

Hi! In this dissertation top tips video we're taking a look at the literature review.

Purpose

Firstly, what's the purpose of the literature review?

This section shows the context of your research, by giving an overview of key issues about the topic and summarising and critiquing previous findings in the literature. It also includes your research questions and justifies them by showing how they fit into previous literature findings.

Structure

How can you structure the literature review?

The first question is where to put it. In some departments the literature review is its own section, and in others it's included as part of the Introduction. Check your departmental guidance to find out what you should do!

Wherever your literature review goes, the structure should move from general to specific. For example, give the background to the topic, then synthesise and critique previous literature findings. Use this to identify a gap in the research, and finally introduce your study, including your research questions and a very brief overview of the methodology.

Using source information

What concepts are important for the literature review?

The literature review is all about, well, the literature, so appropriately reporting source information is crucial. The first part of this is selecting the information to include. This'll depend on your purpose, but often you just want the key result.

Next, you need to choose a citation style. You could put the citation in brackets after the information, for example, 'Expressive voices are harder to identify (Lavan et al., 2019)'. Alternatively, you could integrate the citation into the sentence; 'Lavan et al. (2019) found that expressive voices are harder to identify'.

The literature review isn't a list of source summaries. Instead, you need to synthesise information from different sources to show what it means as a whole. To do this, group similar findings and explanations together. Report them using phrases like 'The majority of studies in this area have found...', with a citation at the end of the sentence, or 'Similarly, Nakamura (2016) reported that...'. Also point out differences between sources. For example, 'However, Brown and Chang (2015) found that...' or 'This contrasts with findings relating to...'.

Critical analysis

The final important concept is critiquing source information - this critical analysis is essential to doing well.

Think about the strengths and weaknesses of studies, and methodology choices made by researchers. What are the implications of these for findings and conclusions drawn? Putting all this together, what do all the literature findings mean? Remember critiquing is not criticising! Consider positives as well as negatives.

There's your top tips for the literature review. Find loads more academic and digital skills resources on the Skills Guides: subjectguides.york.ac.uk/skills