

What to Read, and How to Prepare for, Organize, and Write Your Literature Review

Goals of the Literature Review

- Show reader you are familiar with what has already been said or researched about your topic, including recent trends
- Show reader you are familiar with alternate points of view
- Show reader you can integrate all the information into a coherent, organized essay

First, do the reading

Types of books, articles, and documents to include

- Overview of topic area
- Classic and major works in the area
- Specific research and theories on your main points
- Different perspectives, such as
 - Theoretical
 - Research Findings
 - Ethnic/cultural points of view
 - Historical points of view
 - Professional perspectives
 - Non-professional perspectives (but must be published)
 - Role perspectives (parent, child, therapist, teacher)
 - Political perspectives
 - Religious/lay perspectives
 - Legal/criminal justice perspectives
 - Economic/financial perspectives

Range of information you should cover

- Theoretical
- Research or experimental studies
- Recent trends or controversies

What if not much is published on your specific topic

- Look at closely related and comparable areas. For example, if you are writing about post-traumatic stress disorder of Liberian children from their recent civil war, and you can't find much, look at writing about earlier groups such as Cambodians, or effects of war on children in England after World War II.

Do some preparatory work:

For each book, article, and internet document you read, answer these questions.

- How is this information or opinion relevant to your main arguments or main points? If it isn't relevant, STOP and go on to the next one!
- Do you have or can you get the required bibliographic information for the APA citation?
- What are the author's professional credentials? Often this can be found on the book jacket or in the preface. Also try a www.google.com search of the author's name. If there is more than one author of a book, research all of them.
- How did the author prove that the information or opinion is true?
 - Did the author do an experiment or research study on real people in a real situation?
 - How was this experiment or study conducted?
 - What did the author find out?
 - Is it based on other people's research studies?
 - How were these studies conducted?
 - What did the researchers find out?
 - Is it based on the author's own experience, for example as a manager, counselor, teacher, or school administrator?
 - What was the experience?
 - How many years of experience or numbers of workers, clients, students?
 - How did the author document the experience?
 - How did the author verify that the conclusions were valid?
 - Is it a theory the author developed, not based on research or experience?
 - What is the theory?
 - What proof does the author give for the theory?
 - Do you believe that the author has credibility?

Brainstorm what major points you might need to make and rank their importance.

Plan how you will organize your Literature Review

Organize by major points, not by the individual books or articles.

DO NOT Organize Your Literature Review Like This:

All about the first book or article

All about the next book or article

All about the next book or article and so on...

DO Organize Your Literature Review Like This:

All about one major point, referring to how various books and articles discuss it

All about the next major point, referring to how various books and articles discuss it

All about the next major point, referring to how various books and articles discuss it

One way to organize your Literature Review is by comparing the research studies and theories. For the following questions, refer to all relevant books and articles:

Were experiments and research studies conducted?

- How was the research done?
- What did they find out?
- What made the research credible?
- What theories or conclusions did the research lead to?
- How did other researchers or theorists respond? Are there disagreements? Explain each side.
- How does this relate to your paper's main argument?

Were theories developed?

- What are the theories?
- Who developed them and what did they base them on?
- What was the response? Are there disagreements? Explain each side.
- How does this relate to your paper's main argument?

Another way to organize your Literature Review is by presenting information about your topic that your reader needs to know to understand your entire paper. For example,

- Is there a history of this problem or issue or solution?
- OR What information does your reader need to know? Organize into sections.
- OR What solutions have been tried ? How well did they work?

Write in the expected format

- Turn the main points into subsections with titles (type in boldface at left margin)
- Write an introduction saying how this Literature Review will relate to your paper's main arguments, what it will cover, and how it will be organized
- Write a conclusion summarizing the main points and how they relate to your paper's thesis statement or main arguments.