

## WHAT IS A LITERATURE REVIEW?

While there are many different kinds of literature reviews, in general they are reports on published information about a specific topic. They often highlight the latest empirical research, such as the latest findings on a topic, major theories from key authors on a topic, and methodological contributions (i.e. how people collect and analyze data to answer their research questions).

## WHY DO I NEED TO WRITE A LITERATURE REVIEW?

For many articles, proposals, theses, and books, literature reviews set up the empirical, theoretical, and methodological context of your study topic. They identify the conversation/s (academic, industry, or other) in which your work is situated. They also can identify gaps in current research that your study will help to bridge, areas of knowledge that your study will build upon, theories that your study will test, or theoretical contributions that you integrate into a comprehensive conceptual approach to your study.

## HOW DO I FIND ARTICLES, BOOKS, AND OTHER REFERENCE MATERIALS?

- Visit the **Built Environments Library** and talk to your librarian:  
<http://www.lib.washington.edu/be>
- Search the UW Library: <http://www.lib.washington.edu/>
- Use **Google Scholar** to find articles. Check out who cites an article and related articles:  
<https://scholar.google.com/>
- Once you read an article, **check out what author(s) are cited in the reference section**. If something looks important for your research, find it at the UW library.

**Can't find what you are looking for at the UW library?** You can request an item using the [interlibrary loan and document delivery service](#)

**Still can't find it?** Try searching for the article title or author online. Often researchers post older versions of their journal articles and conference papers or keep them in institutional repositories, such as UW's [ResearchWorks](#).

## WHAT SHOULD I PAY ATTENTION TO WHEN READING LITERATURE?

When reviewing the literature, think about where the gaps are in the conversation. What has been studied so far? What methods were used? How might a different approach to a topic lead to a different set of results? Some key areas to pay attention to are:

- The research questions being asked
- The theories being used, tested, or critiqued and why
- The types of data collected and how it was collected to answer the research questions
- How the data was analyzed to answer the research question
- Limitations of the study
- Suggested future areas of inquiry and methodological approaches

## HOW DO I GET STARTED WRITING MY LITERATURE REVIEW?

A great way to keep track of what you have read is through using reference management software during note-taking and developing a literature review memo. A literature review memo documents the main points of an article and your thoughts and ideas about the article as you read. These memos often evolve through multiple iterations as you focus in on the specific gaps, contributions, or questions that you want your literature review to identify or answer. You can later organize your memo into themes around a specific topic, question, limitation, or other aspects of the literature. This can serve as the basis of your literature review outline and help you to see the connections and gaps within the literature. For examples of literature review memos, see the Construction Management Research Support page.

## RESOURCES ON WRITING LITERATURE REVIEWS:

- [Harvard Literature Review Guide](#) is an excellent resource. They also have an excellent 8 minute lecture on what a literature review is, types of literature reviews, and examples of the different types of reviews:  
[http://gseacademic.harvard.edu/~instruct/gutman\\_library/litreview/defpurpose/player.html](http://gseacademic.harvard.edu/~instruct/gutman_library/litreview/defpurpose/player.html)
- UW: [Literature Review and Research Workshop Recordings](#)
- UW Bothell: [Assessing Sources, Writing Literature Reviews](#)
- UNC-Chapel Hill [Literature Review Handout](#)
- UC Santa Cruz "[Write a Literature Review](#)"
- Purdue Online Writing Lab: [Literature Reviews](#)