

Nine Steps To Writing A Literature Review

1. Find a Working Topic

Look at your specific area of study. Think about what interests you, and what is fertile ground for study. Talk to your professor, brainstorm, and read lecture notes and recent issues of periodicals in the field.

2. Review the Literature

- Using keywords, search a computer database. It is best to use at least two databases relevant to your discipline
- Remember that the reference lists of recent articles and reviews can lead to valuable papers
- Make certain that you also include any studies contrary to your point of view

3. Focus Your Topic Narrowly and Select Papers Accordingly. Consider the following:

- What interests you?
 - What interests others?
 - What time span of research will you consider?
- Choose an area of research that is due for a review.

4. Read the Selected Articles Thoroughly and Evaluate Them.

- What assumptions do most/some researchers seem to be making?
- What methodologies do they use? what testing procedures, subjects, material tested?
- Evaluate and synthesize the research findings and conclusions drawn
- Note experts in the field: names/labs that are frequently referenced
- Note conflicting theories, results, methodologies
- Watch for popularity of theories and how this has/has not changed over time

5. Organize the Selected Papers By Looking For Patterns and By Developing Subtopics

Note things such as:

- Findings that are common/contested
- Two or three important trends in the research
- The most influential theories

6. Develop a Working Thesis

Write a one or two sentence statement summarizing the conclusion you have reached about the major trends and developments you see in the research that has been done on your subject.

7. Organize Your Own Paper Based on the Findings From Steps 4 & 5

Develop headings/subheadings. If your literature review is extensive, find a large table surface, and on it place post-it notes or filing cards to organize all your findings into categories. Move them around if you decide that (a) they fit better under different headings, or (b) you need to establish new topic headings.

8. Write the Body of the Paper

Follow the plan you have developed above, making certain that each section links logically to the one before and after, and that you have divided your sections by themes or subtopics, not by reporting the work of individual theorists or researchers.

9. Look At What You Have Written; Focus On Analysis, Not Description