



Writing a Literature Review in a dissertation

Introduction

This guide will outline how to write a literature review as part of a **dissertation**.

What is a Literature Review?

In a dissertation, the aim of a literature review is to explore and discuss key published material relating to your dissertation topic and research questions. This is to show your understanding and awareness of how your dissertation research fits into your overall field of study and how it will build on existing research.

You will also refer back to your literature review when explaining the findings of your research in the discussion section of your dissertation.

In your literature review you will normally be expected to:

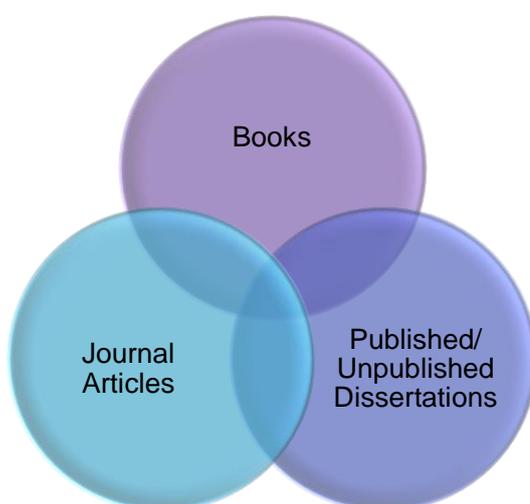
- Identify and group together common issues/themes/areas of discussion
Identify and group together similar studies
- Compare, contrast and evaluate research/themes/issues
- Identify how research/themes/issues have developed over time as well as the current state of research
- Identify gaps in research and areas for further study
- Demonstrate why your dissertation topic and research is relevant to your field of study

Getting Started

You will need to discuss your dissertation topic with your supervisor and agree the direction your literature review will take.

Once you are clear on what specific areas/issues your literature review will cover, you should start by searching for relevant reading material. Contact your Academic Liaison Librarian (<http://lrweb.beds.ac.uk/contact/alls>) for guidance on locating sources relevant to your specific topic/issue.

You should aim to use a variety of different types of sources, which can include, but is not limited to:



Structure

Structure within your Dissertation

Rather than functioning as an independent chapter, your literature review should be linked to the other chapters in your dissertation – in particular, there should be clear reference to your literature review in the discussion chapter of your dissertation.

When discussing the findings of your research, you will need to relate what you have found back to the literature discussed in the literature review in order to explain their significance. For this reason, you may need to go back and make changes/add to your literature review as you write the discussion section of your dissertation. For

example, you may find that certain studies are no longer relevant or that more evidence is needed to explain certain findings.

Structuring the Literature Review

The main part of your literature review will be the discussion and analysis of the literature. You should also include an introduction to the main discussion as well as a conclusion that summarises the key points of the discussion.

Below is an overview of how you could structure your literature review. This is a general overview and you should always follow specific guidance given in your **dissertation handbook**.

Introduce your literature review by:

- Outlining the wider context of your literature review – where/how does your dissertation topic fit in to the wider subject area
- Outlining the scope of your literature review – sources, areas to be discussed
- Outlining how and why you have selected the literature to be reviewed
- Providing a rationale – i.e. reason and aims – for reviewing the literature on the specific topic

Form the main discussion of your literature review by:

- Analysing and evaluating the themes, issues, propositions (=suggestions, conclusions, opinions of authors) found in the literature
- Synthesising (=drawing together/combining) common themes, issues, propositions to enable you to draw reasoned conclusions
- Comparing and contrasting themes, issues, propositions, research outcomes

Language tip: use **linking words** to help with **signposting**

Conclude your literature review by:

- Concluding how your literature review has met the aims outlined in your introduction
- Summarising and synthesising the main issues/themes related to your topic area and research questions as identified in the literature
- Suggesting areas of further study
- Outlining implications and significance of the identified themes/issues for your dissertation topic and field of study
- Identifying why and how your own research will aim to address the gaps identified – providing a rationale for your chosen dissertation topic

Headings/Sub-headings

In order to allow cross-referencing of chapters/information in your dissertation, it is important to structure the chapters/sections of your dissertation using numbered headings and sub-headings. This will be important when referring back to studies in specific chapters of your literature review when explaining your findings.

Overleaf is an example of how to use numbered headings and sub-headings in your dissertation. Under the Literature Review section, you can see an example of how to structure individual chapters using numbered sub-headings; you should also apply the same kind of structure to the other chapters in your dissertation.

Title: Researching Study Skills Provisions at UK Universities.

1. Introduction

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Study Skills in Higher Education

2.2.1 Academic Reading and Writing

2.2.3 Note-taking

2.2.2 Exam Preparation and Revision Techniques

2.3 Study Skills Workshops and one-to-one Tutorials

2.4 Study Skills Online Resources

2.5 Integration of Study Skills into the Core Course Curriculum

2.6 Conclusion

3. Methodology

4. Results/Findings

5. Discussion

6. Conclusions

What to avoid when writing a literature review:

- Listing individual research/literature without **discussing, analysing** and **evaluating** each piece of literature
- Discussing each individual piece of research/literature separately rather than in context – you should **draw together research** and literature based on common **themes/issues** and/or **type of study**
- Describing what is being said in the literature rather than analysing and evaluating - you should apply and demonstrate **critical analysis** and **evaluation** throughout your literature review
- Not linking the literature to **your own dissertation topic** and **research questions** – the literature selected must be relevant to your dissertation topic and be analysed and evaluated in the context of your specific research area
- Not linking your literature review to the **findings of your own research** in the **discussion section**

Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:

lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub

