

The Process of Writing a Literature Review

A literature review is not the same as a book report or an annotated bibliography. The point of a literature review is to provide an organized synopsis of the research surrounding a particular topic. You are not trying to summarize each article that you are reviewing, but instead focusing on major themes that emerge across these articles.

Think of working on your literature review as a multi-step process:

1. Identify a specific topic. The more specific your topic, the easier it will be to integrate the articles.
2. Use [PsychINFO](#) and the [SocINDEX](#) databases to find peer-reviewed journal articles on your topic (for best results, put each search term on a different line). Do not use Google or Academic Search Premier!
 - If you find a good article, click on the authors' names to see if they have published similar research on your topic. Check the article's citations to find additional articles on your topic.
3. After reading your article, answer the six [Article Analysis Questions](#) below. Not every article that you read will be suitable for your literature review.
 - Don't try to force irrelevant articles into your review, this will only weaken your paper. You may have to read 10 or more articles to find ones that are appropriate.
4. Identify 3-6 major themes, key topics, or theories that you could use to organize your review (Use the [Article Theme Matrix](#))
5. Make an outline using your article notes and [Theme Matrix](#) to decide how to organize your literature review.
 - You want to start your review by discussing general or broad topics and then gradually get more specific. Be sure to begin your review by explaining why this topic is important or relevant and by defining major terms and concepts.
6. Write your literature review by discussing one theme at a time. Discuss the parts of each article that are relevant to your themes. Some articles may be mentioned multiple times in your paper.
7. Your literature review will also need an introduction and a conclusion. Your introduction should mention and describe the major themes that you used to organize your review.
8. Make sure that you understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Do not use excessive quotes, paraphrase the information in your own words.
9. **Take your paper to the [SU writing center](#) (Lehman Library) and have peer tutors review your paper for content, organization, and [APA formatting](#). You may need to do this multiple times.**

General Information

- The purpose of a lit. review is to report on the *current state* of the topic. You are informing the reader.
- Discuss different themes within your literature review rather than individual articles. Try to identify common themes that are present in at least 2-3 articles for each theme you discuss.
- Avoid passive voice (ex: It was found that...); Use active voice ("Smith (2013) reported that...")
- This is not an opinion paper. You are not reporting what you think or how you feel.
- Follow the [APA guidelines](#) for style, grammar, citations, and formatting.
- Start early. Literature reviews require a substantial amount of time and effort to write. Most good literature reviews will take over a month from the time you begin researching your topic.
- Have writing tutors at the [SU Writing Center](#) read over drafts of your paper and help with outlining articles.

You can find additional resources related to article Databases, APA formatting, writing guides, and sample papers on our class webpage.

Article Analysis Guide

Complete 1-6 for each article you want to use for your literature review. Taking notes on each article you read will help you remember what each article is about.

1. APA CITATION FOR ARTICLE

2. MAJOR THEORIES INTRODUCED IN THE INTRODUCTION

3. WHAT ARE THE MAIN HYPOTHESES TESTED?

5. IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHAT WERE THE FINDINGS? WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE FINDINGS? HOW DO THE RESEARCHERS EXPLAIN THEIR FINDINGS (THIS IS USUALLY IN THE DISCUSSION SECTION OF THE ARTICLE)

6. WHAT ARE TWO MAJOR THEMES YOU CAN IDENTIFY FROM THIS ARTICLE?

Article Theme Matrix

Check the appropriate boxes for what themes are discussed in each article. When you are done, you will be able to easily see which articles share common themes, and where there are gaps in the research regarding coverage of certain concepts.

Themes	Article 1	Article 2	Article 3	Article 4	Article 5
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					