



SLU CALM Resources

Academic Writing

Writing a Literature Review

When will you need to write a literature review?

A literature review can be written as part of a research project involving new primary research (Context A).

Its function is to make the reader familiar with the context of the new research and how the new research fits into that context.

A literature review can be written as a separate exercise, not necessarily as part of a planned research project (Context B). Its function is to prepare students to undertake a research project of their own, and to encourage them to learn how to systematically research a particular topic.

See the [VU Concurrent Assistance \(CA\)](#) pages for the thinking behind the lit review and a model.

- *What should the literature review cover?*
- *Why is the topic important?*
- *What is known / what research has been done about the topic?*
- *What is most useful about the research already done? What is less useful about it? This involves commenting on particular studies in terms of limitations of scope, problems with procedure, method, data gathering, data analysis, and theoretical or methodological problems.*
- *How do the different studies relate to each other?*
- *What gaps exist in existing knowledge/research about this topic? Why should they be filled?*
- *How will the proposed new primary research fill the gaps? (Context A only).*

Writing the literature review

When you write your literature review you will need to make decisions about selection of material and the structure of your discussion. You should explain these decisions and, where appropriate, the reasons for them, in your review.

- Which studies or articles etc will you include in your review, and which will you leave out? Why?
- How are you going to group the material? Why?
- By author? NB This is the worst way to organise a literature review
- Chronologically (according to the time it was written)?
- Methodologically (according to the methodology it uses eg qualitative, quantitative)?
- Thematically (according to what it says about major ideas or themes)?
- Where are you going to put your comments on the different studies?