

Organizing a Literature Review

- A. Scan all articles first by reading the following sections:
 1. Abstract
 2. First few paragraphs
 3. Last paragraph before Methods section (includes research questions, purpose statement, hypotheses)
 4. Discussion section
- B. Group/stack articles into categories based on what you've scanned:
 - a. First, by topic
 - b. Next, by subtopic
 - c. Next, by chronology within subtopics
- C. Construct a literature table:
 - a. Try to read articles within same category together
 - b. Begin to note most common overall themes/variables (see mind mapping)*
 - c. Use these themes as headings in your literature table
 - d. These themes will then become major elements in your outline
 - e. These elements will then become headings and subheadings in your literature review.

*Mind Mapping:

1. Write down all ideas that you've identified from reading the literature. Don't worry about how these ideas fit together.
2. Identify gaps in the research
3. Connect ideas with lines to show that they're related.
4. Distill these relationships into major themes
5. Now determine which theme makes the most sense to discuss first, and which theme will most logically follow.
6. Beneath each theme, begin to list sub-topics.

Generic Topic Outline for Chapter One:

- I. Introduction
 - A. Identify the topic
 - B. Establish importance of topic
 - i. Number of people affected
 - ii. Impact on individuals or particular group
 - C. Define key terms
 - D. Describe the extent and nature of literature
 - E. Identify gaps in literature
 - F. Provide an overview of the organization of your literature review. (In a research paper, the thesis statement provides the overview.)
- II. Discuss theories
 - A. Theory X
 - B. Theory Y

Possible Generic Outline for Literature Review

- I. Overview
- II. Brief historical context
- III. Landmark or seminal studies (those establishing seeds for later studies)
- IV. Inclusion/exclusion criteria for literature review
- V. Theme One
 - a. Prominent findings (synthesized)
 - b. Theoretical discussion
 - c. Relevance to current study
- VI. Theme Two
 - a. Prominent findings (synthesized)
 - b. Theoretical discussion
 - c. Relevance...
- VII. Theme Three
 - a. Prominent findings (synthesized)
 - b. Theoretical discussion
 - c. Relevance to current study

Sample Outline for Literature Review:

- I. Bereavement
 - a. Consequences and Course of Bereavement
 - i. Emotional Distress of bereavement
 - ii. Physiological Distress of bereavement and mortality
 - iii. Social ramifications of bereavement
 - b. The Transition and Outcome of Bereavement
 - i. Individual characteristics
 - ii. Situational factors or circumstances of loss
 - iii. Environmental influences on loss
- II. Meaning
 - a. Philosophical perspectives on meaning
 - b. Psychological perspectives on meaning
 - c. The role of meaning in adaptation to bereavement
 - d. Other benefits of meaning-making
- III. Growth and positive transformation in response to loss
 - i. Types of change
 - ii. Meaning, change and bereavement: Specific studies
- IV. Summary