

# LITERATURE REVIEWS

You may be asked to write a literature review as part of coursework, a long essay or your EPQ. A literature review is unsurprisingly a structured discussion of published information on a particular topic, summarising the arguments and ideas of others without adding new contributions. It can be a stand-alone piece of work or is more commonly used at the start of an essay, coursework or EPQ to establish the research context from which the aims and objectives of your writing are set. There are lots of information and guides available with many details about literature reviews and how to do them but the basics are covered on this help sheet. It's a good idea to look at some examples to see what they look like – good and bad. Your teacher or the librarian will be able to provide you with examples which are relevant to your course. Once you get started you are likely to consult many sources of information, not all of which will make it into your literature review. It's really important that you keep track of what information you found and where, so take a look at the **Active Reading & Effective Note Taking** help sheet for tips on this.



## THE LITERATURE REVIEW IN 4 STEPS



### Step 1

#### YOUR TOPIC

- When you start your LR, you already have an idea of your writing focus and aims.
- Bear in mind that as you start your reading, your focus may become more specific.
- If your aim or research question changes as a result of your preliminary reading, you must consult your teacher to discuss this change.
- This is important as the LR **must** relate to your question/specific research topic.
- Once you have refined your topic jot down some keywords or subheadings to provide a framework for your reading.

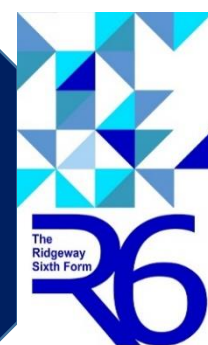
### Step 2

#### CHOOSE & SEARCH THE LITERATURE

- It is not recommended to just search GOOGLE with your keywords – you will be swamped with returns.
- Consider using GOOGLE SCHOLAR, an online database such as JSTOR or a credible periodical.
- Speak to your teacher or librarian to see if they have any recommendations for literature sources or search the subject guides on any University website.
- Consider whether you need historical or contemporaneous sources, the latter more commonly relevant to the Sciences.
- Always be mindful of whether what you are reading is relevant to the topic being researched.
- If you find an article, book or other source that is 100% relevant, use the associated reference list to seek out other sources of information. It's a quick hit!



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## Step 3

### ANALYSE & INTERPRET THE LITERATURE

- Review the information obtained to establish relevance and reliability; do not be tempted to include superfluous or irrelevant information just because you have it.
- As you review, think about how you are going to group and present the information.
- Be mindful of bias in your information source. Critically evaluate your source by asking the following questions of it - is the author objective, what are they trying to prove, was the research funded, what is the political, social and social context surrounding the writing etc.

## Step 4

### WRITING THE REVIEW

- Consider using an introduction (broad topic detail and relevant issues being discussed), main body (analysis of the literature presented logically but not in a shopping list style) and a conclusion (summarise the current state of research and what you are addressing in your project, essay or coursework).
- In the main body, develop your narrative by linking and synthesising key authors, research and themes. When grouping writers with similar opinions try using words or phrases such as: similarly, in addition, furthermore.
- If there is a difference of opinion on a certain topic, consider using words or phrases such as: however, on the other hand, conversely, nonetheless.

University of Manchester (n.d.) *Getting Started with Literature Reviews*. Available at: [https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mle/lit-review/story\\_content/external\\_files/cheat-sheet.pdf](https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mle/lit-review/story_content/external_files/cheat-sheet.pdf) (Accessed: 1 May 2021)

University of Reading (2021) *Literature Reviews*. Available at: <https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/literaturereview> (Accessed: 1 May 2021)

## GREAT WEBSITES

Please remember that when looking at these guides, they may be written for University students. They all offer great hints and tips so just take from them what is useful for your situation.

<https://research.library.gsu.edu/c.php?g=115595&p=753257>

<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/literature-reviews/>

<https://www.reading.ac.uk/library/study-advice/lib-sa-guides.aspx>

<https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/literaturereview>

[https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/ld.php?content\\_id=32363096](https://libguides.reading.ac.uk/ld.php?content_id=32363096)

[https://library.soton.ac.uk/ld.php?content\\_id=32546341](https://library.soton.ac.uk/ld.php?content_id=32546341)

[https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mle/lit-review/story\\_content/external\\_files/cheat-sheet.pdf](https://www.escholar.manchester.ac.uk/learning-objects/mle/lit-review/story_content/external_files/cheat-sheet.pdf)