Questions that will be useful in organizing and writing your literature review

- What have authors already said about my topic?
- Are there contradictions, gaps or inconsistencies in the literature?
- How do we reconcile different findings in the studies?
- How would my study contribute to the research on this topic?

For additional information on writing literature reviews:


How to Write a Literature Review

What is a literature review?
Literature reviews provide background information on a particular subject area, and sometimes information in a particular subject area within a certain period of time. A literature review can be just a summary of other sources, but usually has an organizational pattern and combines both summary and synthesis.

- Summary is a recap of the important information of the source.
- Synthesis is a re-organization, or the combination of separate elements, thoughts, ideas, or information to form a coherent whole.

Who writes literature reviews?
Literature reviews are written occasionally in the humanities, but mostly in the sciences and social sciences; in experiment and lab reports, they constitute a section of the paper. Sometimes a literature review is written as a paper in itself.

How does a literature review differ from an academic research paper?
- A literature review summarizes and synthesizes the arguments and ideas of others.
- The focus of an academic research paper is to support your own argument.

Find the literature
- Check the library
- Check the online card catalog
- Check for electronic and print resources
- Search for scholarly research resources

What are the basic steps for reviewing literature?
Choose the area of research, and develop your research question.
- Start with a sketch of your research question, and expect that it will be modified as you work through the project.

Identify sources of information.
- Talk with professors in your discipline, review work cited list, see whom other researchers reference in their literature reviews, and search the major professional journals in your field.

Read studies and research relevant to your topic.
- Keep records of what you have read, making notes and documenting important quotes. Look for patterns and disagreements among authors.

Develop a meaningful, coherent way to organize the studies.
- Group the literature into categories, and lay out arguments in an ordered sequence.

Write about the literature, explaining what different authors say about your topic.
- Identify differences and similarities in the research you have studied. Relate the literature review to your research question and show relevance for your study.

Questions to guide your reading of each source
- Does the researcher begin by identifying a specific problem?
- Does the researcher establish the importance of the problem area?
- Is the introduction an essay that logically moves from topic to topic?
- Has the research provided conceptual definitions of key terms?
- Has the researcher indicated the basis for factual statements?
- Do the specific research purposes, questions, or hypotheses logically flow from the introductory material?
- Overall, is the introduction effective and appropriate?