

# Conducting a Literature Review

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# What is “the literature”?

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“A collection of all the scholarly writings on a topic.”

“Continuously evolving network of scholarly works that interact with each other.”

- From NCSU Libraries (n.d.). Literature Reviews: An Overview for Graduate Students. Retrieved from: <https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/videos/literature-reviews-overview-graduate-students>

on their next adventure to the land of  
them. So the dinosaurs ate the Scarce  
Now covered in dinosaur-spit, the Scarce  
the dinosaur spit would hide the fact he was  
erty! then The truck had a flat tire! The driver  
died out his cellphone and called his friends Tim, Mary  
from Car Talk. Click didn't answer.  
Size 247.93," said the truck driver. "That's  
+ stuck!" Hope to see you soon

# What is a “literature review?”

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“As it is expected of graduate students, the literature review process requires accumulating, reading, comprehending, evaluating, organizing, and synthesizing relevant literature. Knowledge of the empirical, theoretical, and methodological foundations of one’s research is demonstrated in the literature review, a central feature in both the research proposal and completed thesis . . . Undertaking the literature review eventually leads to determination of existing scholarship, support for problem formulation, and location of one’s own research within existing bodies of knowledge.” (Green & Bowser, 186-7).



Photo by Vann,  
[flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/vann/), CCommons

# (Some of) the Types of Literature Review

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Rapid review

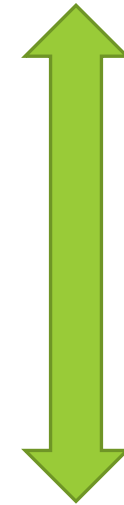
Selective

Narrative Review

Scoping Review

Systematic Review

Meta-analysis




Comprehensive

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What is the purpose of a literature review?

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What are the consequences of a poorly conducted literature review?

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# Step 1: Develop your Research Question

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research topic vs. research question

well-defined and focused

## **Research topic**

Patient perceptions of  
health care services

## **Research question**

What do patients think  
about restricted visiting  
times in hospital in-patient  
wards?

# Step 2: Plan!

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Keep a record of everything you do

Approach the literature search systematically

Determine (and be prepared to justify!) limitations of your search

Define quality/analysis criteria

Describe what you have done in the literature search itself

Devise an organization system that will work for you

Recognize that this likely isn't a linear process

# Step 3: Identify Types of Literature Needed

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Keep in mind that you may need to look at literature related to:

- Your topic
- Your method
- Your use of theory

Remember that the type/characteristics of the literature needed will determine where/how you search.

# Step 4: Develop and Follow a Systematic Search Strategy

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Monographs

Databases (could include but must not be limited to Google Scholar)

Key journals

Citation searching/footnote chasing

- Trace the references given in the literature you are currently reading
- Check other documents that have cited your works of interest

Author searching

Grey literature (theses/dissertations/conferences/gov docs)

Contact researchers

# Step 5: Conduct Effective Searches

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Keywords

Advanced search function

Subject headings

Boolean (AND, OR, NOT)

Truncation (\*?)

Limits

**Too many hits? Time to rethink!**

# Example

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Do **municipal governments** have a role to play in **health policy development** for **drug addictions** issues in their communities?

# When to end the search?

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If relevant new references are appearing, keep searching!

If only the same/redundant references are retrieved from different databases, consider scaling back the search

Discuss with your supervisor

# Step 6: Manage the Information You Find

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## Strategy

- File structure
- Coding/tagging items

## Tools

- Zotero
- Mendeley
- Good old-fashioned cards!



# Step 7: Update the Literature Review

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Saved search alerts

Citation alerts

Table of contents alerts

Social networks

# Step 8: Write the Literature Review

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Read and re-read the literature you have found and continually evaluate its relevance to your project

Engage critically with the literature, don't just report it!

For theses/dissertations, look at literature reviews in other theses and dissertations produced by other students at your institution (oURspace at University of Regina)

# Avoid Pitfalls

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The “laundry list”

Citing sources that you haven’t actually look at

Remember that not all the information that you will find will be of use to you

Including interesting but irrelevant literature

Stating that “there is no literature” rather than “no literature on the topic was identified.”

Writing the literature review as you retrieve items

Excluding articles that question or contradict your position

# Ask for Help!

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Your instructors

Your supervisor and committee members

Experts/those undertaking related research

Your subject librarian