LITERATURE REVIEWS: PART 1

A **literature review** is a survey of scholarly material that is relevant to a particular topic. It can include **scholarly articles**, **books, dissertations, conference proceedings,** and other academic sources.

Literature reviews are *not* to be confused with book reviews of a famous piece of literature. They compile the *literature*, or the scholarly material, pertaining to a certain topic.

ACADEMIC RESEARCH PAPERS VS. LITERATURE REVIEWS

1. Main purpose of an academic research paper: **develops, sustains,** and **proves** an argument
   a. Utilizes your own insight and hopefully contributes something new to the discussion
2. Main purpose of a literature review: **summarizes** and **synthesizes** the research on a topic.
   a. Summarizes the views of others and does not contribute your own unique argument.

USING A LITERATURE REVIEW IN AN ACADEMIC PAPER

While literature reviews are not an academic research paper, you may be able to make use of a literature review *within* a larger academic paper.

▪ Some include a literature review to clearly show where the paper stands in relation to other scholarship in the field.
▪ Even if the paper does not require one, grounding yourself in the research will be immensely helpful as you seek to develop your own unique thesis.

GOALS OF YOUR LITERATURE REVIEW

By the time you have finished your literature review, you should successfully do the following:

o Provide a comprehensive **survey** of the literature relevant to your topic.
o Take the literature and **synthesize** the information into a summary.
o Offer a **critical analysis** of the information that you gathered in the survey.
o **Present** the literature in an organized way.
o **Explore** the most important scholarly contributions relevant to any given subject; these sources should ideally be up-to-date and peer-reviewed.

Note: For detailed information on how to compose a literature review, see our handout entitled "Literature Reviews: Part 2."

PRACTICE NOW