## Literature review

**A literature review is an evaluative critique of the body of literature on a particular topic. It provides the reader with an up-to-date survey on the range of ideas and knowledge that have been established on a topic. A literature review identifies contrasting and opposing views, and highlights any gaps existing in the current knowledge. It identifies how new research, a thesis or dissertation will follow on from what has been done before.**

### Identify a topic

**You may be assigned a topic or asked to choose one. If you choose your topic, ensure that there is enough relevant literature for you to write a literature review.**

### Locate relevant resources

**As part of the writing exercise, you may be given a number of books or articles to review or you may be expected to conduct this research yourself. Use the databases that are recommended for your subject by the subject librarian. For example, you will want to use** [**PubMed**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed) **for Health Sciences. Undertake keyword searches to find relevant books and articles. Evaluate your results. Skim them and decide which ones to include as part of your literature review. Select a suitable number of studies depending on the length of literature review you are expected to write.**

### Analyse the studies

* **Read the selected resources carefully. Critically evaluate what you read.**
* **Analyse author’s credentials.**
* **Is there evidence of bias?**
* **What does the study claim to prove? Identify the purpose of the study.**
* **Is the claim adequately supported by the evidence provided?**
* **Does the study use qualitative or quantitative research, or both?**
* **Are there flaws in the study?**
* **If the result of a focus group, is the study representative of the population under study and of a significant size?**

### Write the literature review

**Organise the literature review either chronologically, thematically or methodologically. If you plan to write the review thematically, try to identify the themes and issues that link your sources together as you read through the literature.**

**Most literature reviews, like essays, have an introduction, a body and a conclusion.**

* **The introduction should be clear and short. It provides an overview of the research topic, your reasons for writing the review, an explanation of the scope of the review, what it is you intend and do not intend to cover. In order to prime the reader, include the sequence or order of the topics you cover in the review.**
* **The body of the text summarises and synthesises the research literature. Summarise and synthesise material in a way that allows you not only to report, but also to compare, contrast, critically review and comment on what has been said in the literature. The similarities, differences, strengths and weaknesses need to be identified from each source.**
* **The conclusion provides a summary of what studies exist and what research has been conducted on the topic. It also identifies any gaps.**

