

LITERATURE REVIEW LANGUAGE GUIDE

Traditional Academic Essay

- Uses theory relevant to the argument
- Focus on the knowledge itself
- Past tense
- Third person
- A thesis (line of argument) and a well organised structure
- Formal Language

Literature Review

- Summarizes, interprets, and critically analyses research
- Focus on the authors and research
- Tense: past, present & future
- Third person
- A thesis (line of argument) and a well organised structure
- Formal language

Citing Literature in Your Text

When you use information from sources you have read, you need to choose a suitable reporting verb to introduce it.

There are three basic reasons for using a reporting verb

1. To present the **aim of the study** you are summarising/quoting

e.g. *Smith (2009) examined the relationship between food insecurity and anxiety.*

2. To talk about the **results** the author you are summarising/quoting has found

e.g. *Al-Mawali (2018) found that food insecurity is particularly high in rural or remote populations.*

3. To give the **opinion** of the author you are summarising/quoting

e.g. *Marklin (2014) argued that “ambivalent or mixed feelings about a divorce are common.” (p. 76).*

Adapted from: Queen Margaret University. (2014). Writing a literature review.

<https://www.qmuc.ac.uk/media/5524/lit-review-2014.pdf>

Common Reporting Verbs

Note: some verbs (marked *) can be used to introduce either results or opinion, depending on the context/grammar.

aim of study	results	opinion
investigate	show	state
examine	suggest*	believe
analyse	find	argue
look at	indicate	note
focus on	The literature reveals	point out
consider	reveal	observe*
identify	establish	consider
report (on)	confirm	hold
be concerned with	conclude*	claim
	demonstrate	according to (author)
	Research by (author/s) found	emphasise/stress
		proposes
		implies
		identify x as

For more on reporting verbs check out this short video: <https://sls.navitas-professional.edu.au/reporting-what-others-say>

Comparing and Contrasting the Literature

To strengthen [critical analysis](#) in your literature review, you will need to not just summarise the literature but identify relationships and themes in the literature by comparing research studies:

- To what extent is the area of focus in the investigations similar or different?
- How do the methodologies used by the authors compare?
- What conclusions are reported by the authors? How do they compare?
- How do the conclusions and findings add to/support/contradict the existing knowledge of the issue being examined?

You will also need to compare perspectives:

- How do the authors' own views on a topic compare?
- Do different authors see things from different angles?
- Do they argue in similar or different ways?
- What are the major areas where authors disagree?

Language for Comparing and Contrasting

The majority of Numerous Several Some A few	}	studies authors	}	found demonstrated examined questioned suggest
---------------------------------------------------------	---	------------------------	---	------------------------------------------------------------

Despite x, the However the In contrast the Similarly Furthermore	}	author(s)	}	found perspective is argument is findings are view is
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The literature Research Findings Recommendations	}	is/are	}	consistent inconsistent clear unclear
-----------------------------------------------------------	---	--------	---	------------------------------------------------

Author takes a	}	similar different complimentary contrasting conflicting	}	view perspective argument view
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Author expanded on these studies	}	suggesting illustrating supporting questioning rejecting	}	the	}	notion recommendation findings assumption
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The relationship between A and B was	}	further also equally	}	supported questioned	}	by author
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There is	}	continued little some	}	debate agreement disagreement controversy
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There is	}	strong little significant inconclusive conclusive	}	evidence
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The passage below shows how a student has taken an **analytical approach** to the literature by:

Comparing and contrasting, **reporting** and writing using their 'voice' (Discussed below)

Existing research does not agree on the impact which physical environment can have on care home residents' perception of autonomy. After studying residents and staff from two intermediate care facilities in Calgary, Alberta, Smith (2004) **concluded** that except for the amount of personal privacy available to residents, the physical environment of these institutions had minimal if any effect on their perceptions of control (autonomy). **However**, French (2005) and Haroon (2013) **found that** availability of private areas is not the only aspect of the physical environment that determines residents' autonomy. Haroon (2013) interviewed 115 residents from 32 different nursing homes known to have different levels of autonomy. **It was found** that physical structures, such as standardized furniture and heating that could not be individually regulated limited residents' feelings of independence. **Moreover**, Hope (2002), who interviewed 225 residents from various nursing homes, **substantiates the claim*** that characteristics of the institutional environment such as the extent of resources in the facility, as well as its location, are features which residents have indicated as being of great importance to their independence. While Smith's (2004) findings appear to differ considerably from those of French (2005), Haroon (2013), and Hope (2013), this could be because only Smith interviewed staff as well as residents and this may have impacted on the results.

Topic sentence
outlines
the main
idea of the
paragraph

Substantiates the claim: *
shows
supporting
evidence and
synthesises
knowledge

Critical analysis:
Points out
limitations of
the study

Adapted from: Queen Margaret University. (2014). Writing a literature review.
<https://www.qmuc.ac.uk/media/5524/lit-review-2014.pdf>

Feak, C. B. & Swales, J. M. (2009) *Telling a Research Story*. The University of Michigan

Making your voice heard amongst the experts

As well as synthesising, comparing and contrasting the literature, you will also need to comment on, or critique, the literature. While the literature review presents the ideas of other authors, it is not sufficient to simply describe or summarise ideas from readings. Instead, you need to use the literature to make points or to locate your ideas in relation to the existing body of knowledge. By taking on an active role as the writer and engaging the reader in a process of critical analysis, your 'voice' will become clear.

Using evaluative language

The style of language used in a literature review is often evaluative and demonstrates your perspectives of the literature. Evaluative language can be positive/endorsing or negative/less endorsing.

Positive/endorsing	Negative/dis-endorsing	Introducing gaps/limitations
<p>It is clear from the research presented by A, B and C that XYZ is a widely understood concept/value/idea/theory/argument...</p> <p>Diener and Oishi's (2014) research makes it clear...</p> <p>This study is consistent with...</p> <p>There is strong evidence that...</p> <p>This concept is central to...</p> <p>This argument considers not only... but also...</p> <p>Despite *insert drawback here* Smith's (2013) theories are beneficial for....</p>	<p>Although these studies have presented ABC, there is still little evidence as to how XYZ are affected.</p> <p>The researcher/s failed to adequately investigate...</p> <p>There is little evidence in support of...</p> <p>Shlay (2016) claimed that...yet...</p> <p>This argument does not consider...</p> <p>X has attracted criticism for</p> <p>Haroon's (2013) studies have yet to indicate....</p> <p>It is unclear whether...</p> <p>Smith's (2013) study does not account for...</p>	<p>Upon closer analysis of the literature several gaps and shortcomings are revealed including...</p> <p>These studies relied on...</p> <p>No previous research has...</p> <p>More work is needed in order to...</p> <p>A new approach is needed...</p> <p>Future research needs to address...</p> <p>There are clear gaps...</p> <p>There is a clear need for...</p> <p>Several limitations include...</p> <p>Studies fail to address...</p> <p>A weakness of the majority of the research reviewed...</p>
<p>Vocab: important, significant, necessary, crucial, pivotal, effective</p>	<p>Vocab: inconclusive, questionable, insignificant, unclear, weak</p>	<p>The study/methodology did not take into account...</p>
		<p>Despite the vast amount of research to date...</p> <p>...highlights flaws in the research methodology...</p> <p>Further research needs to be completed in order to...</p>

Other types of evaluative language include:

- Hedging or low modal language can be used to withhold your full commitment to a statement. Examples of hedging include *may; might; possibly; likely; seemed to; appeared to*
- Boosters reveal your certainty about a statement. Examples of boosters include *clearly; definitely; without doubt*
- Attitude markers reveal your attitude towards a statement. Examples of Attitude markers include *interestingly; surprisingly; unfortunately*. Careful, this may indicate a personal opinion, not recommended in academic writing. Check with your educator or the Unit Outline for assessment details.

Click here for more on hedging: <https://vimeo.com/258908422>

Look at the following example from a literature review. The underlined areas are where the writer is using his 'voice' to comment on the literature. The expressions written in **bold** are expressions which are frequently used and could be used in your own writing.

The existing literature on homelessness strongly suggests that there are many problems associated with life without a home. **Studies have shown that homelessness is associated with** problem behaviours in children (Di Biase & Waddell, 2014; Edleman & Mihaly, 2009), strained family relationships (Nyamathi et al., 2015; Vostainis et al., 2006), higher exposure to trauma (Buhrich et al., 2016; Hien & Bukzpan, 2015), increased anger and depression (Marshal et al., 2004), and the negative psychological impact of social stigma (Lankenau, 2013). **Because of the methodological difficulties related to studying homelessness, it is unclear whether** factors such as depression and alcohol abuse are causes or effects of homelessness. While prior history of mental illness is undoubtedly responsible for homelessness in a least some cases, **there is evidence to suggest that** the experience of homelessness causes or exacerbates many psychological problems. In a study by Shlay (2016) for example, homeless people were found to report greater emotional well-being and fewer behavioural problems in their children after positive changes in their economic and social status.

Synthesises multiple findings from research

Critical evaluation looking at the quality of the studies

Studies on the harmful effects of homelessness are consistent with a larger body of literature examining the relation between income and subjective well-being. In large national surveys, for example, income has been shown to be moderately correlated with life satisfaction, especially at the lower economic levels and in the poorest countries (Diener et al., 1999; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009; Diener & Lucas 2002). Higher income has been shown to be related to increased longevity (Wilkenson, 2013), better health (Salovy et al., 2008), and greater life satisfaction (Diener et al. 1999; Diener & Oishi, 2014). **Scholars appear to agree that** although correlations between income and subjective well-being are often modest, there appears to be a curvilinear relationship in which money has the greatest impact on psychological health at the lowest economic levels (Inglehart & Klingemann, 2015).

Links to the literature in this area.

Adapted from: Feak, C. B. and Swaled, J. M. (2009). *Telling a research story*. The University of Michigan.

How do I reference multiple studies?

Look at the example sentence below that ties together findings from several different research papers. You can see the author uses the semi-colon (;) in order to show several studies had the same findings. This is a great way to show the relationship between several studies in a succinct way.

Studies have shown that homelessness is associated with problem behaviours in children (Di Biase & Waddell, 2014; Edleman & Mihaly, 2009), strained family relationships (Nyamathi et al., 2015; Vostainis et al., 2006), higher exposure to trauma (Buhrich et al., 2016; Hien & Bukzpan, 2015), increased anger and depression (Marshal et al., 2004) and the negative psychological impact of social stigma (Lankenau, 2013).

When referencing multiple studies remember to put your references in alphabetical order.

How can I structure my paragraphs?

For more about how to structure a paragraph, check out our [literature review page](#) on the SLS website. Remember, for a literature review you still follow the same guidelines as an academic essay: one main idea per paragraph and start with a topic sentence. Remember in a literature review your body paragraph should not just be a summary of one research study. You might have body paragraphs on topics like the following:

- An evaluation of a key finding across several studies
- A limitation across several studies
- A gap in the literature
- A common methodology
- A possible intervention/solution suggested in multiple studies
- A disagreement or conflict in the literature
- Specific points mentioned in the marking criteria

Look back at the examples from earlier, pay attention to the topic sentences, can you identify the main idea of the paragraph?

Have I remembered everything?

- ✓ Do I have one main idea per paragraph?
- ✓ Have I used compare and contrast language?
- ✓ Have I used evaluative language?
- ✓ Have I used my voice?

For more help or information visit the SLS website

sls.navitas-professional.edu.au

