

LITERATURE REVIEW PROCESS

What is a literature review

The literature review is a written overview of major writings and other sources on a selected topic. Sources covered in the review may include scholarly journal articles, books, government reports, Web sites, etc. The literature review provides a description, summary and evaluation of each source. It is usually presented as a distinct section of a graduate thesis or dissertation.

Purpose of the literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to provide a critical written account of the current state of research on a selected topic:

- Identifies areas of prior scholarship
- Places each source in the context of its contribution to the understanding of the specific issue, area of research, or theory under review.
- Describes the relationship of each source to the others that you have selected
- Identifies new ways to interpret, and shed light on any gaps in, previous research
- Points the way forward for further research

Components of the literature review

The literature review should include the following:

- Objective of the literature review
- Overview of the subject under consideration.
- Clear categorization of sources selected into those in support of your particular position, those opposed, and those offering completely different arguments.
- Discussion of both the distinctiveness of each source and its similarities with the others.

Steps in the literature review process

Preparation of a literature review may be divided into four steps:

1. Define your subject and the scope of the review.
2. Search the library catalogue, subject specific databases and other search tools to find sources that are relevant to your topic.
3. Read and evaluate the sources and to determine their suitability to the understanding of topic at hand
4. Analyse, interpret and discuss the findings and conclusions of the sources you selected

Evaluating sources

In assessing each source, consideration should be given to:

- What is the author's expertise in this particular field of study (credentials)?
- Are the author's arguments supported by empirical evidence (e.g. quantitative/qualitative studies)?
- Is the author's perspective too biased in one direction or are opposing studies and viewpoints also considered?
- Does the selected source contribute to a more profound understanding of the subject?