

Literature Review Basics

A literature review is a form of research documentation that gives a summary of what we know or do not know about a particular issue/ topic/ subject.

Literature reviews provide a description, summary, and critical evaluation of published information in a particular subject area. It is not your personal opinion on whether or not you liked these sources. They have an organizational pattern that combines both summary and synthesis.

Summarize

A **summary** is a recap of the important information of the source. When you summarize from academic sources you will say, in your own words, the idea(s) expressed in the text. (This can include reducing a whole article to a paragraph in some cases.)

- Only the main points are included.
- Text is condensed without losing the essence of the material.
- Examples and explanations are omitted.
- The summary writer's own words are used. (NB: Do not change technical terms.)
- Reporting verbs (such as 'suggests' and 'contends') are used to discuss and comment on ideas in the text.

Each article or other source should be summarized and then critically evaluated for its premise, methodology, and conclusion, including your conclusion of the value and any questions remaining.

Synthesize

Once you have summarized several articles you need to bring them together by synthesizing.

A **synthesis** is a re-organization and analysis of that information. This starts with stating the significance of the articles and relating them to a larger theme. Use logical connections to group and connect the sources used. While this will be in your own words, it will contain no new ideas – it is a grouping and restating of the ideas of the authors that you have reviewed.

What is included in a Literature Review?

Your instructor will clarify:

- What types of scholarly sources will be included (books, journal articles, websites, or...)?
- How many sources should you use?
- Is there a common theme or issue that you will use to summarize, synthesize, and critique your sources?
- Will you evaluate your sources?
- Formatting with subheadings and other background information?

Literature Review or Academic Paper?

The main focus of an academic research paper is to develop a new argument, and a research paper will contain a literature review as one of its parts. In a research paper, you use the literature as a foundation and as support for a new insight that you contribute. The focus of a literature review, however, is to critically summarize and synthesize the arguments and ideas of others without adding new contributions.

References: <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review>,
http://www.tru.ca/_shared/assets/Literature_Review_Template30564.pdf, <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/>

