



## UCSB McNair Scholars Program

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### Literature Reviews

#### Definition:

- A “re”-view or look again at what has already been written on a particular topic. Put more broadly, a literature review discusses the published scholarly/academic information on a topic or in a research area..
- Or, put yet another way, it is a thorough consideration of the significant research and scholarly writing on a particular topic, systematically, logically, and coherently arranged.
- An organized way to summarize, synthesize, make connections between and present the literature on your topic.

#### Purpose:

- Provide you with a handy “guide” (that you have created) to the literature on your topic.
- Serve as an overview of the previous scholarly work in your subject area.
- Enlarge your scope of knowledge about a topic.
- Let you demonstrate command of the literature in your field and provide an opportunity for you to narrow/focus your topic.
- Offer the chance to conduct a critical appraisal of research available on your topic.
- Challenge your critical and analytical skills – not to mention your skills as a researcher!

#### Some of what it is not:

- The final reference list/bibliography for your paper
- Simply a descriptive list of available materials on your topic (an annotated bibliography).
- A synopsis. A literature review is more than a summary of the major points in books and/or articles; it is a narrative discussion that requires context as well as content. **HOWEVER**, a brief synopsis or summary of each item is important in order to provide the context/reason for including a particular item in your literature review.
- A new contribution to scholarship/research (that’s the role of your actual research paper)

### **A successful literature review should:**

- Be organized around and directly related to the research question you are working on (or developing)
- Synthesize results into a summary of what is and what is not known about the topic.
- Identify areas of controversy/disagreement in the literature.
- Help you formulate questions that need further research/investigation.

### **Suggestions for process – or things to consider as you begin:**

- Review the actual literature review assignment. Be clear about:
  - How many sources you need to cover
  - Are there specific types of sources you need to include (books, articles, etc.)?
  - Are there specific types of sources you should not include (websites, blogs, etc.)?
  - Should your review be evaluative?
- Refine/narrow your topic
- Determine whether you need or want to include “historic” as well as the most current available research.
- Be selective; a literature review is not designed to cover everything ever written in the field.
- Don’t forget about methodology. In other words, read critically in order to draw out the most relevant portions of an article or book.
- Think about organization of the lit. review. How do you want to present the sources (chronologically, thematically, by type of literature, type of methodology).

### **Where I got my information (truth in advertising):**

- The Writing Center. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.  
[http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature\\_review.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature_review.html)
- University of California, Santa Cruz Library. Write a Literature Review.  
<http://library.ucsc.edu/help/howto/write-a-literature-review>
- The Writing Center. University of Wisconsin, Madison  
<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReviewofLiterature.html>

