

Literature Review

First, let's make the distinction between a literature review and a research project. The main focus of an academic research paper is to develop a new argument, and the research paper will contain a literature review as one of its parts. Hence, a research paper uses a literature review as foundational support for a new insight that you plan on contributing. The focus of a literature review, however, is to summarize and synthesize the arguments and ideas of others without adding new contributions.

What to do prior to writing a literature review:

- Seek clarification from your instructor
 - Roughly how many sources will you need to include?
 - What types of sources are acceptable (books, journal articles, websites, etc.)?
- Consider whether your sources are current
 - Sort through current bibliographies or literature reviews in the field political science and/or public administration to get a sense of what our discipline expects. You can also use this method to consider what is currently of interest to scholars in political science and/or public administration, as well as what is not.

Strategies for writing a literature review:

- Find a focus
 - A literature review is usually organized around ideas and not the sources themselves (as an annotated bibliography would be organized). As you read widely but selectively in your topic area, consider what themes or issues connect your sources together. Do they present one, many or different solutions? Is there an aspect of the field that is missing? How well do they present the material and do they portray it according to an appropriate theory within the field? Do they reveal a trend in the field? A raging debate? Pick one of these themes to focus the organization of your review. You may want to review critically reviewing sources on the department writing page.
- Construct a working thesis statement
 - Then use the focus you found to construct a thesis statement. Your thesis statement will not necessarily argue for a position or an opinion, rather it will argue for a particular perspective on the material. For example:
 - The current trend in treatment for congestive heart failure combines surgery and medicine. Or, more and more cultural studies scholars are accepting popular media as a subject worthy of academic consideration.

- Consider the review's organization
 - You've got a focus, and you've narrowed it down to a thesis statement, so what is the most effective way of presenting the information? What are the most important topics, subtopics, etc., that your review needs to include? And in what order should you present them?

Just like most of your academic papers, literature reviews also must contain the following three basic elements:

- Introduction-gives a quick idea of the topic of the literature review, such as the central theme or organizational pattern.
- Body-contains your discussion of sources and is organized either chronologically or thematically.
- Conclusions/Recommendations-discuss and summarize what you have drawn from reviewing this literature. Where might the discussion proceed, or what questions have arise for future research in this topic area?

Revise your work:

Remember, because your main objective is to present the material and not an argument, spending time making revisions is a wise thing to do prior to turning it in. In an effort to present your information in the most concise way, rewrite or rework the language of your review to make sure it follows the assignment (and/or your outline of the assignment). Finally, ask your instructor for the desirable formatting of the sources you will be putting in the reference section.