

# How to Review the Literature

After selecting a research topic, you are now ready to collect and evaluate the current research. Although you may not be required to complete a full literature review, a thorough examination and understanding of the relevant literature is a crucial step of the research process nevertheless. Thus, the purpose of this worksheet is to guide you through the literature review process. However, you may need to change or adjust your research topic based on what you find during the lit review process. Additionally, keep in mind that it is common for students unfamiliar with the current literature to rework their research question entirely.

## Step #1 - Understand the Purpose of a Lit Review

- Further define your research topic
- Find gaps in the literature
- Identify models or studies that support your topic
- Establish a theoretical framework for your topic

## Step #2 - Know Your Resources

When you explore your resources, be sure to gather your list of keywords from when you chose your research topic. These keywords should drive much of your search. Additionally, be sure to add recurring terms to your growing list of keywords, among other things (see below).

### A Strong Starting Point to Learn about Your Topic

It may be helpful to review information about your topic before you dive into the current research. You may consider using the following sources for this phase:

- Previous meta-analyses
- Previous literature reviews
- Use bibliographies, references, or repeated citations in meta-analyses and literature reviews to start your exploration
- Ask your professors or researchers in the field about studies you should look for
- Textbooks, or textbook chapters focusing on your topic

### Databases – To Explore Your Topic and Find the Latest Research

Next, you should review the current research on your topic. This will help you find the current trends and allow you to generate empirical bases for ideas. You may consider the using the following sources for this phase:

- Google scholar
- Your own university library database
- SPORTDiscus
- PubMed
- Etc.

### **Step #3 - Take Notes as you Search**

- Abstracts may be a good starting point to evaluate relevance of an article to your topic
- It may be helpful to create an annotated bibliography of your running bibliography identifying
  - And defining key terms
  - Gaps in literature
  - Strengths/Weaknesses of article
  - Frequently-cited authors
  - Relevant findings, information pertaining to your topic

The amount of information you find may seem overwhelming at first and you may wonder how you could keep track of all of the information. Here are several tips to help calm your anxiety.

- Write down and keep track of your searches (e.g., running bibliography, annotated bibliography)
  - It may be helpful to color-code, or numerically identify articles relating to searches, topics, relevance, ect.
- Replicate searches later
- Remember what you have searched for already

#### **Organize your notes**

- Summarize your findings in a table format using Excel, Word, or the reference manager of your choice
- Group articles into categories by topic/subtopic, chronologically, ect.

#### **Keep track of specific sources using reference libraries**

- EndNote
- RefWorks
- Mendeley
- And more!

### **Step #4 - Synthesize the Information**

- Identify larger patterns, trends, or gaps in the literature
- Compare and contrast articles
- Explain how specific articles contribute to the field
- Begin to formulate a thesis (argument)
- Identify future directions for research

Considering all of the above tips, it will be helpful to write out your thoughts and findings to guide you through the research in an organized and effective manner.

1. Note any recurring keywords, phrases, and authors.

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2. If your question has already been answered, what were the conclusions? What were the limitations?

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3. What were some of the conclusions that stood out as interesting?

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4. What did authors recommend for future studies? How did these authors propose these ideas be tested?

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5. If your original research question/topic needs to be revised, what revisions could be made to support a viable research topic?

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