

Literature Review: Structure

What is it?

A literature review is an investigation of what has been written previously on a specific topic. Sometimes, you may be asked to answer a question using existing research.

Structurally, it is very similar to an essay in terms of organising key ideas, comparing and contrasting authors' views, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and offering critical analysis throughout the review. But, rather than making an argument for a case and answering a particular question as you would in an essay, a literature review presents all of the debates and existing knowledge on this topic in a condensed format.

Introduction

This provides your reader with answers to the following questions:

- What is your topic?
- Why have you chosen this topic?
- What are the key themes that you are going to discuss?

Note: You may need to identify how you conducted your literature search: state which databases and keywords for each database you used. Not all assignments require this, and some will require a separate methodology for this - please check your assessment guidelines.

Example

Topic sentence – identifies five major themes as the scope of this review

Many theories have been proposed to explain what motivates human behaviour. **Although the literature covers a wide variety of such theories, this review will focus on five major themes which emerge repeatedly throughout the literature reviewed.** These themes are: incorporation of the **self-concept** into traditional theories of motivation, the influence of **rewards** on motivation, the increasing importance of **internal forces** of motivation, **autonomy and self-control** as sources of motivation, and **narcissism** as an essential component of motivation. **Although the literature presents these themes in a variety of contexts, this paper will primarily focus on their application to self-motivation.**

5 major themes to be covered

Concluding sentence – specific focus

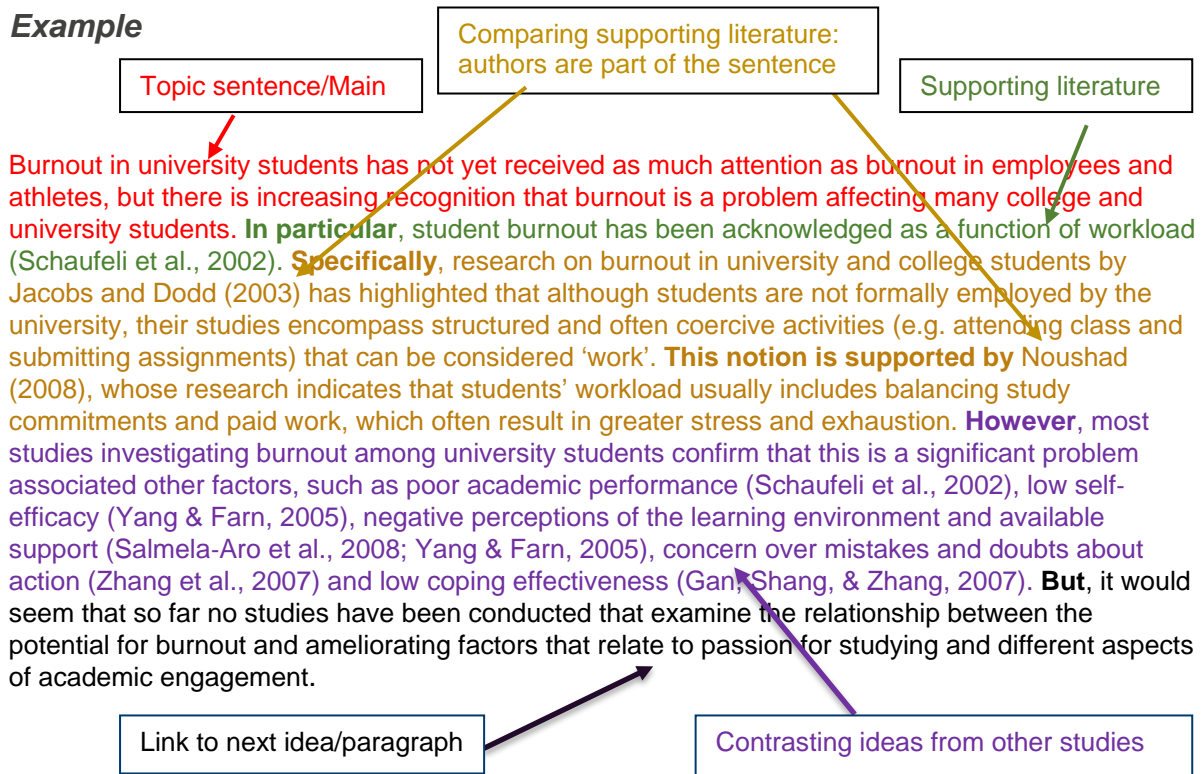
Source: University of New England (n.d.). *Writing a literature review*. Retrieved from https://www.une.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/9245/literature-review.pdf

Body

Break down your topic into themes based on what has emerged from the literature. Each paragraph should include:

- a main statement or idea that you are putting forward, e.g. topic sentence related to a specific theme
- a discussion that compares and contrasts the literature (do the various studies or papers make similar points or are there differences?); identify any gaps
- analysis and evaluation of the research literature/themes where appropriate
- a brief summary and link to the next idea (paragraph).

Example



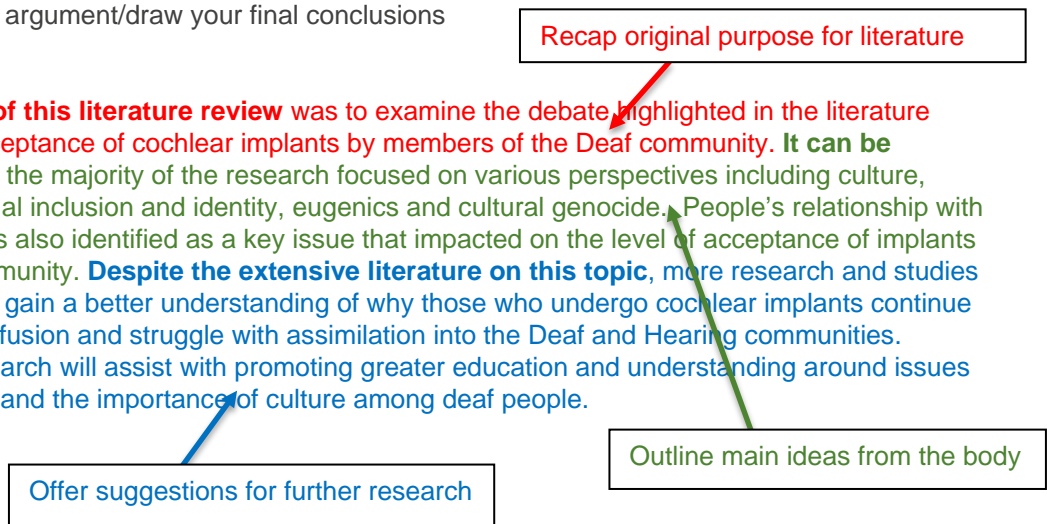
Adapted from: Stoeber, J., Childs, J.H., Hayward, J.A., & Feast, A. R. (2011). Passion and motivation for studying: predicting academic engagement and burnout in university students. *Educational Psychology*, 31(4), 513-528.

Conclusion

- Summarise the key findings within the literature
- Summarise the main points you have made
- Restate your argument/draw your final conclusions

Example

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the debate highlighted in the literature around the acceptance of cochlear implants by members of the Deaf community. **It can be observed that** the majority of the research focused on various perspectives including culture, education, social inclusion and identity, eugenics and cultural genocide. People's relationship with technology was also identified as a key issue that impacted on the level of acceptance of implants within the community. **Despite the extensive literature on this topic**, more research and studies are required to gain a better understanding of why those who undergo cochlear implants continue to face the confusion and struggle with assimilation into the Deaf and Hearing communities. Additional research will assist with promoting greater education and understanding around issues of segregation and the importance of culture among deaf people.



Other helpsheets available

- Literature Review: Detail
- Writing in an Academic Style