

## Script: How to Write a Literature Review

So you've arrived to class and your instructor is talking about the literature review that is due this semester. You've heard the term a number of times but aren't sure exactly what it is, much less how to properly structure and write one .

Don't stress, this video will teach you how to write and structure a literature review, go over the different types of literature reviews and give you some helpful tips to end up with a great mark from your instructor.

Let's start out with a definition ; A literature review is both a summary and explanation of the current state of knowledge on a focused topic as found in academic books, journal articles and all other sources connected to the subject of study. Its aim is to provide an overview of sources you have explored while researching a particular topic and to demonstrate to your readers how your research fits within the larger field of study.

Essentially literature reviews have to accomplish 4 things:

- be organized around the research question you are developing
- cohesively summarize results of what is and is not known
- identify gaps in the available literature
- formulate questions that you feel needs further research

So before you even start to write or research, develop an outline of your research question and include your assumptions on what you think you will find. Since a good lit review is both a summary and synthesis of existing information, start your research thinking about how you'll move past a simple summary and into a discussion on the state of research in your chosen area.

Maybe this means you:

- Give a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations,
- Trace the progression of the field, including major debates,
- advise the reader on the most pertinent or relevant research, or
- discuss where gaps exist in how a problem has been researched to date.

This is the perfect time to begin your research on the McMaster Library homepage or choose a database to gather sources using your search terms.

If you find there are far to many results as you search consider narrowing your topic so you can gather a good cross section of resources. Be aware of your professor's requirements as you search.

There are a few different ways you can organize your lit review, you'll most likely want to decide on which you choose to use once you've done some research. You could structure it chronologically, by publication, thematic (by topic or issue), or methodologically (which focuses on the methods utilized by the researcher)

Once you start to write, there are a few things to keep in mind.

- always use evidence

- use quotes sparingly

- rephrase the information's significance in your own voice

- be careful with paraphrasing and citation

Feel ready to get researching and writing? Check out our Literature review libguide if you want more information.

We also offer Ask a Librarian chat, other How Library Stuff Works videos and sit down research consultations, all available on the McMaster Library website at [library.mcmaster.ca](http://library.mcmaster.ca)