

APSU Writing Center
Writing a Literature Review

What is a Literature Review?

- It examines published research on a topic to show how scholars have approached it. Rather than summarizing sources one by one, it synthesizes, compares, and evaluates ideas, arguments, and findings within a field.
- It is not a list of summaries. It is a conversation among sources, guided by your research focus.

What a Literature Review Does

- Organizes research around a central thesis or research question
- Synthesizes what is and is not known
- Identifies trends, debates, and gaps in the literature
- Evaluates strengths and weaknesses of existing studies
- Suggests areas for future research

Before Writing

- Determine the number and type of sources required
- Evaluate source credibility
- Group sources by shared themes or issues
- Define key terms and provide background as needed

How to Evaluate Sources

- Look for shared or opposing ideas related to:
 - Thesis or main argument
 - Definitions of key terms
 - Common ground and disagreements
 - Rhetorical context or purpose

Review Structure

Introduction

- Introduce topic and scope
- Present research question or thesis
- Preview major themes or organization

Body

- Synthesize sources by theme, method, or theory
- Compare and contrast scholars' arguments
- Analyze significance, strengths, and weaknesses

Conclusion

- Connect findings back to your research question
- Summarize key insights
- Highlight gaps or directions for future research

Common Organizational Styles

- **Chronological:** Traces development of ideas over time
- **Thematic:** Groups research by key themes
- **Methodological:** Compares research methods or approaches
- **Theoretical:** Examines theories, models, or frameworks

Questions to Guide Your Review

- What problem or question does this literature address?
- What are the major findings and trends?
- Where do scholars agree or disagree?
- What methods or theories dominate the field?
- What gaps or missing perspectives remain?



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Literature Review Outline

Introduction: Purpose of the review. Research question or focus. Scope, criteria, and methodology.

1st Theme Paragraph: Key findings and arguments. Relevant theories or frameworks. Strengths and weaknesses of studies. Relevance to your research

2nd Theme Paragraph: Prominent findings. Scholarly disagreements or variations. Methodological approaches. Significance to the field.

3rd Theme Paragraph: Additional perspectives or gaps. Supporting or conflicting research. Patterns or trends.

Conclusion: Synthesize overall findings. Compare approaches and perspectives. Recommend areas for future research.