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What is a Literature Review?

A literature review is not an annotated bibliography in which you summarize briefly each article that you have reviewed. While a summary of what you have read is contained within the literature review, it goes well beyond merely summarizing studies. It focuses on a specific topic of interest to you and includes a critical analysis of the relationship among different works, and relating this research to your work. It may be written as a stand-alone paper or to provide a theoretical framework and rationale for a research study (such as a thesis or dissertation). ([Mongan-Rallis, 2006](#))

Seven Simple Rules

Here are seven simple rules that cover the most common literature review mistakes, in no particular order. Refer to these rules before submitting any written work:

1. Do not write in the first person (no I or we).
2. Single space after all punctuation. This is APA format. If you double space by habit, use [Find and Replace](#) in Microsoft Word to replace double spaces with single spaces.
3. Pay attention to capitalization on the References page. Only capitalize the first letters of titles and after punctuation. Capitalize and italicize all first letters in journal titles.
4. Limit direct quotations to two, total, in the review and always include author, year, and page numbers for direct quotations. For example, (Galvan, 2006, p. 76). Paraphrase!
5. Everything is double-spaced – not single, not triple, double. Everything is double-spaced.
6. Use subheadings for the different points in your review.
7. Only use peer-reviewed sources. Newspapers and magazines do not count as peer-review references. [Here](#) is a quick guide to telling the difference.

Guidelines for Writing a Literature Review

The following guidelines are modeled after the similarly titled [guidelines by Dr. Helen Mongan-Rallis](#). Both forms are based on [Galvan's \(2006\) text](#), and **sections of this guide have been quoted directly or with only minor revision from both sources**. This adaptation is organized to reflect a three-part approach I found effective for pacing students. I typically recommend six-eight weeks for writing a first review. The three sections include the following:

Steps 1-4: Finding Research (one-two weeks)

Steps 5-6: Analyzing and Organizing Research (two-three weeks)

Steps 7-9: Citing and Writing Research (three-four weeks, repeating 1-6 as needed)

In addition to using this guide, you should also (a) locate and browse examples of literature reviews in your field to get a feel for what they are and how they are written and (b) read other writing guides to see different perspectives and approaches. Examples include:

1. [Review of Literature](#): UW–Madison: The Writing Center.
2. [How to... Write a Literature Review](#): UC–Santa Cruz: University Library.
3. [Information Fluency: Literature Review](#): Washington & Lee: Leyburn Library.