

# The Literature Review

## Tips for a Successful Start to University Study

Version 2

A Literature Review is an opportunity for a writer to demonstrate a deep understanding of the existing body of work in a particular field. Importantly, the writer must critically assess the works to ensure each is analytical, objective, intellectual and rational.

### Why Review the Literature?

A Literature Review is often the first step taken by a post-graduate student towards their dissertation or thesis.

The rationale is to thoroughly explore the area in which a writer intends to research and to show all the literature to date on the subject.

From this exploration, the student will develop a good working knowledge of the research area. In addition, a thorough review will often highlight areas which should be further researched.

The Purpose of a Literature Review is to:

- Show the historical background to an issue
- Compare and contrast the various researchers or schools of thought of the issue
- Synthesise the various bodies of writing into cohesive groups
- Highlight previous research methods
- Note areas of disagreement
- Summarise the prior research

- Show where further study is required

### What is Literature?

Literature is any published material which is relevant to a researcher's field of study. It may include:

- Books
- Journals – scholarly and popular
- Government documents
- Statistics
- Theses and dissertations
- Encyclopaedia
- The World Wide Web

### Literature Review Vs Annotated Bibliography

A Literature Review, like an essay, is a piece of discursive prose. Rather than a list, it organises and synthesises the research around concepts determined by the writer.

An Annotated Bibliography, in contrast, lists, describes and reviews each text in turn.

## Writing

A Literature Review is similar to an essay in that it is comprised of an introduction, body and conclusion.

### Introduction

- The nature of the topic under discussion (the topic).
- Any parameters of the topic.
- How or Why the writer selected the literature within this Review.

### Body

The body could include any of these:

- Historical background
- Definitions
- Different approaches to the subject
- Mainstream vs alternative schools of thought
- Methodologies and Methods
- Previous research
- Current research
- Findings etc
- Questions raised

### Conclusion

- Summarise the general conclusions
- Summarise the major points of agreement and disagreement
- Provide a re-statement of the thesis.
- Summarise the main points.
- May suggest areas for further research or investigation.
- Do not introduce any new material.

### How many References?

There is no definitive answer to this question as some research areas are awash with previous work and other areas devoid of any.

The following are general guidelines only:

Undergraduate	5-20 titles
Honours dissertation	20+ titles
Masters thesis	40+ titles
PhD thesis	50+ titles

### Common Essay Faults

- Insufficient or inappropriate research
- Listing and summarising the research instead of developing a set of concepts and comparing each of the research items to it.
- Not assessing research – discussing strengths and weaknesses
- Not discussing studies contrary to the writer's view
- Ideas not communicated clearly and logically

### On the Web

For other Tips for a Successful Start to University see the ECU website

[http://www.business.ecu.edu.au/current-students/learning\\_adviser.htm](http://www.business.ecu.edu.au/current-students/learning_adviser.htm)

Grammar help available at:  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/index2.html>  
or  
[www.utoronto.ca/writing/advice.html#grammar](http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/advice.html#grammar)

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<http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/litreviews/index.html>

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