

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 tó 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

Topic sentence/Main

Comparing supporting literature: authors are part of the sentence

Supporting literature

Burnout in university students has not yet received as much attention as burnout in employees and athletes, but there is increasing recognition that burnout is a problem affecting many college and university students. In particular, student burnout has been acknowledged as a function of workload (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Specifically, research on burnout in university and college students by Jacobs and Dodd (2003) has highlighted that although students are not formally employed by the university, their studies encompass structured and often coercive activities (e.g. attending class and submitting assignments) that can be considered 'work'. This notion is supported by Noushad (2008), whose research indicates that students' workload usually includes balancing study commitments and paid work, which often result in greater stress and exhaustion. However, most studies investigating burnout among university students confirm that this is a significant problem associated other factors, such as poor academic performance (Schaufeli et al., 2002), low selfefficacy (Yang & Farn, 2005), negative perceptions of the learning environment and available support (Salmela-Aro et al., 2008; Yang & Farn, 2005), concern over mistakes and doubts about action (Zhang et al., 2007) and low coping effectiveness (Gan Shang, & Zhang, 2007). But, it would seem that so far no studies have been conducted that examine the relationship between the potential for burnout and ameliorating factors that relate to passion for studying and different aspects of academic engagement.

Link to next idea/paragraph

Contrasting ideas from other studies

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

Recap original purpose for literature

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.

Offer suggestions for further research

Outline main ideas from the body

Other helpsheets available

- Literature Review: Detail
- Writing in an Academic Style