

APA

Literature Review

What is a literature review?

A literature review is a concise overview of the research that exists on a particular subject. (Note that it has nothing to do with reviewing works of literature as would be assigned for an English course.) The emphasis is on synthesis, interpretation and evaluation of primary research articles. A literature review is a typical type of assignment given to students in courses that fall under APA guidelines (usually the sciences or social sciences) because it shows you have familiarized yourself with current research on a topic you are exploring.

Beyond simply reporting the findings of others, **the literature review** requires you to make connections between sources through comparison and contrast of results and ideas. It has a thesis statement that reflects your assessment of the sources and how they contribute to the chosen topic.

A literature review may be required for students who intend to conduct their own scientific study on the same topic, or it may just be used as an introduction to conducting library research within a particular field. The length of a literature review and the required number of sources will vary based on course and instructor preferences.

Literature Review Sections

- Title page
- Abstract (Optional – check professor’s guidelines)
- Introduction section, including thesis
- Body of Paper, including summary, analysis and synthesis
- Conclusion, including relation to an intended study or future directions
- References page

Writing a Literature Review

1. Choose which articles you will cover and assess the material

- Do not try to include every article you encountered. Choose the ones that address your research question most directly and that are most current (unless you need to include a landmark study).
- Take careful notes including:
 - A brief summary of each article
 - Definitions of key terms (note if they differ)
 - Emphases, strengths, weaknesses
 - Research methods used

2. Critically analyze the material, rather than just summarizing it.

- Look for holes, unanswered questions and weaknesses in methods or scope.
- Relate the information in one article to that of the others. Do they confirm or contradict each other? Can you identify any trends or patterns over time?
- Identify any gaps in the literature. Speculate about the reasons for that and indicate what needs to be studied in the future.

3. Plan how you will organize your analysis into an essay.

- Decide what argument you will make about the available information and how it fits in with your research topic/question.
- Create a topic outline that traces that argument with appropriate explanation from your notes and evidence from the research.

4. Write the essay

- Indicate why the subject is important.
- State explicitly what will and will not be covered.
- Clearly state your argument **about these articles (not the topic)** in a thesis statement.
- Integrate key details from the literature that support your point of view.
- Use summary periodically.
- Discuss how individual articles contribute to the knowledge on this subject.
- Describe any limitations of the studies or gaps in the research.
- Include your evaluations and conclusions.
- Use transitions to guide the reader through your argument and make connections between the articles clear.

5. Format the essay using APA style.

- Use subheadings, especially in long reviews.
- Use in-text citations for all information from the sources, whether summarized, paraphrased or quoted.
- Include a complete references page at the end.
- Make sure all formatting elements follow APA guidelines.
- Consult the Writing Center's other APA information sheets for details and/or The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th ed.

