

Literature Reviews Handout

First, what you have to understand is that a “literature” review isn’t necessarily just something that you would do in your English, American, or World Literature classes. Of course, you can and probably will do a literature review in these classes, but “literature” is considered to be any document or text from a scholarly source and will be a part of just about any and every curriculum. Secondly, a literature review is not an academic research paper. In essence, a literature review is the opening of a research paper, in that it describes a particular topic. It is a report or overview of facts and information in a specific field or discipline.

A Literature Review is a *synthetic* document. In this case, synthetic means that the review is the articulation of a new understanding of content based on different sources. Therefore, a Literature Review is neither a cut and paste nor a simple restatement of your annotations.

Your literature review should contain the following parts:

- 1) Introduction- An overview of the topic or claim of the literature review.
- 2) Body (remember that a body paragraph has, in general three parts)
 - A claim, usually articulated in a topic sentence. This will be your own statement of understanding about some issue.
 - Support for that claim, usually through researched evidence, paraphrases, and quoted text. Here, you will properly cite sources, signaling them as appropriate, in order to show how they support your claim.
 - Development of the relationship between each piece of evidence and the topic sentence and thesis. This is your original discussion, including transitional ideas.
- 3) Conclusions/Recommendations-What you have learned from the literature review.

How to write a Literature Review:

1) Organize your sources according to particular claims. Try to use appropriate Modes of Thought as a guide. (The modes of thought are Comparison/Contrast, Cause & Effect, Problem & Solution, Process, Description, Illustration, Classification & Division, Definition, and Narrative)

For example: Group the sources that discuss causes together, effects together, those that reveal problems together, those that provide illustrations of the topic together, those that provide definitions

of a complex term together, etc. You will find that different sources may (and should) be used more than once.

2) Review what each source says about the issues. Organize them according to the claims or arguments they make that reinforce what you are arguing, versus those that don't.

For example: Four sources agree that the Louisiana Bayou ecosystem is being destroyed. Two of these state that it has been caused by the amount of construction built in the delta. One argues that it has been caused naturally by the Mississippi River. A third says it has some divine spiritual cause. You agree with the construction theory, think part of the issue involves the river itself, but dismiss divine involvement.

3) Make your claim. This must be your own original statement.

For example: "The ecosystem of the Mississippi delta has been threatened largely by man-made construction, although the river itself cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor."

4) Discuss the evidence. You'll need to decide in what order to put your sources. Do you want to dismiss those you disagree with first, or build your case before dismissing others? (This is prioritizing the information). Remember that you need to signal each source as you integrate it, and the information you don't provide in the signal needs to appear in the parenthetical citation after the information. Remember also to provide some discussion relating the support back to the topic sentence.

For example: (APA Style) "According to Strong (1997)...paraphrase or quote here (p.47). Similarly, Pretes (2004) argues that ... (p.12). Natural causes cannot be ruled out either, as Keyes-Mathews (2001) claims. In her study, she writes "... (p.871). One potential cause that can be dismissed is offered by Koch (2002), who claims that ... (p.11). Very clearly, the scientific evidence supports...

5) Continue this process with other claims you would like to make relating to your topic. Make sure to connect paragraphs together through logical transitions in your topic/first sentences.

For example: While scholars disagree on the causes of the Mississippi Delta erosion problem, they appear to be unanimous on the possible solutions. Several researchers (Keyes-Mathews, 2001; Pretes, 2004; Strong, 1997) agree that... summary.

Remember, if you are still confused, there are always other literature reviews in your area of interest and you can read them to get a sense of the style you might want to look for to complete your own research or ways to organize your final review. Also try asking your professor about his or her experience writing literature reviews. Chances are, your professor will have good advice about how to start your review and where to look for information.

Submitted by Dr. Robert T. Koch Jr., and Katie Crum

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References:

Review of literature. (2009). University of Wisconsin Writing Center. <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReviewofLiterature.html>

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<http://www2.una.edu/writingcenter>