

How to write a literature review for a research article

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First, you need to have written the annotated bibliography. Then use this process to turn it into a literature review.

Create your literature review file

Save your annotated bibliography as a new file, which will eventually become the basis of your literature review. (Keep your annotated bibliography in its original form, because you might want to refer back to it.)

Create an outline

At first, your notes in the annotated bibliography might appear to be a chaotic mix of different ideas. Your goal is to put them into a neat, easy to understand order, in language that flows. It will be a full literature review of each topic or theme with in-text references and a complete bibliography at the end. You want your readers to be able to enjoy reading something that is informative and flows well. You will find that a structure will emerge as you go, even if it is not obvious at first. (You might even have multiple options from which to choose.)

The steps are as follows:

1. Develop a structure for the literature review. This will be expressed in set of section headings that naturally represent the literature and will be easy for your readers to follow.
 - a. Group articles together when they are on the same theme or topic.
 - b. Otherwise, if you can, try putting them into chronological order so that you “tell a story.”
2. If you can't tell a story, group them by theme, and then go through them theme by theme, perhaps including sub-themes. (The key words might be a good guide to themes.)
3. If the variety of information starts getting confusing, you might like to follow a specific method to determine key concepts or themes, for example:
 - a. Draw a mind-map of your topic
 - b. Create a matrix
 - c. Make a color-coded chart
 - d. Create a chart and then group articles in parts of the chart.
 - e. Write one outline of the whole chapter, and then write mini-outlines for each main idea or theme.
 - f. Use color coding to highlight main ideas when you read.
4. Write your outline
 - a. The topic and definitions come first. This is simply a modified version of the introduction to the annotated bibliography.
 - b. Other headings, making up your outline
 - c. A heading for concluding comments (if necessary)
5. Write a heading for the bibliography

Turning it into a literature review

You can turn those points into paragraphs or pages. This will be your first rough draft of the literature review.

1. Move all annotations into the outline under the relevant section heading. (This is simply a cut and paste activity in your word processor.) Go through each item in the annotated bibliography for that heading:
 - a. Copy it into the relevant place in the literature review.

- b. Cross out the text in the annotated bibliography so that you can recognize what has been done, ~~like this~~. Don't delete anything because you might want to check back later on.
 - c. Put the bibliographic entry (author, title, publication details) into the bibliography. (You can use Mandalay or Zotero)
- 2. Edit the notes of each section into a section of flowing prose. If necessary, add any interpretive notes in each section.
- 3. About your bibliography:
 - a. Some sources might be relevant to multiple parts of the literature review, but still only need one bibliographic entry.
 - b. Check that you don't have duplicates in the bibliography.
 - c. Check for cases of multiple articles written by the same author in the same year. Depending on your referencing system, they will need to be referenced as, for example, (Smith, 2019a) and (Smith, 2019b).
- 4. Put the bibliography in alphabetical order.
- 5. You now have a full first draft of your literature review.

Edit, edit, edit

Make sure you have an introductory section and a closing section. Look at the whole document and edit it into a coherent literature review. Add transitional paragraphs as necessary so that it flows and makes sense to your readers.

Then proofread: Check details of references, grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc. Edit, edit, edit
 Make sure you have an introductory section and a closing section. Look at the whole document and edit it into a coherent literature review. Add transitional paragraphs as necessary so that it flows and makes sense to your readers.

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