

# The Writing Center @ KUMC

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## The Literature Review

A literature review is a foundational component of academic writing, especially research at a graduate level. While there are different kinds of literature reviews that require greater depths of research, the basic purpose of a literature review is to identify question or topic that interests you and discover what other academics have studied or said about that area. They will often take a “funnel” shape, where you start with the broader question and slowly narrow towards the gap in the literature—the yet unknown that you could potentially investigate on your own. This handout will give you a sense of what is typically included in a literature review and what you need to know to get started on one.

### Traditional Components

Abstract

Introduction or Background (the big picture)

Review Strategy (databases searched, keywords used, etc.)

Literature Review Findings (usually organized into headings, funneling towards a knowledge gap)

Review Matrix or Review Profile section (usually optional)

Discussion section (synthesizing the information you have collected to justify future research)

Conclusion

References

### Overview of the Literature Review

#### I. What It's Not

- a. An essay or plot summary
- b. Proof of a concept/theme

#### II. What It Is

- a. “Literature” = *major* published works on a *narrow* topic (mostly articles and books)
  - i. “Major” defined by author/publisher, i.e. how many times a work is cited, how well-known the author is, recommended by faculty, etc.
  - ii. “Narrow” means works dealing w/ *very specific* topic
- b. “Review” = a snapshot, capture, synthesis, consideration, and/or appraisal
  - i. Major elements, concepts, and outcomes analyzed
  - ii. Phenomenon presented from a specific discipline
  - iii. Criteria explained
  - iv. Timeline included (when appropriate)

#### III. What It Does

- a. Demonstrates relationship among studies according to some method
- b. Extracts key concepts, hypotheses, or outcomes from sources
- c. Contributes to clinical practice by assessing specific intervention

#### IV. Purpose

- a. Improve understanding and expertise
- b. Demonstrate knowledge in writing
- c. Educate or update reader about key concepts or outcomes

## V. Types

- a. Narrative
  - i. Most common, appropriate for *qualitative* studies
  - ii. Organizes studies by concept, with adequate detail to support analysis
  - iii. Limited number of references
- b. Systematic
  - i. Appropriate for *quantitative* studies (usually focuses on intervention)
  - ii. Answers particular questions, tests hypotheses, and identifies all known references relating to a question
- c. Meta-analysis (Greek *meta* = “after,” “beyond”)
  - i. Type of systematic review
  - ii. Stats to extract common truth about multiple, conceptually similar studies

## VI. Techniques For Organizing

- a. Chronological – divides aspects of topic into decades to track its history or the scientific community's perception of it
- b. Advancements – breakthroughs occurring over time (e.g., robot technology)
- c. Geographical (e.g., immigration)
- d. Questions – major issues/gaps addressed by researchers about topic
- e. Headings, figures, tables, graphs, appendices, plus keywords

## VII. The Writing Process

- a. Collect sources (academic, peer reviewed journals, trade, etc.)
  - i. [Reach out to a librarian](#) to help with research: [dykesresearch@kumc.edu](mailto:dykesresearch@kumc.edu)
- b. Analyze (first scan title, headings, abstract to strategically identify the most relevant)
- c. Arrange (make outline based on pattern, list sources under each major point (e.g., breakthrough, major questions, etc.))
- d. Summarize (state gist of source and make transitions between each source)
- e. Synthesize (make connections among diverse materials in clear writing)

## How to Create a Literature Review Outline

Start with a statement of the topic (usually 1 para explaining your approach/viewpoint). In 1-2 sentences, introduce sources and identify them by strengths and weaknesses. Group sources under reasonable, logical headings (e.g., decades or critical questions). Number sources to create a tally.

### Key Sources

- Bibliographies
- Online Catalogues
- Abstracting and Indexing journals
- Cochrane Collaboration (reference work, handbook for systematic reviews)