



Literature review purpose

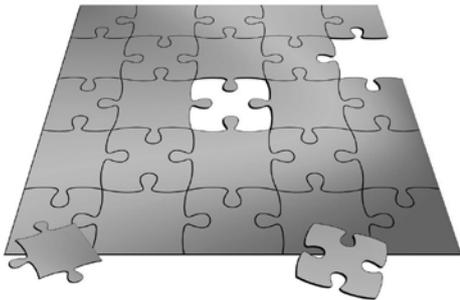
The purpose of a literature review is to gain an understanding of the existing research and debates relevant to a particular topic or area of study, and to present that knowledge in the form of a written report.

Conducting a literature review helps you build your knowledge in your field. You'll learn about important concepts, research methods, and experimental techniques that are used in your field. You'll also gain insight into how researchers apply the concepts you're learning in your unit to real world problems.

Another great benefit of literature reviews is that as you read, you'll get a better understanding of how research findings are presented and discussed in your particular discipline. If you pay attention to what you read and try to achieve a similar style, you'll become more successful at writing for your discipline.

Understanding the state of things

Literature reviews are often found at the beginning of research articles. This is because the literature review shows the reader where the research community is up to in researching that topic and highlights gaps in the existing research. The research article then addresses those gaps through new research.



It's a bit like finding pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and putting them together. Once they are put together, you can see clearly where the missing pieces are and what they might look like. You can then go looking for the missing pieces.

Researchers conduct a literature review to identify the areas of a topic that have not yet been researched in detail. They then go and do the research to fill the research gap. This is how researchers contribute to the development of knowledge on that topic.

Evaluating the sources

A literature review should not just be a summary of each source. That would be more like an annotated bibliography. Instead, you need to:

- compare and contrast each source to other relevant literature on the topic
- critically evaluate each source
- indicate how each source contributes to the body of knowledge about the topic
- integrate your discussion of the sources into your argument about the state of knowledge on the topic

You can also organise your literature review report in a way that demonstrates your evaluation of the sources in terms of how each one relates to other sources and to the major debates on the topic.

How does a literature review differ from an essay?

The following table provides a comparison between literature reviews and essays.

Feature	Literature review	Essay
Purpose	"[T]o determine what is known on the topic, how well this knowledge is established and where future research might best be directed" (University of Melbourne, 2013).	"To present a coherent argument in response to a stimulus or question, and to persuade the reader that your position is credible (i.e. believable and reasonable). To demonstrate your ability to research the topic, develop your position, and then convince the reader by presenting a reasoned response supported by evidence from the research you have done" (Western Sydney University Library, 2016).
Content	Critical review of one or more pieces of literature. May be in response to a stimulus or question to narrow the scope of the literature search and the focus of the review.	Argument responding to a question or stimulus about some topic area. Discussion of aspects of a topic, with explanations and examples.
Structure	Varies, but usually needs an Introduction, Body, and Conclusion (including if it forms part of a longer text). Ideas are to be organised thematically with main points relating to the topic of the literature review, showing how sources relate to each other and contribute to knowledge about the topic (i.e. don't just write a new paragraph for each source).	Introduction, Body, and Conclusion. Ideas are to be organised thematically according to how they contribute to the overall argument.
Approach to sources/literature	Critical approach. The sources/literature are the subject matter of the writing.	Critical approach The sources are used as evidence for the argument.

Useful links

- Study Smart [Researching and reading](#) page
- [Library FAQ](#) about Literature Reviews with PDF guide
- Western Sydney University Library: [Assignment Assistance: Literature Reviews](#) (video, 4:27)
- Curtin University: [Literature Reviews for Undergraduates](#) (PDF, 51 KB)
- University of New South Wales: [Getting started on your literature review](#), aimed at postgraduate research students

References

Western Sydney University Library. (2016). Essay purpose. Retrieved from

https://westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/assignment_help/writing

University of Melbourne. (2013). Reviewing the literature: a critical review. Retrieved from

http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicsskills/all_resources/writing-resources