

# Literature Reviews

## What is a literature review?

A literature review is different from an argumentative essay. An argumentative essay arrives at an answer, whereas a literature review raises questions. These questions come from your evaluation of the state of the existing literature in your field. You will discuss what the current literature says, and what is does not say—what is missing and where does your research fit?

Argumentative essays	Literature Reviews
Argue the author's point of view on a topic	Discuss what the existing literature says, not the author's point of view on the topic itself
Use evidence to support the author's claims	The evidence is the main content
Respond to a question	Raise questions but do not necessarily answer them
Constantly remind the reader of the author's thesis statement	Provide a critical discussion on the existing literature in the field, what is missing from the literature, and where the author's research will fit

## Features of the literature review

The literature review includes rhetorical purpose, augmentation, synthesis and voice.

### *Rhetorical purpose*

The purpose of your literature review is to demonstrate your immersion in and understanding of the field of knowledge on your topic and to provide an authoritative overview, a critical summary, and a context for your research.

Example questions to deepen your immersion in the field:

1. What are the key sources, theories, and concepts?
2. How is knowledge on the topic structured and organised?
3. What are the common methodologies?
4. What are the main questions and answers that have been addressed to date?
5. What are the current debates/issues?

### *Argumentation*

Your literature review presents an argument that leads to an identifiable 'gap' in existing research. The gap justifies the need for your research because your research will fill the gap.

The research gap could be:

- Perspectives taken on an issue/topic, e.g. a different theoretical framework or disciplinary approach
- Aspects/issues within a topic, e.g. more nuanced/deeper focus on one aspect/issue
- Methodological approaches to issue/topic
- A particular context, e.g. new subjects, location, industry etc.

The argumentation could be structured according to one or more of these:

Issues; methodologies; theoretical approaches; schools of thought; chronology; geography

## Synthesis and voice

It is essential that you include your own critical voice throughout the literature. You cannot simply list quotes from existing literature—you must provide the critical discussion, analysis and evaluation of the state of the literature.

You can show this through your choice of language. The below example shows the author's critical argument and engagement with the literature (in green). These words and phrases can be subtle, but they make the difference between providing your own 'voice' on the literature, and merely restating what scholars have written.

Relatively little research has been done on the way in which psychiatric nurses spend their working day or on the nature of their interactions. The few observational studies that have been done have shown fairly consistent patterns of activities, despite the use of different methodologies and subject populations (Fairbanks et al., 1977; Handy, 1991; Hodges et al., 1986; McGuire et al., 1977; Poole et al., 1981; Sandford and Elzinga, 1990; Sanson-Fisher et al., 1979). A relatively large amount of time, varying from 25 to over 50% was spent on administrative or task-oriented activities. On the other hand, the percentage of total time spent interacting with patients was low, ranging from 8.2 to 42.5%, with a mean of 17.6%. The figure of 42.5% reported in the study by Hodges et al. (1986) was unusually high and possibly reflects the fact that it was obtained in a chronic, closed ward with a very structured program that was designed to foster contact, whereas all the other data comes mainly from short-term units.

SOURCE: Tyson, G.A., Lambert, W.G., Beattie, L. (1995). The quality of psychiatric nurses' interactions with patients: an observational study [Electronic version]. *The International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 32(1), 49-58.

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