

BCU Lit guidance from Harry M

The aim of a literature review is to show your reader (your tutor) that you have read, and have a good grasp of, the main published work concerning a particular topic or question in your field. This work may be in any format, including online sources. It may be a separate assignment, or one of the introductory sections of a report, dissertation or thesis. In the latter cases in particular, the review will be guided by your research objective or by the issue or thesis you are arguing and will provide the framework for your further work. It is very important to note that your review should not be simply a description of what others have published in the form of a set of summaries, but should take the form of a critical discussion, showing insight and an awareness of differing arguments, theories and approaches. It should be a synthesis and analysis of the relevant published work, linked at all times to your own purpose and rationale.

According to Caulley (1992) of La Trobe University, the literature review should:

- compare and contrast different authors' views on an issue
- group authors who draw similar conclusions
- criticise aspects of methodology
- note areas in which authors are in disagreement
- highlight exemplary studies
- highlight gaps in research
- show how your study relates to previous studies
- show how your study relates to the literature in general
- conclude by summarising what the literature says

The purposes of the review are:

- to define and limit the problem you are working on
- to place your study in an historical perspective
- to avoid unnecessary duplication
- to evaluate promising research methods
- to relate your findings to previous knowledge and suggest further research

A good literature review, therefore, is critical of what has been written, identifies areas of controversy, raises questions and identifies areas which need further research.