

Helpful Tips For Writing A Literature Review

1. Why Write a Literature Review?

The main function of a Literature Review is to present background on a topic, based on the information that has been collected about a problem or issue. Researchers use these to guide their studies so that they are building on what is known rather than working in a vacuum. We also use literature reviews to see what is not known about a problem or issue, so we can identify gaps in the research that need to be explored.

2. What's in a literature review?

Three areas that you need to know about include:

- 1 Specific theories related to the problem or issue.
- 2 What is known about the problem/issue from previous research studies.
- 3 What needs to be done to advance knowledge concerning the problem/issue.

3. How do I get started?

I find that index cards are a great tool for literature reviews. Keep one for each of your sources. Don't cover it with writing, but rather bullet key points in the source and indicate page numbers for any brilliant quotes that you might want to use. Number each card in the upper right hand corner.

Once you have the index cards finished, sit at a BIG table (or the floor if that's got more room) and play with the cards. Put them in piles of things that go together. For example, cards number 1, 5, and 6 all relate to divorce rates. Put those in that pile. Then look them over to see what the main concepts are about divorce—which cards say similar things and which offer a different perspective.

4. Is An Outline A Good Idea?

Usually, yes! You can start from your index cards—make a list of the grouped topics or concepts that your sources are talking about. Then organize those topics in a logical way. Alternatively, if you took article notes or made an annotated bib., you'll have to review those for common elements and then transfer information into one of the three sections below to make an outline.

Here is the information you need to get onto a rough outline before you begin writing:

1. A list of concepts, theories, and variables related to the problem/issue that you're writing about (and the sources these came from).
2. Underneath each concept, theory or variable, list what is known about it from previous research studies (i.e. results of research, supporting or refuting other points of view). Organize these into topics if necessary.
3. As you sort, list and think about your problem/issue, keep track of what isn't known/what needs to be done concerning this problem. This can go into your conclusions.

On the next page, we'll talk about how to actually write the lit review once you have your sources read, analyzed, and sorted.

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Significantly adapted from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Criollo-LitReview.html>

5. After I Have My Outline Made, Then What?

Use your outline to guide your writing. Here's the structure of a sample paragraph in your literature review that may help you if you have never written one before (See #9 for an example):

1. Introduce a concept / Make a point about a particular topic of research (topic sentence) +
2. Supported it with references or previous research results +
3. Add more support (explain any critical details or evidence) +
4. If there is information refuting (contradicting) the point made, add it (don't forget to cite where it came from) +
5. If there is more support for this contradicting evidence, give it +
6. Compare or contrast the different points of view on this topic +
7. State your conclusion (restating the topic sentence) .

6. How Do I Know the Format for Citing My Sources in APA?

Use the APA handbook or go to <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>.

7. How do I get from one paragraph to the next?

You can use subheadings to signal different topics if they span more than one paragraph. Also, don't forget to use your transition words—literature reviews are great places to use them. Some examples:

<u>Adds to an idea</u>	<u>Introduces info.</u>	<u>Compares/Contrasts</u>	<u>Makes a Concession</u>
Furthermore, Moreover, Also, In addition,	For example For instance Including As an illustration	Similarly, In the same way, Conversely, However,	Nevertheless, Although Even though, Despite (this),

For more transitions, see: <https://www.msu.edu/~jdowell/135/transw.html>.

8. I use “the author states...” a lot. How else can I say what authors found?

Try an attributive tag that gets at what the authors try to do in their study. Some examples (from <http://www.uwyo.edu/english/undergraduate-students/English/>):

<u>Neutral tag</u>	<u>Proposing a new idea</u>	<u>Adds/emphasizes information</u>	<u>Takes a counter-argument</u>
Says, writes, claims, comments, notes, discusses	Contends, suggests, asserts, believes, proposes, speculates	Points out, emphasizes, adds, agrees, confirms	Argues, disagrees, warns, contends, speculates

On the next page is an example of a paragraph that has been written using the structure from #5 above, so you can see what it looks like all put together.

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8. Can I see an example of a paragraph?

Here is a sample paragraph written with the structure above (see #5). It uses multiple citations as evidence and transition words for flow. See the importance of the topic sentence in guiding all of the material in the paragraph.

In order to understand best the importance of learning styles in the language classroom, it is first important to provide a definition of what learning styles are. Reid (1995) defines learning style as "an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way(s) of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills". In a similar way, Brown (2000) states that every person has their own natural way to perceive, transform, learn, and possess knowledge and information in their environment. Using a narrower concept, Larsen-Freeman & Long (1991, p. 192) define 'cognitive style' as "the preferred way in which learners process information or address a task". Their definition is limited in that, as will be seen when a classification of learning styles is given (Reid 1995), there are learning styles that do not depend on cognitive processes. Finally, it is important to mention that learning styles will not vary across teaching methods and content areas, they will persist (Reid 1995 and 1998); and, even though they develop gradually in children, they are supposed to be more or less permanent in adults (Brown 2000). It can then be concluded that learning styles are the somewhat permanent ways in which learners perceive, process, and understand the information around them.

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