

### Definition of genre

A literature review is a “critical analysis of a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison of prior research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles” (University of Wisconsin Writing Center). Do not confuse a literature review with an annotated bibliography.

### Questions to ask

- How are sources similar in terms of methodologies, philosophies, claims, choice and interpretation of evidence, reliability, etc.?
- How do they differ?
- Do you observe gaps in the research or areas that require further study?
- Do particular issues or problems stand out? Do you want (or does your prompt ask you) to compare texts in general or hone in on a specific issue or question?

### Actions to take

- Determine your purpose. Professors assign literature reviews for various reasons. One assignment might ask students simply to demonstrate knowledge of available sources; another might ask students to integrate sources and say something new about them. A literature review may be an end in itself or it may be preparatory work motivating future research. Understanding the purpose and expectations of the prompt will help you place appropriate emphasis on analysis or summary.
- Keep track of sources by writing a brief summary for each.
- Consider making a table or chart to map how different sources relate to/contrast with one another.
- Consider the significance of each work to the field. The amount of space you dedicate to an individual source denotes its significance within the body of literature.

### Format

- The introduction should explain why you are writing the review (“so what/who cares?”) and make some central claims about the current state of the literature (e.g. trends, debates, gaps, etc.).
- Organize the body of the paper by common denominators among sources, such as methodologies, conclusions, philosophical approaches, or possibly chronology (assuming topical subsections).

- The conclusion should summarize significant contributions to the field, situate the reviewed literature in the larger context of the discipline, point out flaws or gaps in the research, and/or suggest future areas of study.

**Helpful link**

The information in this handout is drawn in part from the University of Wisconsin Writing Center's online guide to Literature Reviews: <http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/ReviewofLiterature.html>.