



Writing a Literature Review

Overview

A literature review is a survey of published materials that are relevant to a particular issue, theory, or area of research. A literature review provides a description, summary, and critical evaluation of each work and of the major themes and issues that arise from the literature.

A literature review is most often completed as part of an essay, thesis, or report to provide the necessary context and background information to the subject. Remember that a literature review is a piece of discursive prose, not a list summarizing one piece of literature after another.

A literature review can be used to:

- Identify new interpretations of previous work
- Resolve conflicts between contradictory studies and theories
- Identify previous scholarship in order to prevent duplication and repetition
- Determine gaps in the existing knowledge and the way forward for further research and writing

Types of literature to consider:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles (periodicals) Books and book chapters
- Conference proceedings
- Dissertations and theses
- Reports (government, institutional, private-sector)
- Websites, newspapers, encyclopedias, etc.

Questions to consider:

- How will you organize your sources (by trends, subject, date, author, methods, etc.)?
- How credible are your sources?
- Is the source relevant to your topic?
- Are you synthesizing, analyzing, and thinking critically, not just summarizing?
- Do you rely on too heavily on direct quotations?
- What citation style will you use? (APA, MLA, Chicago)?
- Have you left enough time to review your own work multiple times?

How Can We Help

If you are working on a literature review project, we can provide useful advice and guidance in Writing Support. We can help you develop your skills in searching the literature, provide guidance for writing your literature review effectively, and assist you in proper citation style. Our one-on-one appointments would be ideal for this and we encourage you to come early in your writing process so we can give feedback that you can take away and incorporate into your work as you go along. We also offer a workshop on writing a literature review which can give you a more detailed overview.

Resources

The Ryerson University Library & Archives (RULA) <http://library.ryerson.ca> is an essential partner in your effective research process. They are the experts at locating good sources of information Talk to your librarian