

Research Matrix for Literature Reviews

THE BASICS OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review is a presentation of existing scholarship on an issue. It often provides context or background for an argument, an experiment, a study, or a research proposal. Summary and synthesis are the foundation of lit reviews.

A TOOL FOR ORGANIZING RESEARCH AND PRE-WRITING

In one sense, a literature review is like a conversation among sources or perspectives.

Your job is to build that conversation through synthesis. Try following these steps:

1. Summarize your sources by creating an annotated bibliography.
2. Determine sub-topics within the larger issue by noticing patterns, repetitions, or intersections across your sources and throughout the annotated bibliography.
3. Create a research matrix like the one below to discern what each of your sources have to say about each sub-topic.

Sources	Subtopic 1	Subtopic 2	Subtopic 3	Subtopic 4
Source A	---	Proposes... p. 14-22	Great background and examples of ... p. 17, 24, 30-31	Challenges the notion based on ... p. 30-32
Source B	Disagrees because of ... p. 227, 245	Suggests the point that ... p. 225	---	Supports and extends with the examples of ... p. 246, 250-255
Source C	Seems to mostly agree, some variation in terms of ... p. 123 – 130	Explains issue and gives examples p. 122, 128-130, 133	Offers contrasting examples... p. 128-130	Challenges most but accepts the part about... p. 133-135
Source D	Agrees completely and provides examples of ... p. 28, 33, 39-40	Examines from the perspective of p. 39	Another contrasting example of... p. 35, 41-43	---

NEXT STEPS

You may need to continue researching, or you may be ready to write. Once you're ready to write, try using the columns to organize the paper. One paragraph, for example, might put Sources D and B in conversation around Subtopic 1; you might find that the columns can comprise the various sections of the paper and that the subtopics can lead to section headings.