A literature review is not the same as a book review. Book reviews give the author’s opinion on a piece of literature while literature reviews seek to give an overview of published works on a specific subject.

Literature reviews help readers understand the history of what has been published about a certain subject. They can be presented as entire papers or parts of larger papers. See the infographic below for an overview of writing a literature review:

Between the reading and drafting stages, try writing a summary of the main points of each source – in your own words. Remember, you are paraphrasing these sources, so you need to use in-text citations! As you organize and write your first draft, draw from your summaries.

Please visit the ECU University Writing Center:

- 1015 Joyner Library
- 2514 Laupus Library
- Online Writing Lab

Make an Appointment:
- ecu.mywconline.com

Contact Us:
- (252) 328-2820
- www.ecu.edu/writing/uwc
Synthesis:

When writing a literature review, *synthesis* is key. What is synthesis?

*Synthesis* is a reorganization or reshuffling of information. From the Greek *sunthesis*, it literally means “place together.”

See the box to your right for questions to help you start synthesizing information! See also the handout, *Synthesis: A Paragraph Approach* for additional help.

Organization:

Another important aspect of the literature review is organization. You will need an introduction, body, and conclusion.

There are several ways to set up the body of your literature review. There are three main organizational strategies:

1. **Date of Publication**: Discuss sources in chronological order. This works best with subjects that have progressed in leaps instead of incremental steps.
2. **Theme**: Separate sources by theme, and discuss each theme’s main concepts. This works best with subjects that can be approached from several different angles.
3. **Method**: Examine sources by publication method – such as scientific study, journal article, or primary source (like a historical diary entry). This works best with subjects that depend on several kinds of sources.

As you write each body section according to the organizational structure you have chosen, be selective! **Only include the most important points from each source.** This will help your reader not to get bogged down with the details.

The final thing to keep in mind: **do not lose your voice!** If your work starts to sound more like the sources you are citing than your own voice, you need to work on synthesis.

See these Writing Center handouts for further assistance:

- Synthesis: A Paragraph Approach
- Annotating Sources
- The Annotated Bibliography

Helpful Hint:

Works Consulted


The Writing Center at UNC Chapel Hill. Literature reviews. UNC Chapel Hill. Retrieved from http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/


By Renée Boettner, June 2016

Unlike an annotated bibliography, a literature review is not separated into specific sections about each source. Instead, it should be organized by ideas. Some questions to ask are:

- How do the ideas in one source connect to the ideas in another?
- Do the arguments in one source conflict with the arguments in another?
- Do the sources reveal a trend in the field?