



Guide to Writing A Literature Review

This is a brief introductory guide to writing a literature review.
For further help please contact knowledge@imi.ie.

What is a literature review?

A literature review is a written summary of existing scholarship on a particular topic. It focuses on secondary academic sources and theories proposed by specialists in an academic field. The purpose of the review is to investigate gaps in knowledge and therefore propose the need for new research.

What are the steps?

- 1) Find and choose material
- 2) Assess the literature
- 3) Write the literature review.

Step 1 - Find and choose material:

- Focus on the specific question or topic of the assignment and locate appropriate literature such as journal articles, books or government publications. Bear in mind currency, relevancy, authority, accuracy and purpose of the research found.
- Search your course bibliography and identify authors and theories that may lead to other relevant sources.
- Search the IMI library catalogue for keywords about the topic that are broad enough to find content but narrow enough to remove irrelevant material. This search may lead to other texts in the same topic. Browse the library bookshelves for other useful material.
- Search the UCC Library catalogue and look at the subject guides. Consider alternative points of view.

Step 2 - Assess the literature:

Consider the following questions when assessing the literature:

- What are the key theories and concepts discussed by the author and what evidence does the author use to support their argument?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments presented and has anything been left out?
- Could the evidence be interpreted in other ways? What is the author's research methodology?
- Does the author critically evaluate other literature in the field or show bias which could affect their reliability?
- How does the author contribute to the understanding of this topic?

Step 3 - Write the literature review:

The structure of a literature review includes an introduction, main body and conclusion.

- **Introduction**

In the introduction it is important to outline the strategy you have adopted for selecting the books or articles and introduce the theory or theme that you are going to discuss.

- **Main Body**

In the main body of the text summarise the content and critically analyse each book or article that you read. Highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the text. Assess the purpose of the literature and how it relates to your own research. Read and understand the theoretical approach and examine the connections between each author's theories and concepts. Base all your analysis of the evidence presented and analyse in your own words, using the third person e.g. *"The author examines..."* *"The article deals with..."*

- **Conclusion**

In the conclusion briefly draw all the theories together and outline any gaps in the literature reviewed, thus presenting a theoretical context for your own research.

If you would like to borrow books about literature reviews from the IMI Knowledge Centre please contact knowledge@imi.ie for further details.