WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

What is a literature review?

A literature review is a survey of everything that has been written about a particular topic, theory, or research question. It may provide the background for larger work, or it may stand on its own. Much more than a simple list of sources, an effective literature review analyzes and synthesizes information about key themes or issues.

Book Review	Annotated Bibliography	Literature Review
Analyzes and evaluates a particular book.	Summarizes relevant sources and explains the significance of that source to the research question.	Surveys all relevant literature to determine what is known and not known about a particular topic.

Why write a literature review?
1. To discover what has been written about a topic already
2. To determine what each source contributes to the topic
3. To understand the relationship between the various contributions, identify and (if possible) resolve contradictions, and determine gaps or unanswered questions

What is involved in writing a literature review?
1. Research – to discover what has been written about the topic
2. Critical Appraisal – to evaluate the literature, determine the relationship between the sources and ascertain what has been done already and what still needs to be done
3. Writing – to explain what you have found

Steps to writing an effective literature review:

Gathering 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.

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.

Evaluating 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 differing opinions? What evidence or reasoning are the differences based on?
Gaps or omissions: What questions are raised by the literature?

Writing a Literature Review

Introduction
The introduction should identify your topic, some discussion of the significance of that topic and a thesis statement that outlines what conclusion you will draw from your analysis and synthesis of the literature. If your literature review is part of a larger work, explain the importance of the review to your research question.

Body
In the body, discuss and assess the research according to specific organizational principles (see examples below), rather than addressing each source separately. Most, if not all, paragraphs should discuss more than one source. Avoid addressing your sources alphabetically as this does not assist in developing the themes or key issues central to your review.

Organizing Principles

Principle	When to Use	Example
Theme	-When explaining key themes or issues relevant to the topic -This is the most common way to organize literature reviews.	A literature review of 31 relevant articles published between January 1999 and March 2004 identified 12 categories of neighborhood characteristics relevant to maternal and child health: income/wealth; employment, family structure, population composition, housing, mobility, education, occupation, social resources, violence and crime, deviant behavior and physical conditions. [Example adapted from Rajaratnama, J.K., Burke, J.G. & O'Campo, P. (2006). Maternal and child health and neighborhood context: The selection and construction of area-level variables. *Health and Place, 12,* 547-556.]
Methodology (also called a methodology review)	When discussing interdisciplinary approaches to a topic or when discussing a number of studies with a different approach.	In dentistry, fluorescent imaging been used for many applications revealing a variety of information about bonded restorations. This review evaluates the different methods used in this area with the intent of determining if standardized methodologies exist. [Example adapted from D'Alpino, P.H.P. et al (2006).Use of fluorescent compounds in assessing bonded resin-based restorations: A literature review *Journal of Dentistry, 34* 623-634.]
Chronology	When historical changes are central to explaining the topic.	A literature review is presented on the evolution of water pollution management and its impact on land pollution from 1900 to 2000 within a hypothesis of whether we could have done more, sooner. Stream pollution science in the context of the fundamental sanitary engineering concepts of reasonable use and assimilative capacity is examined in light of evolving regulatory frameworks from the early 1900s, when regulation and standards were mostly lacking, to the zero discharge goals and comprehensive federal command/control regulations of the late 20th century. [Example adapted from Shrifin, N.S. (2005). Pollution Management in the Twentieth Century. *Journal of Environmental Engineering, 131,* 676-691.]

Conclusion
The conclusion should provide a summary of YOUR findings from the literature review. Explain what your analysis of the material leads you to conclude about the overall state of the literature, what it provides and where it is lacking. You can also provide suggestions for future research or explain how your future research will fill the gaps in the existing body of work on that topic.

Growth and Positive Transformation in Response to Loss

A growing body of literature displays an appreciation that some individuals are able to experience positive personal changes as a result of their struggle with highly challenging life circumstances (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1989; Edmonds & Hooker, 1992; Lehman et al. 1993; Tennen & Affleck, 1999; Yalom & Lieberman, 1991). Various terms have been used to describe these changes, including: benefit finding, perceived benefits or construing benefits (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1991; McMillen, Zuravin, & Rideout, 1995; Tennen & Affleck, 1999), positive psychological changes (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991), stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), and posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Changes have been observed in individuals recovering from their first heart attacks (Affleck, Tennen, Croog, & Levine, 1987), victims of fire (Thompson, 1985), and survivors of severe tornados, plane crashes, and mass shootings (McMillen, Smith, & Fisher, 1997). The experience of personal losses such as divorce, sexual assault, and breast cancer have also been associated with personal change (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

A definition of QOL may be helpful in understanding the various factors that contribute to the construct. When describing QOL, Bradlyn et al. (1996) define it as "multidimensional." They state that

> it includes, but is not limited to, the social, physical, and emotional functioning of the child and adolescent...must be from the perspective of the child, adolescent, and family, and it must be sensitive to the changes that occur throughout development. (Bradlyn et al., p. 1334)

Mulhern et al. (1989) summarized QOL as a "multifactorial construct that provides for supranormal and subnormal performance within a developmental framework. The relevant QL *[sic]* dimensions include (a) physical functioning and comfort, (b) psychological and social adjustment, and (c) a person's satisfaction with self" (p. 132). In following with these definitions, when measuring QOL, the multiple sources of support must be considered. In a study of adult cancer survivors, social support accounted for the most variance in self-reported QOL (Mellon, Northouse, & Weiss, 2006). Rather than looking at a single global view of social

Category	Source	Notes
Literacy necessary for employment	Warren	
	Basi Martin	Otherwise, individual and society both suffer
The problem is lack of effort, not lack of ability	Simms	
	Roberts	If students can't meet standards, it's not society's fault.
Society suffers if high standards lead to dropping out	Gordon McGee Yando	
Enforcing tough standards builds character	Jenkins Pullman Raviggio	
	Pena	Society should also offer more help to the individual student.
Test scores less important than individual potential	Sokolov	
	Berg Pearson	Promotion should be based on a variety of skills.
Test scores less important than individual self-esteem	Del Rey Felice	
Society owes an education to bad students as well as good ones	Limburg	
Society should offer an alternative track for failing students	Ray Willoughby	

   Several people believe that reading test scores are not a valid basis for deciding whether students should be promoted or made to repeat seventh grade. According to Jason Berg, Tina Pearson, and Patricia Sokolov, proficiency in reading is just one factor among many that should count toward promotion. Pearson points out that students with high scores in reading don't necessarily excel in other subjects. In her view, it is unfair to base the decision on just one area of learning. Berg finds it equally unfair that one test should be valued more highly than a year's achievements. But the issue here is not limited to academic competence. Both Berg and Sokolov attach more importance to a student's character and potential than to intellectual attainments. Berg's definition of "overall performance" includes general contributions to the class that demonstrate a positive attitude. For Berg, the context is the classroom; for Sokolov, it is the nation. In her view, intellect alone won't make the nation thrive: "Laborers and blue-collar workers have been credited throughout our history for their great contribution to the wealth and progress of our country." Our primary concern should be to educate good citizens rather than good readers.

From Brenda Spatt's *Writing from sources* (2003) 6th Edition
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CHECKLIST FOR SYNTHESIS

☐ My literature review is a dialogue between the researchers and me.

☐ My synthesis blends major themes rather than discussing each source or idea separately.

☐ I use multiple sources in my citations when ideas from multiple studies overlap: Smith (2003) and Jones (2007) identified the ability to be democratic as a significant feature of transformational leaders.

☐ My literature review/comprehensive exam proceeds logically, and I explain connections from one idea to the next.

☐ Each main idea is developed thoroughly with explication, examples and support.

☐ Each point is connected to my statement of purpose.

☐ My synthesis/literature review/comprehensive exam contains no irrelevant information.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM (APPLYING THEORY)

Overall Situation	**Overall mention of Theories**	**Application (Explain how these theories are relevant to your overall situation**
Breakdown of situation Element One	**Relevant theory**	**How it applies to this element** (*Specifically* **what you will do as the leader based on this theory & element)**
Breakdown of Situation Element Two	**Relevant theory**	**How it applies to this element...**