



WRITING CENTER

The Literature Review

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THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Occasionally, instructors will ask for a Literature Review as part of the writing process. The purpose of a Literature Review is to:

- Give you the opportunity to better understand the academic conversation surrounding the topic you have chosen
- Give you the necessary background to be prepared to defend your thesis
- Give your reader a detailed understanding of the key points in each source, and how those points fit together to support your overall thesis

The term “literature” can be confusing for disciplines outside of English. “Literature” in the Literature Review refers to any of the main sources you are using in your paper. Whatever scholarship or research you have conducted for your paper should be included in the Literature Review.

It is important to keep in mind that a Literature Review is not a straightforward summary of each of your sources. While it will ultimately give your reader an understanding of each source, it is not meant to summarize each source individually, one at a time. It is also not a place for you to insert your opinion or defend an argument.

Notes:

- The Literature Review is created using the citation style required for your paper. Follow the same guidelines for layout, citations, bibliography, and works cited as you would when writing any APA, MLA, or CMS paper.
- Different academic disciplines may have different requirements or expectations for the Literature Review, so make sure to check with your instructor on the specifics of the assignment.

The Literature Review

The Literature Review can be created in two different formats: as a section of your paper, or as a stand-alone document.

AS A SECTION OF YOUR PAPER

If it is part of your paper, the “Literature Review” section usually comes after the “Introduction” and before the “Research Methods” section.

AS A STAND-ALONE DOCUMENT

If it is a stand-alone document, the Literature Review is constructed similarly to a paper, with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. Headings are typically used.

COMPONENTS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

- Information about your working topic and thesis
 - Outlines what you will discuss in the Literature Review
 - Provides the paper’s organization
 - Describes how you came to find the sources and decided on the topics you are analyzing
- Body
 - Summarize, synthesize, and evaluate the sources in terms of how they are relevant to your overall thesis
 - Define key terms and theories
 - Explain relevant research and evidence
- Conclusion
 - Summarize the literature reviewed
 - Relate the conclusion back to your overall research question, thesis, or working topic
- List of References

Notes:

- If the Literature Review is written as a section of a larger paper, shorten the components as outlined above to fit within the overall context of the paper.
- An Abstract is optional in a Literature Review—check with your instructor if this is a requirement of your assignment.

ORGANIZATION OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The Literature Review can be organized chronologically, thematically, methodologically, or theoretically:

- Chronological: follow the development of your topic from its inception up to the modern day. Do not just summarize each source in order—instead, synthesize the information by discussing patterns, historical themes, key developments, etc.
- Thematic: select several themes or topics relevant to your research, and discuss how each source fits within the selected theme
- Methodological: organize your review based on the different research methods used to obtain information, i.e., qualitative vs. quantitative research
- Theoretical: define key terms and theories and how they fit within the larger framework of your thesis

TIPS FOR WRITING THE LITERATURE REVIEW

- Make sure you have thoroughly read and taken notes on your sources
- Organize your notes based on patterns for easier compilation
- This is not a linear process—more research will most likely be necessary in the process of writing a Literature Review
- Remember that summarizing and synthesizing a source are two different things. Do both, but with a greater emphasis on synthesizing:
 - Summarizing gives a general overview, in a few words or sentences, of what was discussed in the overall text
 - Synthesizing finds patterns and makes connections between sources

THE ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

It may help to also create an Annotated Bibliography, which is a good way to organize notes associated with specific sources.

It is important to note that the Annotated Bibliography is NOT the same as a Literature Review. To understand the difference, and for information about creating an Annotated Bibliography, go to the Writing Resources page of the JCCC Writing Center website; click [here](#) and scroll to Writing Resources, then Style Guides, then select “Annotated Bibliography”.

Note: Even though they are different documents, with different purposes, the contents in the Annotated Bibliography may be repurposed for inclusion in the Literature Review.