

The Literature Review

A literature review surveys the available *academic literature* on a narrow area of discussion within an academic field, indicating the patterns of current thought on the particular subject under discussion. The term *academic literature* can be defined as everything that has been published on a particular topic of interest within a particular field, referring especially peer-reviewed articles reporting on research studies. The literature review seeks to explain what is known about the topic and also covers the connection, or lack of connection, among the various works in the academic literature.

In writing a literature review, the writer should gather together sources from the academic literature that provide information on the narrow area under discussion and look for how the sources *talk* to each other, discussing some of the same *themes* related to the topic under discussion. The writer of the literature review should then explain as explicitly as possible the similarities within each theme and the differences between themes. Note in particular such patterns as conflicts between opposing groups of scientists and other researchers. The major ideas you have come across should be represented in the literature review. In this manner, you will demonstrate to readers that you are familiar with the source material on your subject.

The literature review may stand as an independent piece of writing, and literature reviews are frequently assigned as end-of-semester papers in a variety of undergraduate courses. A literature review may also be just the beginning of a much larger paper that, for instance, reports on the results of a research study. In these cases, the literature review will first report on what other research studies have been done in order to communicate what is known already and to provide background on why the study that is the subject of the paper was done. In some disciplines, the academic literature may be so technical and may require so much detailed study that simply gaining a grasp of it is enough of a task for any student at any one time. Thus, professors in the sciences and the social sciences may assign literature reviews on specific topics to familiarize their students with the most recent professional findings. Active scholars may also write reviews of the literature for professional journals to keep their colleagues informed on proliferating research. When the review stands as a separate piece of writing, it may be quite extensive—upwards of twenty pages—and deal with the major sources in some detail.

Even the separate literature review, in the long run, is in the service of new, original research. In the case of the undergraduate in a technical discipline, such original research may be postponed until the student gains a wider range of skills and concepts necessary to make a contribution at current levels of work. The literature review is a way of making the student aware of that level. In the case of practicing researchers, the professional literature review provides the starting point for future work done by themselves or their colleagues.

It's also useful to know that this type of paper goes by many different names. Sometimes it's referred to as a *term paper*, a *research paper*, an *end-of-course* paper, or something else. And all of these names for different types of papers will mean something different depending on who you ask. Professors' expectations, and the expectations of particular courses, majors, and disciplinary areas, will vary widely. It's critically important to be clear about the specific expectations of the professor teaching the particular course you're enrolled in. But the general guidelines presented here can be transferred across many different courses and contexts, and they should prove a useful guide

In a literature review, no matter what kind, all sources must be acknowledged in the format appropriate to the discipline.

As with any type of writing, it's exceedingly helpful to think in terms of *process*—what to do first, second, and so on, to the end of writing a paper. That's how this article is organized, giving you some pointers for how to get started and where to go from there, guiding you through to the end of the writing process, and hopefully to a successful paper. This article will present the typical stages you will pass through in preparing a literature review. The purpose of these stages is to isolate some of the complex tasks that go into completing the assignment and to allow you to focus on each skill one at a time. In reality, these stages are not so clearly separable. Everyone has an individual way of working, and the development of each essay follows a different course.

Finding a Direction

Before you can do any research, you must set yourself a direction—a general area to investigate. That direction can, and probably will, change with time and knowledge. At the least, it will become more specific and focused. But with the first step, as the cliché goes, begins the journey.

The immediate context in which you are writing the paper provides one set of clues. Literature reviews are often assigned as an end-of-semester paper in a variety of undergraduate classes. If you are writing a literature review as part of an academic course, the issues raised in class and the particulars of the assignment given by the professor establish the direction. If the professor gives a detailed sheet of instructions defining the major research assignment, these instructions will suggest specific kinds of topics. Regardless of how detailed or general your professor's instructions, however, the overall expectations tend to be similar. The idea is that you go through the semester attending lectures, completing readings, discussing readings, and completing assignments that are intended to teach you about the body of knowledge within a particular discipline. Hopefully, something you heard or read over the course of the semester sparked your interest. The literature review allows you to explore an aspect of the course in more detail through independent research. In the literature review, you write about that research.

In addition to the stated expectations of the professor, you should also consider the intended audience as part of the context. In some courses, the professor is the only reader; that professor, already well informed about the topic you choose, may read your paper to judge your understanding of the material. At other times, the professor, still the only audience, may request

papers on topics with which he or she has only limited familiarity. In another class, the professor may ask you to imagine yourself a practicing scholar writing for a well-informed professional community; your classmates may in fact be your primary audience—the community to which you report back your findings. Careful consideration of which topics might interest each of these audiences may help you choose an initial direction.

You can also look into yourself and into the materials for help in choosing a general area of research. If you choose an area in which you already have some background knowledge, you will have some insight into the meaning and importance of the new materials you find. Prior acquaintance with a subject will also give you a head start in identifying useful sources. Even more important, if you already have an interest in the subject, you will have more motivation to learn and understand the subject in depth. If your interest in the subject makes you feel your questions are worth answering, that conviction will carry across to your readers. On the other hand, if you pick a subject that is tedious to you from the start, not only will you probably drag your feet in doing the research, you will also have a hard time convincing your readers that reading your paper is worth their time.

Conducting Library Research

It's important to understand, first, that *academic literature* is generally, and most would say unfortunately, not available on the *open* internet, and it therefore isn't accessible through Google and other search engines. To be clear, you might be able to pull up the title of an article that is part of the academic literature of a field, and maybe even a summary of a few sentences, but you won't be able to read the source itself, which you'll need to write a paper of this length and scope.

Most any college or university library will provide enrolled students with access to a sufficient store of academic literature for just about any literature review you might be writing on any academic topic, and it's likely that you'll be able to find everything you need online through the library's website. College and university libraries provide students and faculty with access to online tools called *databases*. A database is essentially a search engine, very similar to Google, but its results are usually confined only to the academic literature of certain fields of study. Most databases are only accessible with a subscription, and the college or university library pays the subscription fees on behalf of its students. Libraries make it easy for students to access the databases they subscribe to, and there are many of them. Some are specialized for certain fields, while others provide literature for a range of fields. But the following three databases that are likely to work well for literature reviews in nearly any area of study, and the vast majority of college and university libraries carry subscriptions to them:

- ✓ JSTOR
- ✓ Academic OneFile
- ✓ ScienceDirect

In addition to including information from the formal academic literature of a field, it may also be acceptable to include sources from less formal publications, such as major national newspapers and major national news magazines, which often include articles about research in various fields

of study. The advantage in using these articles is that they can be easier to read, and less dense with jargon and extraneous detail. Most of these types of sources are also only available with a subscription, so you'll want to access them through the library databases, as well. Articles from these types of publications are found in many different databases. One commonly available database that carries a variety of major national newspapers is US Newsstream - Major Newspapers. If you have difficulty locating them, consult your instructor or a research librarian. The following publications should be appropriate for typical literature review assignments at the undergraduate level:

- ✓ The New York Times
- ✓ The Wall Street Journal
- ✓ The Washington Post
- ✓ The Atlantic
- ✓ The Economist

A very important point is that the organization of material in your sources will differ from the new organization of facts and ideas that you will eventually achieve in your paper.

Writing an essay based on academic literature takes time. You will spend time finding sources; you will spend additional time reading these sources and taking notes. Even more time will be required for your thinking to go through many stages: You will need to identify major details, develop a focus, and come to understand the subject. The vision of what your paper should cover will only gradually emerge in your mind.

In terms of the number of sources you'll need, it really just depends. It depends on the length of the paper you're writing, the paper's purpose, how broad or narrow the topic is, and a range of other factors. For a literature review assigned in a typical undergraduate course, no fewer than five representative sources will be needed to cover a topic with any degree of detail. To provide background for an original research study of the kind that might be done by a graduate student or a student in the final year of her or his undergraduate studies, dozens of sources might be necessary, particularly if the student intends to publish the paper.

Reading Closely and Taking Notes

It's fair to say that nothing is more important in writing a literature review than carefully reading, and ideally re-reading, the sources you locate on your topic. Take your time reading your sources, and get to know them really, really well. The better you know your sources, the stronger your paper will be.

You must also, of course, keep track of the relevant information you find in the sources by taking notes. Paraphrase, summary, and outline are good practices in preparing for this paper. You can record only the most relevant information, and you can focus on giving your reader the essential ideas from the sources. In each case, make sure your notes accurately reflect the meaning of the original, even though you are using your own words. In taking notes from any one source, you

may use each of these forms of note taking—depending on how directly the passage bears on your subject.

In the early stages of your research, before you have a specific idea of your final topic, you should record a wide range of information—even though you will not use all of it. In this way, you will not have to return to the source to pick up useful data or detail that you ignored the first time around. As your topic gains focus, you may become more selective. In the last stages of research, you may simply be interested in a single fact to fill a gap in your information. Whatever form your notes take, be sure to keep an accurate record of where each piece of information comes from.

The process of understanding the relationships among the many ideas that you read requires that you make sense of each bit of information as you discover it. You should read and annotate the material at the time you find it. By staying on top of the source reading, you will think about the material at the proper time, and you will have complete, well-organized notes when you are ready to gather together all your information for the paper.

Closing in on the Subject

After reading on a subject for a time, you become familiar with both the subject itself and what the academic literature has to say about the subject. Both types of knowledge should help you define your specific approach to further research. Knowledge of the subject itself lets you know what information exists and what information is important. While becoming increasingly familiar with your subject, you gain substantive material on which to base your thinking. Simultaneously, your knowledge of the prior writing on the subject lets you know what has been fully discussed and what has not in the literature of the discipline. In addition to helping you evaluate the early information you have come across, a study of the literature helps you sort out what kinds of data are available and what areas of agreement and disagreement exist between sources.

Organizing the Literature Review

For shorter, less complex papers, a few organizational notes may be enough to fix the structure of the literature review in your mind before you begin writing, but literature reviews are usually too long and too complex to organize by haphazard methods. An essay of anywhere from five to twenty or more pages incorporating a range of information from many sources requires conscious, careful planning. Preparing a full outline will let you think over your plans and revise them accordingly.

The outline places in schematic form the main topic and issues you will discuss in the paper and arranges the subtopics and specifics underneath the major statements. It is the bare bones, the skeleton, of the paper you will write. As such, you should neither take it lightly nor arrange the material in a mechanical, automatic fashion. Rather you should consider the essentials of what the most effective arrangement of the material will be.

The outline is your way of putting the subject together. Your major statements and the arrangement of them, although built out of your reading of sources, should not resemble the pattern of any source. If you borrow the skeleton of someone else's work, it will resemble that person's work, no matter how you flesh it out. But because you have consulted many sources—and compared, evaluated, and synthesized them—your vision of the subject will not resemble anyone else's: your original outline will be the result of a long line of original inquiry.

Actually, you may want to prepare an outline at any one of several stages of the research project. At each stage, the outline serves a different function. Toward the end of the research period, you can make an idealized outline to help you determine whether your research material is adequate to the argument you have in mind. If not, you can opt to supplement your research.

After you complete the research, but before you write a first draft, you should prepare a working outline to figure out the order and relationship of all the material. Then, as you actually write the paper, you can modify the working outline to solve problems, to take advantage of opportunities, or to identify gaps that you discover in the process of writing. If the organization of your paper changes significantly as you write a first draft, you may wish to make a draft outline to make sure that the paper hangs together. Finally, you can make a formal outline of the completed paper.

Usually you do not need to write all these levels of outlines for any one project. You can choose among them, depending on the nature of the project and your personal preferences. You should, however, outline the paper at least once in the course of your writing to ensure it is well-organized and coherent.

You are probably familiar with the mechanics of an outline. At the top is a thesis statement, listed underneath the thesis are the major statements that support or subdivide that thesis; these major statements are identified by Roman numerals. In turn, each major statement is supported or subdivided into secondary statements, which are listed beneath it and identified by uppercase (capital) letters. This subdivision continues as long as the material warrants, the smaller units being marked successively by Arabic numerals, lower-case letters, numerals in parentheses, and letters in parentheses. Successive indentations visually separate the main points from the minor ones.

Although the requirements of a literature review vary widely, as stated previously, the following four parts are generally expected:

- Background
- Thesis Statement
- Report on the Literature
- References Section

The background portion comes at the beginning of the paper. It should be one or two paragraphs, and it should introduce the topic, communicate the topic's importance, and reflect the writer's interest in the topic.

The thesis statement should come after the background. It should be a single sentence that reflects the content of the paper and the strength of the research. It should define the topic narrowly and be specific, but not too detailed and wordy, as in the following example, taken from an example literature review about the social phenomenon known as *helicopter parenting*, which is found at the end of this article:

Parenting styles have shifted dramatically in recent decades, moving from a more permissive to a more restrictive approach, yielding both positive and negative effects for both adult children and their parents, particularly as children emerge into young adulthood.

The vast majority of your paper will be a report on the information from your sources containing, at a minimum, at least 6 paragraphs. Here you only report information from your sources. Throughout the paper, **you must use entirely different words. DO NOT COPY** the words directly from the sources. If you fail to do either of these things, then you have committed plagiarism, and the penalties for doing so, as you likely know already, are quite severe at any college or university.

You must also cite your sources within the text, giving credit to the authors of the sources. There are very specific requirements for this. Most popular academic disciplines these days, including many of the natural sciences, the social sciences, the medical fields, and business, require APA style in-text citations. The complete guidelines for in-text citation go beyond this article, but they are generally covered in first-year composition courses, and they are widely available through college libraries and other sources. In general, though, APA style in-text citations require that you include both the name of the author or authors of the source and the year of publication. This information can be formatted in one of two ways. One is called a *parenthetical citation*, in which the author and the year of publication are named in parentheses at the end of the information from the source. The other form is called a *narrative citation*, in which the author is named within a sentence where information from the source is used. The year of publication must still appear in parentheses after the name of the author. The following examples of both forms of in-text citation are also taken from the example literature review that appears at the end of this article:

The Two Methods for In-Text Citations

APA style allows for in-text citations to take two forms:

- ✓ A *narrative* citation
- ✓ A *parenthetical* citation

Parenthetical Citation	Narrative Citation
Young adults are less likely than in past decades to be involved in car accidents (Twenge, 2017).	Dwyke and Zilibotti (2019) present data confirming these parents' anxieties, explaining their desperation to see their children succeed.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th Ed., 8.11

Your literature review should be organized around the *themes* you identified when reading your sources. Write at least one paragraph about each theme. Make each paragraph distinct from every other paragraph. Every paragraph should contribute something different. Your goal here is to choose information that is not commonly known. You also must *synthesize* the information from your sources in this part of your paper, bringing together information from different sources in each paragraph to develop the theme of that paragraph. Each paragraph must draw on and cite at least two different sources.

Finally, a correctly formatted references page is critical for a literature review. Doing quality research is central to the purpose of a literature review, and the references page makes clear what sources were used. Like with in-text citation, mentioned above, the references page must be formatted according to very specific guidelines which, in most cases, will be APA guidelines. The complete guidelines for the references page go beyond this article, but they are generally covered in first-year composition courses, and they are widely available through college libraries and other sources.

Writing the Literature Review

An outline can serve only as a partial guide—a stage in your thinking. Even having a complete first draft does not complete the active consideration of your subject because the refinement of language through revision will lead you to make changes to your approach.

Because the literature review rests on such a variety of source materials and requires such an extended development, step-by-step organization of your thoughts as they appear in the final paper is exceedingly important. You do not want your reader to get lost in the mass of information. Beyond preventing confusion, you also need the reader to see the subject from the perspective that you have finally gained by reading the academic literature on the particular area that is the focus of your literature review. The pattern of your organization should reflect a pattern you have discovered in the material.

Once you have come to an organizational logic for your paper, you need to make that logic explicit for the readers so that they know what you are trying to do. The longer and more complex the paper is, the more you need transitions—bridging phrases and sentences—to show the connection between one idea and the next.

Because the research paper is a structure of your own thought built upon the written statements of others, you need to be aware of the most effective method of presenting the material from each source and the proper ways of giving credit to the sources you use. Again, as discussed above, it is absolutely critical that you put all of the information into your own words and that you carefully and accurately cite your sources. If you fail to do either of these things, then you have committed plagiarism.

The last stage of preparing your paper is the creation of a final manuscript that adheres to all of the appropriate formatting conventions of the discipline. In most cases, that will be APA style. Absolutely essential is a careful proofreading of the final manuscript. These elements of

formality and care are in themselves signs that you are making a well-considered public statement on a subject on which you have become highly knowledgeable through your own careful study and hard work. Your thoughts deserve the best possible presentation.

A Complete Example Literature Review

On the pages that follow, you will find a complete literature review that would likely meet many, if not all, of the requirements of a typical literature review assignment in a typical undergraduate college course. The paper is visually formatted according to the guidelines found in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 7th Edition, which are the guidelines followed in the vast majority of undergraduate college classes and degree programs. Annotations in the margins reference content provided in this article, including organizing the paper according to *themes* and synthesizing sources within the body of the essay.

The Rise of Helicopter Parenting: Its Impacts on Parents, Children, and Society

Daniel Beugnet

Tallahassee Community College

ENC 1101: College Composition

Professor Daniel Beugnet

May 12, 2020

The paper begins with a title page formatted according to the requirements of APA Style. See the video titled "How to Format a Paper in APA Style" for specific instructions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNVpCkKVbb4>.

The sentences in blue provide background.

2

The Rise of Helicopter Parenting: Its Impacts on Parents, Children, and Society

Over the past decade, researchers have observed a dramatic shift in the roles that parents play in their children's lives as they reach their later teen years and young adulthood (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2019; Fingerman, et al., 2012; Flanagan, 2016; Nelson, 2010; Twenge, 2017). Characterized by constant intervention in the lives of their children, extending to their children's lives, extracurricular pursuits, and education, this new style of parenting has come to be known as "helicopter parenting," imagery that references the tendency of parents to "hover" over the lives of their children, even as they grow up, leave home, matriculate through college, and launch families and careers. Researchers have even documented a trend in which parents remain financially and emotionally involved in the lives of their children well into adulthood (Fingerman, et al., 2012), with some even observing parents interfering in the admissions process as their children apply to graduate school, or even involving themselves directly in their children's careers (Nelson, 2010). Parenting styles have shifted dramatically in recent decades, moving from a more permissive to a more restrictive approach, yielding both positive and negative effects for both adult children and their parents, particularly as children emerge into young adulthood.

The thesis statement is shown here in red.

Research shows conclusively that parents in recent decades have been investing an increasing amount of both time and money in managing many aspects of their children's lives. Doepke and Zilibotti (2019) analyzed data from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics showing that parents in 2005 spent, on average, six more hours per week managing various aspects of their children's lives than they did in 1975, with parents in 1975 spending approximately two hours per week actively engaged in their children's lives versus more than eight hours per week on average in 2005, an increase of well over 300%. But the support of

The sentences in green are developing the first theme of the review of literature, this one explaining how common helicopter parenting is.

parents extended well beyond an increased investment of time, and they expanded beyond childhood. Parents also substantially increased their financial investments in their children's lives well into adulthood. Today, fully 30% of parents report providing both financial and emotional support to their adult children (Fingerman, et al., 2012). Jean M. Twenge (2017) also confirmed this trend in a study of generational differences that collected extensive ethnographic interviews with teenagers and young adults from a range of backgrounds. Findings indicated that the vast majority of parents spent considerable time driving their children to social activities, managing their extracurricular activities, and communicating with their teen and young adult children via smartphone, a departure from earlier parenting styles. Nelson (2010) also found that fully 86% of college students reported very frequent electronic communication with at least one parent.

Although a range of causes for the shift in parenting styles have been examined in recent years, the most often cited is the massive upheaval in the global economy that has resulted from the technological advancements that have eliminated countless lower-skilled jobs in recent years (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2019; Fingerman, et al., 2012; Flanagan, 2016; Nelson, 2010; Twenge, 2017). Nelson (2010), in particular, documented the acute anxiety felt by many parents for their children as they have watched the number of available employment opportunities in their own workplaces shrink dramatically over the past two decades. In response, she finds, parents organize an array of extracurricular activities and micromanage their children's academic work to give them an increased advantage in college admissions, which they hope will translate into better employment prospects later in life. Doepke and Zilibotti (2019) present data confirming these parents' anxieties, explaining their desperation to see their children succeed. They document that the buying power of those without college degrees has fallen by more than half in the past forty years as those without a higher education compete for an ever-decreasing number

The sentences in orange make up the second theme, about the causes of helicopter parenting.

of jobs, forcing wages to decrease for this group. Meanwhile, the need for skilled technology workers has increased dramatically during the same period, further contributing to the trend of economic inequality.

But the rise in inequality is a more complicated phenomenon, researchers caution, with changes in public policy also playing a potent role in the economic upheavals that have subsequently altered parenting practices (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2019; Nelson, 2010). The conservative politics of the 1980s reformed laws that had previously regulated wages and working hours. Over time, this resulted in the managers and shareholders of large corporations demanding increased productivity from workers while keeping wages low. As productivity increased, the number of available jobs decreased, creating more competition for an ever-shrinking pool of jobs. Researchers are now finding that this shift in public policy led directly to an increase in anxiety among parents for their children's futures (Doepke & Zilibotti, 2019).

Even as parents in general have been investing increasing amounts of time in their children's lives, however, researchers have found that wealthy parents spend a great deal more time managing their children's lives. Nelson (2010) documented that the same economic changes that have led an increasing number of parents to invest ever greater amounts of time in managing their children's lives have also resulted in lower-income parents having far less time available to spend with their children, further increasing concerns over inequality. Twenge (2017) also found in interviews with parents and children that wealthy parents were far more likely than lower-income parents to enforce limits on technology usage, requiring their children instead to invest that time in activities that will bring them educational advantages later in life.

All of this increased anxiety on the part of parents has led to a range of negative impacts resulting from the resulting changes in parenting styles. Among them is that many parents now

A third
theme
begins
here

And a
fourth
one
here.

place a greater reliance on technology to keep track of their children's whereabouts, pushing more communication between parents and their children online. Twenge (2017) has documented that young people perceive a marked reduction in the quality of their communication with their parents as more and more of that communication occurs via texting and other online platforms. And Doepke and Zilibotti (2019) have found that children are increasingly frustrated by their parents' overuse of technological devices, with survey results indicating that more than one-third of teens routinely become frustrated over their parents' overuse of electronic devices.

Another concerning negative impact of the more hands-on style of parenting that has emerged in recent years are findings that a high number of parents feel distress over the amount of help they offer their children, especially as they reach adulthood and continue to be dependent on their parents both emotionally and financially. Studies have repeatedly shown that parents who provide significant financial support for their adult children report feeling distressed, perceiving their children as having failed to establish successful, productive adult lives, and perceiving themselves as having failed as parents (Fingerman, et al., 2012). Levitzki (2009) found a strong correlation between this perception of personal failure and depression in older parents who continue to play a direct role in the lives of their adult children, confirming that there are serious consequences to a more intensive parenting style that continues well beyond childhood.

But in addition to the negative effects of the recent shift to a more intensive parenting style, researchers have also found positive results. Among them is that young people are far less likely than in past years to engage in risky behavior, such as underage drinking and driving while intoxicated (Flanagan, 2016; Twenge, 2017). There has also been a precipitous decrease in unplanned pregnancy among teens and young adults. Young adults are also less likely than in

The
final
theme
begins
here.

past decades to be involved in car accidents (Twenge, 2017). Additionally, young adults who received frequent support from their parents have reported feeling healthier, more content, and more successful in their careers than do the children of parents with less involved parenting styles (Fingerman, et al., 2012).

Note that there is no summary conclusion in this type of paper.

References

- Doepke, M. & Zilibotti, F. (2019). The rise of helicopter parents. In *Love, money, and parenting: How economics explains the way we raise our kids*, (pp. 51-84).
- Fingerman, K. L., Cheng, Y. P., Wesselmann, E. D., Zarit, S., Furstenberg, F., & Birditt, K. S. (2012). Helicopter parents and landing pad kids: Intense parental support of grown children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 74(4), 880-896.
- Flanagan, K. (2016, September). How helicopter parenting can cause binge drinking. *The Atlantic*.
- Levitzki, N. (2009). Parenting of adult children in an Israeli sample: Parents are always parents. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23, 226-235.
- Nelson, M. K. (2010). No playpen. In *Parenting out of control: Anxious parents in uncertain times*, (pp. 1-14).
- Twenge, J. M. (2017, September). Have smartphone destroyed a generation? *The Atlantic*.

The references page is vitally important for this type of paper, and it's usually worth a lot of points.