

## APSU Writing Center

### Literature Review

#### Literature Review

- the **research**, the **scholarship**, and the **literature** in a given field
- examines the different ways various scholars approach a topic
- focus is to synthesize and evaluate the arguments and ideas of others
- collects key sources on a topic and discusses the sources in a conversation with each other (synthesis)
- any collection of materials on a topic, not necessarily the great literary texts of the world
- discusses published information in a particular subject area

#### Before Writing Consider

- The amount and type of sources you should include
- Evaluating your sources
- Summarizing your sources by discussing a common theme or issue
- Providing subheadings and other background information such as definitions

#### Potential Topics

- Purpose
- Scope
- Participants
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Limitations
- Implications
- Significance

#### Determine Shared Topics by Evaluating

- Thesis
- Definition of terms
- Common ground
- Issues that divide
- Rhetorical context

#### What does my Literature Review have to do?

- Organize around and related directly to the thesis or research question you are developing
- Synthesize results into a summary of what is and is not known
- Identify areas of controversy in the literature
- Formulate questions that need further research

#### Review Structure

- Introduction
  - Preview of key topics
  - Central theme or organizational pattern
- Body
  - Summarize your main points into a whole
  - Analyze the other researchers
  - Add your own interpretations
  - Discuss significances of the findings
  - Mention the strengths and weaknesses of your sources
- Conclusion
  - Connect your key findings back to your primary research question
  - Discuss what you have discovered from reviewing so far

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#### Potential Questions to Answer

- What is the specific thesis, problem, or research question that my literature review helps to define?
- What is the current state of knowledge on the topic?
- What are the key theories or frameworks related to the topic?
- What research methods have been used in previous studies?
- Do the themes or issues present one or different approaches or frameworks? Is there an aspect that is missing in these different approaches?
- Are there any gaps in the existing literature?
- Have I critically analyzed the literature I use? Do I follow through a set of concepts and questions, comparing items to each other in the ways they deal with them? Instead of just listing and summarizing items, do I assess them, discussing strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the major findings and trends in the field?
- How has the topic evolved over time?

#### Example Thesis

- from The Roger & Joyce How Center
- While it is possible to perceive certain common theoretical concerns and narrative strategies among recent works on gender in Latin America produced in the United States—including the near universal adoption of the term “gender”—this is more difficult to do with the more varied recent Latin American scholarship. I will argue, however, that it is possible to trace in very broad strokes the development of certain scholarly trends in the international literature on women and gender in Latin America over the past three decades, in which Latin American production plays a leading role. In synthesizing both political processes and scholarship on the region as a whole, I will inevitably overlook or even distort debates and contributions that are crucial to distinct national cases.

#### Organizational Styles

- **Chronological**
  - Trace the topic’s development over time
  - Analyze the patterns, turning points and key debates that have shaped the field
  - Examine a trend with subsections to determine the differences in the history of the topic
- **Thematic**
  - Discuss different aspects of the topic by breaking it up into key theme sections
- **Methodological**
  - Compare results and conclusions from different approaches
    - Qualitative versus quantitative research
    - Empirical versus theoretical scholarship
    - Divide the research by sociological, historical, or cultural sources
- **Theoretical**
  - Discuss various theories, models, and definitions of key concepts
  - Argue the relevance of a specific theoretical approach
  - Combine various concepts

**APSU Writing Center**  
Literature Review Outline

**Introduction**

**Methodology:** *(what you intend to solve with your review, the results you wish to achieve, historical context, criteria, etc.)*

**Body**

**First Theme** *(prominent findings, theoretical discussion, relevance to current study, strengths, weaknesses, other research info, etc.)*

**Second Theme** *(prominent findings, theoretical discussion, relevance to current study, strengths, weaknesses, other research info, etc.)*

**Third Theme** *(prominent findings, theoretical discussion, relevance to current study, strengths, weaknesses, other research info, etc.)*

**Conclusion**

**Evaluate & Analyze** *(summary of the findings, pros and cons, different studies and approaches, topic recommendations, what to do with information found, etc.)*