

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW?

The aim of the literature review is to demonstrate that you have read and understood the current published research on your topic. A literature review is not just a summary of current research but a critical analysis and evaluation of this research.

WHY DO A LITERATURE REVIEW?

The literature review helps develop your understanding of your topic. It provides you with knowledge of what is currently known and believed about your topic and identifies any gaps in the current research. A literature review provides the opportunity to compare, contrast and critique various perspectives on your topic.

WHAT IS 'LITERATURE' ?

In a literature review the 'literature' are the items you have searched in order to understand your research question. Literature can include several different types of publication:

- Journal articles (found either on the library's databases or in the library's collection of print journals)
- Books
- E-books
- Conference proceedings
- Reports published by governments and international agencies

STARTING THE LITERATURE REVIEW: THE READING PROCESS

Develop a list of search terms from your research question to guide your search of the literature. Taking the time to create well thought out search terms means the literature you find is more likely to be useful.

You do not need to read everything written on your topic. Instead, set boundaries of what information is relevant and what is not. For example, for the topic leadership style and its effect on employees' motivation, the review will focus only on leadership within the retail sector. By establishing boundaries, you prioritise your reading and read only what is relevant to your question.

Use a variety of sources and look for any differing theories, values or research methods regarding your topic. Look not only for relevant information but also identify where there are gaps in the current research.

MANAGING THE LARGE AMOUNT OF INFORMATION

You will collect a large quantity of information so it is essential that you devise a system of filing this information. For example, you might divide the information by main themes, trends or by research method.

With a large quantity of information, it is essential that you record all of the references and citations as you go. It is important to do this otherwise you may find yourself at the end of your assignment attempting to recreate your searches to locate a resource to get the correct reference and citation. There are a number of ways to keep track of references:

- A reference manager is third party software which helps manage and organise your references to books, articles, and documents you have included in your literature review. The library provides links to the reference managers Mendeley and Zotero on the library's blackboard page. You can also use the reference manager in Word.
- Another way to record references is when you locate useful information photocopy the relevant page or print the article and record on these the APA reference of where it came from.

- Look at the APA guide to make sure you include the correct information for all your references.

WRITE THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Before you begin to write your review you need to evaluate the research you have collected. Identify what are the common ideas, theories and trends. Make your own judgements through comparing, contrasting and critiquing the various perspectives on your topic. Judge which research methods are more successful than others and identify any gaps in the research.

The structure of a literature review is similar to an academic essay, both have an introduction, a body of multiple paragraphs and a conclusion. However, what these cover is slightly different.

Introduction

The introduction should establish the specific focus of the literature review, identify what boundaries you have set and state the general findings of the review.

The body

The body is made up of multiple paragraphs that evaluate the sources you have located. It is important that each paragraph focuses on a main idea, theory or trend instead of a paragraph being focused on one piece of research. This means in one paragraph you will be presenting the findings that different researchers have made that all present the same idea, theory or trend.

Each paragraph should start by presenting the broad idea, theory or trend then get more specific. It is here that you present your critique of the research you have collected. Evaluate the research for its premise, the research methodology used and its conclusions. Identify any biases in the research. Address any inconsistencies or errors as well as identifying if the research is credible, accurate, in-depth or relevant. It is important to link evaluations of multiple pieces of research back to the main idea, theory or trend that the paragraph is about. This is achieved by comparing and contrasting the literature. Identify if there are any gaps in the current literature in relation to the idea, theory or trend you are discussing. Discuss how your research will fill this gap or add depth to a particular idea, theory or trend.

Any judgements you make must be supported by evidence. For example, if you disagree with the research method one researcher used, identify a better method through an approach used by another researcher.

The Conclusion

The conclusion summarises the key findings of your literature review and links this to your research topic.

A GOOD LITERATURE REVIEW...

- Locates and identifies a range of literature.
- Presents an overview of relevant and current research.
- Identifies main ideas, theories, trends and research methods found across the literature.
- Provides an evaluation of current research.
- Critiques the research and makes judgements.
- Does not take the literature at face value, considers any biases.
- Written with formal language.
- Clearly structured with an introduction, a body and a conclusion.