



# Literature Reviews

*These are surveys of current debate and research, taking multiple sources from across a topic, bringing them together, and evaluating them. Whether you are comparing, contrasting, or providing a history of the topic, the literature review shows your audience where the debate is, what the gaps are, and how you will weigh in.*

## What does a literature review look like?

Literature reviews appear in research papers. Maybe your instructor asked for one or maybe you need to provide detailed context for your reader. Regardless of the reason, they operate like their own chapter with an introduction, body paragraphs/sections, and a conclusion.

- *Introduction*
  - This is where you will inform the reader of the history and growth, the current debates, and any other **important context**.
  - You will also **identify the gaps** and **your review's thesis**.
- *Body Paragraphs*
  - This is where you evaluate the sources. You can organize them in many ways, but their **order and length** should always depend on their **relevance** to your thesis.
  - This includes sources directly **for and against** your thesis.
- *Conclusion*
  - This is where you detail the gap in the research, how you fit into it, and how it will change the debate.



# How to Build a Literature Review

## Introduction

- **Narrow the topic down; develop clear research questions.**
  - Your topic should be specific. Do not overwhelm yourself.
  - The questions you ask should be clear and relevant to the topic.
- **Find your gap.**
  - Look for a place in the topic that no one has really researched.
- **Introduce existing research and where it is found.**
  - Summarize overall trends in the research.
  - Is it found in articles? Websites? Special databases?
- **Explain why it matters.**
  - Why should a reader care?
- **Include key terms, common methods, and relevant debates and platforms.**
  - Detail and summarize these general elements of the topic. The reader needs to know the history and state of the topic. Where are current researchers?
- **Create a specific literature review thesis.**
  - Are you extending, questioning, combining, updating, or challenging modern research? How so?

## Body Paragraphs

- **Do not summarize.**
  - Synthesize (i.e., combine them to make something new).
- **Focus on your own voice!**
  - Even though you are using multiple sources, the literature review should focus on your thoughts.
- **Answer the same questions with every source.**
  - This helps to keep every source easily relatable.
- **Organize by theme, methods, time, argument, theory, etc.**
  - You can choose to organize it in any way that makes sense for your paper. Which is the most relevant to the topic, for example?
- **Use quotes sparingly; paraphrase fairly and accurately.**
  - This will keep the focus on your thoughts and keep it visually tidier.
  - Always represent the authors' thoughts how they intended them.
- **Keep citations tidy.**
  - Literature reviews can get messy. Try to keep every source in an annotated bibliography and maintain proper formatting.



# How to Build a Literature Review

## Conclusions

- **Wrap up evaluations of debates and the overall topic.**
  - Like any other conclusion, provide the reader with an overall synthesis of the research, the debates and stances, and the topic in general.
- **Bring up your gap again.**
  - Make sure you remind the reader of your gap and how it will apply to the current debates. How is it arguable?
- **Explain the implications.**
  - Show the reader how your gap will affect the research going forward. Is it asking for more research? Is it challenging a former assumption? Is it providing a possible research-based solution?

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## Additional Notes

- **Revise!**
  - Revision is essential to a literature review. Any time your argument changes, your sources are updated, or you simply receive feedback, you have to update the literature review. They can always be revised to be clearer and more connected.
- **Use examples.**
  - If you need help, sometimes it helps to view templates and examples. These can be found on the internet for any discipline.
- **Organize with an annotated bibliography and source locations.**
  - To keep your citations organized and available, create an annotated bibliography that includes links (if available).
- **Come to the Writing Center!**
  - Make appointments with the Writing Center for any and all help with literature reviews.