



Preparing for your Literature Review

A literature review is a survey of the body of published work on a particular topic, theory, or research question. The purpose is not only to tell your reader the state of scholarship about a given topic, but also to organize and evaluate the major points, parts, or arguments of each source. Here are some ways you can prepare before writing a literature review:

Find a Working Topic

Look at your specific area of study; think about what interests you, and ask yourself: Is there an opportunity or need for further study? Talk to your professor, brainstorm, and read recent issues of periodicals in the field.

Gather Sources

Focus your topic: A literature review aims to cover all of the research on a given topic. If the topic is too large, there will be too much material to cover it adequately.

Consider the following:

- What interests you?
- What interests others?
- What time span of research will you consider?

Read with a purpose: Although you will need to briefly summarize sources, a good literature review requires that you isolate key themes or issues related to your own research interests.



Organize and track your research by creating an Excel spreadsheet.

Evaluate Sources

For each book or article, consider:

- Credentials: Is the author an expert?
- Argument/Evidence: Does the evidence support the conclusion? Is the argument or evidence complete?

When comparing sources, consider:

- Conclusions: Does all research arrive at the same conclusion, or are there different viewpoints? What evidence or reasoning are the differences based on?
- Gaps or omissions: What questions are raised by the literature?



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Tip!

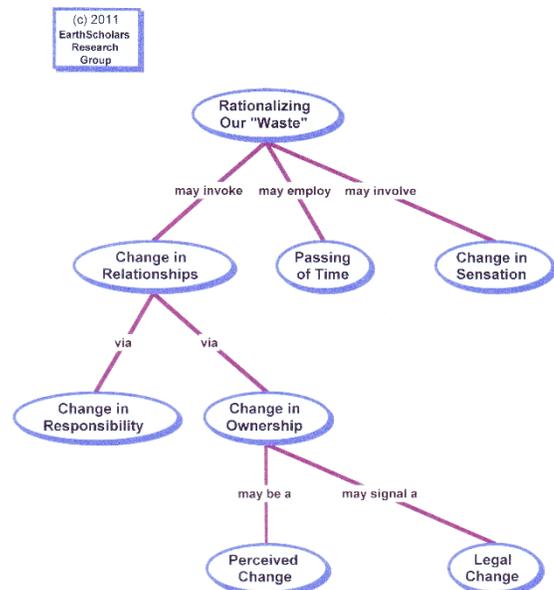
Use official databases to ensure you are finding reliable resources. TRU library has a vast database for all disciplines.

Organize Sources

There are several types of literature reviews, so the first step is to know the type of review you will be doing. This will impact how you categorize and organize data.

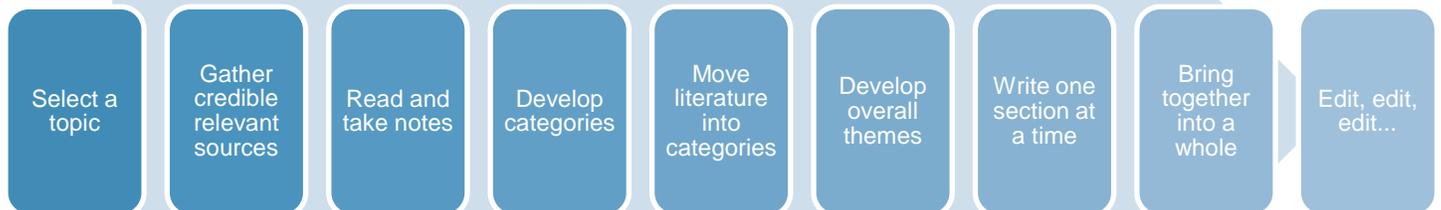
Categorize the selected papers on the basis of:

- Themes and patterns, and by developing subtopics;
- Findings that are common or contested;
- Two or three important trends in the research;
- The most influential theories.



Tip!

Draw a map to organize themes and subtopics.



http://www.ucdenver.edu/academics/colleges/SPA/CurrentStudents/academicresources/Documents/Lit%20Review%20Updated_2014.pdf

Online Resources

- Writing a Literature Review. McLaughlin, Library University of Guelph. <https://www.lib.uoguelph.ca>
- The Literature Review: A Few Tips on Conducting It. <http://advice.writing.utoronto.ca>
- Allyson Skene. The Writing Centre, University of Toronto at Scarborough. See terms and conditions for use at <http://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~ctl/twc/terms.htm>