

Literature Reviews

A quick and easy definition of a literature review is that it is an overview of your paper's sources. It provides all the necessary and relevant information to build the foundation of your paper's topic and overall discussion.

In a literature review, you will:

- Introduce your sources and summarize what they say
- Define any niche terms and topics that your audience may not be familiar with
- Examine any shortcomings of previous research
- Place your argument within the scope of existing scholarship

Before Writing:

1. Examine each source and ask yourself:

- Is this source relevant to my paper?
- What information from the source, if any, is important to discuss?
- Does the source have any logical shortcomings that I'll need to point out?

2. Consider some options for organizing your review:

- Chronological - in the order each source was released
- Expertise- most reputable/informed source to least reputable/informed
- Thematic - by topic or issue
- Grouping - cluster similar sources together

After thinking through these ideas, you're ready to write. The overall structure of a literature review should include:

- An introduction of your overall topic
- An explanation as to why this topic is important for research
- A brief overview of your sources and the most important information from them
- A conclusion that details where previous scholarship ends and your discussion begins

Looking forward:

Literature reviews may seem to be a daunting task, but you can master them in no time. Many of your literary and scientific papers will rely upon a good literature review when your topics have been widely and/or hotly debated, and a synthesis of any previous discussions is required before readers are able to understand your argument and point of view.

For examples of literature reviews, check out scholarly articles accessible in academic databases. Lengthy articles will often have a literature review located near the beginning of their content. Reading over them will give you an idea as to how scholars organize and write literature reviews for successful papers.