



I. What is a literature review?

A literature review is a critical and in depth evaluation of previous research. First part of a literature review is the literature. The literature represents the scholarly conversation- your research question. The second part of a literature review is the review. The review “re-views”— looks at again — what others have said and done about a particular topic/subject/issue.

A literature review **CONNECTS**, **SYNTHESIZES**, and **EVALUATES** these texts/studies by putting the authors in conversation with each other.

II. What a literature review **IS NOT**:

- An annotated bibliography
- Simple catalog of all your sources
- A collection of quotes and paraphrasing

III. An **effective** literature review

- **Connects and Groups relevant** research based on common themes or “trends.” Each paragraph should discuss one theme or “trend” not one author.
- Uses **topic sentences** to illustrate the connection among multiple research or studies:
 - Use the following phrases when illustrating an **agreement** among authors:
 - “One trend is research is...”
 - “Research seems to agree that...”
 - “Numerous authors support the claim that...”
 - “There is strong convergent evidence that...”
 - Use the following phrases when illustrating a **disagreement** among authors:
 - “There is overall debate regarding...”
 - “A lack of consensus exists on the point of...”
 - “The evidence on X is mixed of...”

Source: <https://writingcenter.fiu.edu/resources/synthesis-matrix-2.pdf>

(How to Use a Synthesis Matrix to Write Your Literature Review)

Example Literature Review Topic Sentences



The following only discuss one source. They are ineffective in a literature review, as they do not discuss multiple authors centered on one theme.

“A study conducted by Sum and Fogg (1991) found that poor students are ranked in the 19th percentile on assessments while students from a middle-upper income family are ranked in the 66th percentile on assessments. In data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) measuring kindergarten students achievement on the ECLS reading assessment, low income students scored at about the 30th percentile...”

Summarizes only one text.

Peters and Mullis (1997) found that parental education had a significant effect on academic achievement. The mother’s education level had a 20% higher affect than the father’s education level on the academic outcomes of adolescents.

Too many details on single author

In a study of 30,000 households in India, Peru, and Uganda, Krishna6 concludes “Up to one-third of those who are presently poor were not born poor; they have fallen into poverty within their lifetimes, and their descents offset the success stories of those that have managed to climb out of poverty.”

Over-explains an individual study

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Literature
Review

The following examples **EFFECTIVELY** connect multiple studies centered on one theme.

Research has shown that student achievement, particularly for at-risk students, is affected by the values and beliefs of the family and community. Some families and communities, particularly in poverty stricken areas, do not value or understand formal education (Shields; Dragga...).

Involves multiple authors and focuses on one theme

Studies also show that state and district policies as well as resources greatly affect classroom instruction, particularly for at-risk students. Principals and teachers need policy makers to support efforts for providing effective instruction to all students. Researchers insist that federal, state, and district policies must be carefully studied in order to document the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of various policies in closing the poverty achievement gap (Shields; Dragga...).

Research on the achievement of low-income students found that low achievement is closely correlated with lack of resources. Phillips' study concludes that some of the most substantial negative effects of the No Child Left Behind law are found to be an increase in teacher turn-over. **These results align with Flashman's findings, which found that** the negative results of the "No Child Left Behind law" include a reduction in teachers' academic skills and little or no change in the amount of professional development opportunities provided to teachers (Phillips and Flashman, 2007)

Situates individual authors within a theme

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