



# LITERATURE REVIEW

## A literature review is usually written for one of two reasons. It may be

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- a survey of the relevant literature in the field written to provide an understanding of the current state of research in the field
- AND/OR to demonstrate the need for more research in a particular area. (This kind of research literature review is often a lot longer than the first kind and has a different focus.)

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*This HO consists of two sections. The first gives information about literature reviews in general. The second focusses on literature reviews written as part of the research process, designed to identify gaps in the field, culminating in the writing of a thesis.*

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## A general literature review

### A literature review

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- Gathers information about what is already known about the topic
- May *sometimes* also identify 'gaps' in current knowledge
- Presents an overview of the literature relevant to the field
- Provides a commentary on the research in the field

### Your reading process

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- Begin with the most well-known, up-to-date and general introductions to the area you are focussing on. If appropriate to the assignment, move on to include other relevant texts.
- Read with a purpose - know why you are reading and how it could contribute to your literature review and assignment.
- Be disciplined about reading only what is relevant.
- Devise a personal notetaking system.
- Develop the discipline of reading and taking notes as you go rather than downloading to read later.



**Related resources:**  
Writing an Abstract  
Writing a Critique

**Te Taiako | Student Learning**  
[wgt.n.ac.nz/student-learning](http://wgt.n.ac.nz/student-learning)  
[student-learning@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:student-learning@vuw.ac.nz)  
+64 4 463 5999

## Managing the large amount of information for a big literature review

- Devise a system of filing articles and references (physical, digital OR both).
- Keep VERY careful records of source ideas, papers, quotes etc.
- Use bibliographical software e.g., Endnote, Mendeley, Zotero.

## The writing process

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- Read other literature reviews - ask your lecturer/supervisor/tutor to recommend good ones.
- Outline your ideas before you start - themes, questions, propositions, logical steps in an argument.
- Draw a diagram or mind map of relationships between ideas.
- Begin by writing individual sections. You can reorganise for the final version.

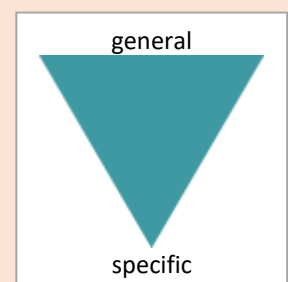
## For a big project

- Talk about ideas before, during and after writing them down (for a big project, you could organise a group of fellow students and have regular sessions when you can share and clarify your ideas).

## Structuring the literature review

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- Work from the general to the specific - from secondary sources (reviews of research) to primary sources (such journal articles or books documenting original research).
- Organise the literature around findings, ideas or themes rather than individual studies or authors.
- Focus on writing the literature review as a logical argument which leads the reader to an understanding of the current state of research in this field and how the field arrived at its current position on this area of knowledge.
- Do all of the following:
  - describe
  - summarise
  - clarify
  - evaluate and critique
  - synthesise and integrate



**but** keep the emphasis on evaluating/critiquing and synthesising and integrating.

- Aim to keep your 'voice' central by using evidence to support your points.

# Writing a literature review as an early step in the research process

In addition to the general guidelines, if you are writing a literature review as part of the research process for a larger piece of work such as a research proposal or thesis, you should consider the following points.

## A literature review underpins and informs your research by

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- Placing your tentative research problem in the context of your field and related fields
- Helping to limit or refine your research
- Suggesting methods and design for research
- Suggesting ways of avoiding difficulties or deficiencies in your research
- Identifying 'gaps' in current knowledge
- Helping to interpret results

## A successful research literature review

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- States what you plan to do to fill the gaps in existing knowledge
- Says why and how your proposed research will contribute to existing knowledge
- Highlights the similarities and differences between your work and the work of others
- Locates your research problem within a theoretical framework and reviews the underlying theory

## The reading process

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- Read with a purpose - know why you are reading and how it could contribute to your research goals and thesis (it's easy to get off track).

## The writing process

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- Get regular feedback on what you write - from a naïve reader, from a peer in the same subject, and from your supervisor. Ask for specific feedback e.g. on writing style, or clarity of ideas and concepts.
- Write regularly.

## Writing the research literature review

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- Focus on a logical argument which allows the reader to understand not only the current state of research in the field but also the rationale for investigating your research question or problem.
- Work from the general to the specific.
- Organise the literature around findings, ideas or themes rather than studies or authors.
- Aim to keep your 'voice' central by using evidence to support your points.
- End sections by summing up the significance of the literature to *your* study.

## Check out this link for more information

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