

Literature Review

APSU Writing Center Handout

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 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

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?

Introduction: Purpose of the review. Research questions 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.