**Literature Review**

The previous studies are considered as a compass that directs the captain of the ship to the shore of safety. So that you take the researcher to the paved road in order to pass safely One of the main steps that must be followed in the preparation of the research steps is to look at the books of previous research, which has a direct relationship to the subject of research, and then the researcher's knowledge of previous studies has several benefits for the researcher and the subject together.

**Definition of the Literature Review : A literature review is a comprehensive summary of previous research on a topic. The literature review surveys scholarly articles, books, and other sources relevant to a particular area of research.**The review should enumerate, describe, summarize, objectively evaluate and clarify this previous research.  It should give a theoretical base for the research and help you (the author) determine the nature of your research.  The literature review acknowledges the work of previous researchers, and in so doing, assures the reader that your work has been well conceived.  It is assumed that by mentioning a previous work in the field of study, that the author has read, evaluated, and assimiliated that work into the work at hand.

A literature review creates a "landscape" for the reader, giving her or him a full understanding of the developments in the field.  This landscape informs the reader that the author has indeed assimilated all (or the vast majority of) previous, significant works in the field into her or his research.

 "In writing the literature review, the purpose is to convey to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. The literature review must be defined by a guiding concept (eg. your research objective, the problem or issue you are discussing, or your argumentative thesis). It is not just a descriptive list of the material available, or a set of summaries.

A literature review surveys books, scholarly articles, and any other sources relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, and by so doing, provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of these works in relation to the research problem being investigated. Literature reviews are designed to provide an overview of sources you have explored while researching a particular topic and to demonstrate to your readers how your research fits within a larger field of study.

In a larger piece of written work, such as a dissertation or project, a literature review is usually one of the first tasks carried out after deciding on a topic.  Reading combined with critical analysis can help to refine a topic and frame research questions.  Conducting a literature review establishes your familiarity with and understanding of current research in a particular field before carrying out a new investigation. After doing a literature review, you should know what research has already been done and be able to identify what is unknown within your topic.

When doing and writing a literature review, it is good practice to:

* summarise and analyse previous research and theories;
* identify areas of controversy and contested claims;
* highlight any gaps that may exist in research to date.

**THE ROLE OF RELATED LITERATURE IN RESEARCH**

The search for related literature should be completed before the actual conduct of the study begins in order to provide a context and background that support the conduct of the study. This literature review stage serves several important functions:

1. Knowledge of related research enables investigators to defi ne the frontiers of their fi eld. To use an analogy, an explorer might say, “We know that beyond this river there are plains for 2000 miles west, and beyond those plains a range of mountains, but we do not know what lies beyond the mountains. I propose to cross the plains, go over the mountains, and proceed from there in a westerly direction.” Likewise, the researcher in a sense says, “The work of A, B, and C has discovered this much about my question; the investigations of D have added this much to our knowledge. I propose to go beyond D’s work in the following manner.”

2. A thorough review of related theory and research enables researchers to place their questions in perspective. You should determine whether your endeavors are likely to add to knowledge in a meaningful way. Knowledge in any given area consists of the accumulated outcomes of numerous studies that generations of researchers have conducted and of the theories designed to integrate this knowledge and to explain the observed phenomena. You should review the literature to fi nd links between your study and the accumulated knowledge in your fi eld of interest. Studies with no link to the existing knowledge seldom make signifi cant contributions to the fi eld. Such studies tend to produce isolated bits of information that are of limited usefulness.

3. Reviewing related literature helps researchers to limit their research question and to clarify and defi ne the concepts of the study. A research question may be too broad to be carried out or too vague to be put into concrete operation; for example, “What do parenting practices have to do with mental health?” A careful review of the literature can help researchers revise their initial questions so that the fi nal questions can be investigated. The literature review also helps in clarifying the constructs involved in the study and in translating these constructs into operational defi nitions. Many educational and behavioral constructs—such as stress, creativity, frustration, aggression, achievement, motivation, and adjustment—need to be clarified and operationally defined. These, as well as many other educational and behavioral constructs, do not lend themselves to research until they can be quantifi ed. In reviewing literature, you become familiar with previous efforts to clarify these constructs and to defi ne them operationally. Successful reviews often result in the formation of hypotheses regarding the relationships among variables in a study. The hypotheses can provide direction and focus for the study.

4. Through studying related research, investigators learn which methodologies have proven useful and which seem less promising. The investigator develops increasing sophistication after digging through the layers of research that the related literature represents. As you delve into your topic, you soon see that the quality of research varies greatly. Eventually, you should begin to notice that not all studies in any one fi eld are necessarily equal. You will soon be critiquing studies and noticing ways in which they could be improved. For example, early studies in any one particular fi eld may seem crude and ineffective because research methodology and design are constantly being refi ned with each new study. Becoming profi cient at evaluating research to determine its worth helps the investigator discover the most useful research path.

5. A thorough search through related research avoids unintentional replication of previous studies. Frequently, a researcher develops a worthwhile idea only to discover that a very similar study has already been made. In such a case, the researcher must decide whether to deliberately replicate the previous work or to change the proposed plans and investigate a different aspect of the problem.

6. The study of related literature places researchers in a better position to interpret the signifi cance of their own results. Becoming familiar with theory in the fi eld and with previous research prepares researchers for fitting the findings of their research into the body of knowledge in the field. As this discussion shows, quantitative research is built on a study of earlier work in the field, which helps the researcher refine his or her problem and place it in context.

## Importance of a Good Literature Review

**A literature review may consist of simply a summary of key sources, but in the social sciences, a literature review**usually has an organizational pattern and combines both summary and synthesis, often within specific conceptual categories. A summary is a recap of the important information of the source, but a synthesis is a re-organization, or a reshuffling, of that information in a way that informs how you are planning to investigate a research problem. The analytical features of a literature review might:

* Give a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations,
* Trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates,
* Depending on the situation, evaluate the sources and advise the reader on the most pertinent or relevant research, or
* Usually in the conclusion of a literature review, identify where gaps exist in how a problem has been researched to date.

**Given this, the purpose of a literature review is to:**

* Place each work in the context of its contribution to understanding the research problem being studied.
* Describe the relationship of each work to the others under consideration.
* Identify new ways to interpret prior research.
* Reveal any gaps that exist in the literature.
* Resolve conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous studies.
* Identify areas of prior scholarship to prevent duplication of effort.
* Point the way in fulfilling a need for additional research.
* Locate your own research within the context of existing literature [very important].

**The structure of a literature review should include the following in support of understanding the research problem**:

* An overview of the subject, issue, or theory under consideration, along with the objectives of the literature review,
* Division of works under review into themes or categories [e.g. works that support a particular position, those against, and those offering alternative approaches entirely],
* An explanation of how each work is similar to and how it varies from the others,
* Conclusions as to which pieces are best considered in their argument, are most convincing of their opinions, and make the greatest contribution to the understanding and development of their area of research.

**The critical evaluation of each work should consider**:

* **Provenance** -- what are the author's credentials? Are the author's arguments supported by evidence [e.g. primary historical material, case studies, narratives, statistics, recent scientific findings]?
* **Methodology** -- were the techniques used to identify, gather, and analyze the data appropriate to addressing the research problem? Was the sample size appropriate? Were the results effectively interpreted and reported?
* **Objectivity** -- is the author's perspective even-handed or prejudicial? Is contrary data considered or is certain pertinent information ignored to prove the author's point?
* **Persuasiveness** -- which of the author's theses are most convincing or least convincing?
* **Validity** -- are the author's arguments and conclusions convincing? Does the work ultimately contribute in any significant way to an understanding of the subject?

**Development of the Literature Review**

**Four Basic Stages of Writing**

1.  Problem formulation -- which topic or field is being examined and what are its component issues?

2.  Literature search -- finding materials relevant to the subject being explored.  
3.  Data evaluation -- determining which literature makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the topic.

4.  Analysis and interpretation -- discussing the findings and conclusions of pertinent literature.

**Consider the following issues before writing the literature review:**  
  
**Clarify**  
If your assignment is not specific about what form your literature review should take, seek clarification from your professor by asking these questions:  
1.  Roughly how many sources would be appropriate to include?  
2.  What types of sources should I review (books, journal articles, websites; scholarly versus popular sources)?  
3.  Should I summarize, synthesize, or critique sources by discussing a common theme or issue?  
4.  Should I evaluate the sources in any way beyond evaluating how they relate to understanding the research problem?  
5.  Should I provide subheadings and other background information, such as definitions and/or a history?  
  
**Find Models**

Use the exercise of reviewing the literature to examine how authors in your discipline or area of interest have composed their literature review sections. Read them to get a sense of the types of themes you might want to look for in your own research or to identify ways to organize your final review. The bibliography or reference section of sources you've already read, such as required readings in the course syllabus, are also excellent entry points into your own research.

**Narrow the Topic**

The narrower your topic, the easier it will be to limit the number of sources you need to read in order to obtain a good survey of relevant resources. Your professor will probably not expect you to read everything that's available about the topic, but you'll make the act of reviewing easier if you first limit scope of the research problem. You can also review the indexes of books to find references to specific issues that can serve as the focus of your research. For example, a book surveying the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may include a chapter on the role Egypt has played in mediating the conflict, or look in the index for the pages where Egypt is mentioned in the text.  
  
**Consider Whether Your Sources are Current**

Some disciplines require that you use information that is as current as possible. This is particularly true in disciplines in medicine and the sciences where research conducted becomes obsolete very quickly as new discoveries are made. However, when writing a review in the social sciences, a survey of the history of the literature may be required. In other words, a complete understanding the research problem requires you to deliberately examine how knowledge and perspectives have changed over time. Sort through other current bibliographies or literature reviews in the field to get a sense of what your discipline expects. You can also use this method to explore what is considered by scholars to be a "hot topic" and what is not.

**Ways to Organize Your Literature Review**

**Chronology of Events**

If your review follows the chronological method, you could write about the materials according to when they were published. This approach should only be followed if a clear path of research building on previous research can be identified and that these trends follow a clear chronological order of development. For example, a literature review that focuses on continuing research about the emergence of German economic power after the fall of the Soviet Union.

**By Publication**

Order your sources by publication chronology, then, only if the order demonstrates a more important trend. For instance, you could order a review of literature on environmental studies of brown fields if the progression revealed, for example, a change in the soil collection practices of the researchers who wrote and/or conducted the studies.  
  
**Thematic [“conceptual categories”]**

Thematic reviews of literature are organized around a topic or issue, rather than the progression of time. However, progression of time may still be an important factor in a thematic review. For example, a review of the Internet’s impact on American presidential politics could focus on the development of online political satire. While the study focuses on one topic, the Internet’s impact on American presidential politics, it will still be organized chronologically reflecting technological developments in media. The only difference here between a "chronological" and a "thematic" approach is what is emphasized the most: the role of the Internet in presidential politics. Note however that more authentic thematic reviews tend to break away from chronological order. A review organized in this manner would shift between time periods within each section according to the point made. Note that this is the most common approach in the social and behavioral sciences.  
  
**Methodological**  
A methodological approach focuses on the methods utilized by the researcher. For the Internet in American presidential politics project, one methodological approach would be to look at cultural differences between the portrayal of American presidents on American, British, and French websites. Or the review might focus on the fundraising impact of the Internet on a particular political party. A methodological scope will influence either the types of documents in the review or the way in which these documents are discussed.

**Other Sections of Your Literature Review**  
Once you've decided on the organizational method for your literature review, the sections you need to include in the paper should be easy to figure out because they arise from your organizational strategy. In other words, a chronological review would have subsections for each vital time period; a thematic review would have subtopics based upon factors that relate to the theme or issue. However, sometimes you may need to add additional sections that are necessary for your study, but do not fit in the organizational strategy of the body. What other sections you include in the body is up to you. However, only include what is necessary for the reader to locate your study within the larger scholarship about the research problem.

**Here are examples of other sections, usually in the form of a single paragraph, you may need to include depending on the type of review you write:**

* **Current Situation**: Information necessary to understand the current topic or focus of the literature review.
* **Sources Used**: Describes the methods and resources [e.g., databases] you used to identify the literature you reviewed.
* **History**: The chronological progression of the field, the literature, or an idea that is necessary to understand the literature review, if the body of the literature review is not already a chronology.
* **Selection Methods**: Criteria you used to select (and perhaps exclude) sources in your literature review. For instance, you might explain that your review includes only peer-reviewed articles and journals.
* **Standards**: Description of the way in which you present your information.

**Questions for Further Research**: What questions about the field has the review sparked? How will you further your research as a result of the review ?

**Writing Your Literature Review**

Once you've settled on how to organize your literature review, you're ready to write each section. When writing your review, keep in mind these issues.

**UseEvidence**  
A literature review section is, in this sense, just like any other academic research paper. Your interpretation of the available sources must be backed up with evidence [citations] that demonstrates that what you are saying is valid.  
  
**BeSelective**  
Select only the most important points in each source to highlight in the review. The type of information you choose to mention should relate directly to the research problem, whether it is thematic, methodological, or chronological. Related items that provide additional information but that are not key to understanding the research problem can be included in a list of [**further readings**](https://libguides.usc.edu/aecontent.php?pid=83009&sid=615882).

**UseQuotes Sparingly**

Some short quotes are appropriate if you want to emphasize a point, or if what an author stated cannot be easily paraphrased. Sometimes you may need to quote certain terminology that was coined by the author, is not common knowledge, or taken directly from the study. Do not use extensive quotes as a substitute for using your own words in reviewing the literature.

**Summarize and Synthesize**

Remember to summarize and synthesize your sources within each thematic paragraph as well as throughout the review. Recapitulate important features of a research study, but then synthesize it by rephrasing the study's significance and relating it to your own work and the work of others.

**Keep Your Own Voice**

While the literature review presents others' ideas, your voice [the writer's] should remain front and center. For example, weave references to other sources into what you are writing but maintain your own voice by starting and ending the paragraph with your own ideas and wording.  
  
**Use Caution When Paraphrasing**

When paraphrasing a source that is not your own, be sure to represent the author's information or opinions accurately and in your own words. Even when paraphrasing an author’s work, you still must provide a citation to that work.

**Common Mistakes to Avoid**

**These are the most common mistakes made in reviewing social science research literature.**

* Sources in your literature review do not clearly relate to the research problem;
* You do not take sufficient time to define and identify the most relevant sources to use in the literature review related to the research problem;
* Relies exclusively on secondary analytical sources rather than including relevant primary research studies or data;
* Uncritically accepts another researcher's findings and interpretations as valid, rather than examining critically all aspects of the research design and analysis;
* Does not describe the search procedures that were used in identifying the literature to review;
* Reports isolated statistical results rather than synthesizing them in chi-squared or meta-analytic methods; and,
* Only includes research that validates assumptions and does not consider contrary findings and alternative interpretations found in the literature.

Once you are satisfi ed that you have carried out a reasonably comprehensive search of the literature in the fi eld, you can proceed to the task of organizing it. A useful approach is to arrange the studies by topic and determine how each of these topics relates to your own study. Avoid the temptation to present the literature as a series of abstracts. Rather, use it to lay a systematic foundation for the study. Present the literature in such a way as to justify carrying out your study by showing what is known and what remains to be investigated in the topic of concern. The hypotheses provide a framework for such organization. Like an explorer proposing an expedition, the researcher maps out the known territory and points the way to the unknown territory to be explored. If your study includes several facets or investigates more than a single hypothesis, the organization process is done separately for each hypothesis. It is almost inevitable that a number of the reports you have carefully studied and included in your notes will, on refl ection, prove only peripherally related to the topic. It is neither necessary nor desirable to include in a proposal every study encountered in the search through the literature. Your readers will not be impressed by mere quantity. Relevance and organization of the material are of prime importance. The researcher who fails to approach the task of assembling the related literature in a systematic manner from the beginning can become very disorganized. The following suggestions may be of assistance. Your university, department, or research adviser may offer help sessions or minicourses, and the librarians at most institutions can also provide helpful suggestions.

1. Begin reading the most recent studies in the fi eld and then work backward through earlier volumes. An obvious advantage of this approach is that you start with studies that have already incorporated the thoughts and fi ndings of previous research. Earlier misunderstandings have been corrected, and unprofi table approaches have been identifi ed. Another advantage is that these studies include references to earlier works and therefore direct you to sources you might not otherwise encounter. Obviously, limits must be set to the process of gathering related research. On the one hand, laying meaningful groundwork for a study entails including all the important works in the field. On the other hand, devoting excessive time to this endeavor could result in boring the readers of your own report with superfl uous detail. Make sure the related literature serves, but does not dominate, your own work.

2. Read the abstract or summary sections of a report first to determine whether it is relevant to the question. Doing so can save much time that might be wasted reading unhelpful articles. . 3. Before taking notes, skim the report quickly to fi nd those sections that are related to the question—another way to save reading time.

4. Make notes on fi le cards, in a word processing program, or in some format that can be accessed easily or moved around to cluster with other notes on related research. This begins to organize the review. With the prevalence of spreadsheet and database programs such as EndNote and ProCite on virtually every computer and stand-alone software packages such as RefWorks also available, note taking and manipulation of data is signifi cantly easier than it was in earlier versions of this text. EndNote, ProCite, and RefWorks all offer a free download trial, which will help you get started.

5. Write out a separate complete bibliographic reference for each work. For the sake of record keeping, include the reference in the bibliography list and with the individual note card with the notes on the source. A bibliography typically includes author, title, publisher, year, issue and volume numbers, and/or the universal resource locator (URL) or web address, the date you accessed an electronic source, and other information depending on the type of sources. Follow the most recent edition of the chosen style manual for citing references. There are websites that provide help in using the American Psychological Association and Turabian style manuals (see Chapter 19), which may be good places to begin. Add the library call number, location of the terminal, or URL of the source to facilitate fi nding the work again, should it be necessary.

6. To facilitate sorting and organizing, do not put more than one reference on each page, entry, or card. It is not possible to arrange references alphabetically or in any other way unless they are recorded singly.

7. Be sure to indicate which parts of the notes are direct quotations from the author and which are your own paraphrases. Failure to make this distinction can lead to inadvertent plagiarism. It is also wise to clearly separate the author’s evaluation of his or her research from your own conclusions.

8. If you searched online databases, keep the search strategies (often called “search histories”) on fi le. Typically, any given database will give the option of printing out a search history, the list of searches typed in, along with the results. This information will help in the retrieval of information and reduce cost and time in case an update is needed.