

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW

IN LIBERAL ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE COURSES

PURPOSE: a literature review provides a scholarly context for the argument you propose and support in your paper. It helps readers perceive how your argument fits into past and present scholarly discussion of your subject. Most often, a literature review is formatted to appear as a separate section of your paper, preceding the body.

Unlike an annotated bibliography, which provides information on one source at a time, a literature review offers a generalized picture of what scholars have thought and written about your topic. To arrive at this overview, you need to:

- Survey important representative samples of the scholarly literature on the topic
- Summarize the contents of those works
- Group those works in a purposeful manner (perhaps according to the extent of coverage of the topic, date of publication or age, purpose, or point of view)

STEPS IN PREPARING A LITERATURE REVIEW:

1. Determine which scholarly writings are generally deemed to be significant and acquire access to them.
2. As you read each of these works, take notes on:
 - the author's field of expertise and credentials
 - the types of evidence the author relies on (e.g., case studies, narratives, statistics, primary sources) and the reliability of this evidence
 - the author's point of view
 - the author's arguments (indicating which are most convincing and which are less so)
 - the author's contributions to scholarly discussion of the topic
3. Once you are sufficiently familiar with the individual works you have examined, look for patterns among them. Determine how they compare and contrast. Hint: constructing a chart to organize your findings visually often makes it easier to discern various kinds and degrees of similarity and difference.

ORGANIZING YOUR LITERATURE REVIEW:

The introduction establishes the significance of your topic and gives a brief preview of the trends you have identified in the scholarship of the subject.

The body contains more extensive information about notable similarities and differences, points of agreement and disagreement, patterns, trends you have discovered. Use topic sentences to introduce and clarify these relationships among the separate scholarly works you have examined.

The conclusion provides an overview of what is known and thought about the topic and what is left to explore.

LENGTH OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

In the absence of specific instructions about the length of a literature review, a general rule of thumb is that it should be proportionate to the length of your entire paper. If your paper is 15 pages long 2-3 pages might suffice for the literature review.

