

# 10 effective steps to write good literature review for an academic dissertation



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**Abstract** Comprehensive, critical and constructive literature review are very important to produce a good academic dissertation. This article suggests 10 effective steps to write a high-quality literature review for an academic dissertation. The suggested steps are (i) define scope, (ii) conduct comprehensive search, (iii) organize sources, (iv) read and analyze, (v) identify key themes and arguments, (vi) develop logical structure, (vii) write clearly and critically, (viii) provide coherence and synthesis, (ix) revise and refine, and (x) seek feedback. It is recommended for researchers who are working on an academic dissertation to take advantage of this strategy in their writing, in order to produce a high-quality literature review presentation.

**Keywords:** research methods, literature review, academic dissertation

## 1. Introduction

Literature review is set as a student task in various modules to enhance understanding of a particular research topic and enable students to practice critically evaluating ideas and arguments (Rewhorn 2017). In academic dissertations for postgraduate students, a well-done literature review is crucial. Students can place their own work into the larger scholarly debate by using it as a thorough review of the body of knowledge and research that already exists on a particular topic. A solid literature review indicates the postgraduate student's topical expertise and comprehension. They can demonstrate your familiarity with important ideas, theories, and empirical investigations while also demonstrating a thorough comprehension of the body of work and theoretical underpinnings of your subject (Hart 2018). By reading and discussing pertinent material, students demonstrate their capacity to critically evaluate and synthesize data, laying the groundwork for their own study.

Postgraduate students can find research gaps and create research questions that add to the body of knowledge by doing an extensive literature review. A proper time-planning strategy is essential for searching the literature to identify the relevant articles and texts that produce higher-quality work (Bolderston 2008). Students can situate their own research within the larger intellectual landscape by reviewing the good literature, which helps them find open issues, unresolved issues, controversies, or areas that need further investigation. To ensure the literature review is accurate, precise, and reliable, the correct steps must be followed and proper actions must be taken where the literature review sets up the research methodology correctly (Snyder 2019). This step is essential to defining the goals and relevance of the dissertation in order to improve added value, particularly when generating a dissertation that adds new knowledge to the topic being examined.

The methodological rigour of the postgraduate student's research is helped by a strong literature review. By analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of earlier research, it will assist students in choosing acceptable research methodologies, measurement equipment, and data gathering strategies (Cooper 2021). A good literature review can extract new ideas from other authors by synthesizing and summarizing previous sources of literature (Bolderston 2008). Students can make educated selections and stay clear of potential hazards in their own studies by critically analyzing the approaches used in prior research.

The literature reviews set the frameworks and provide the context for the research (Rewhorn 2017). The review of the literature lays the groundwork for developing theoretical frameworks in the research for graduate students. Students can develop a solid theoretical framework for their research by using a well-written literature review to help them find and assess the theories, concepts, and models that support their work (Ridley 2012). This is because a literature review is the best way to synthesize research findings to show evidence at the meta-level and to reveal areas that require more research, which is a critical component for developing theoretical frameworks and building concept models (Snyder 2019). Students can defend their research topics and ideas and show how they have contributed to the discipline by drawing on accepted theories.



Postgraduate students' abilities in academic writing and communication are improved by reading critically and synthesizing research findings. The important summaries of the literature help focus what has been written on a topic so that the reader is able to glean this information in one setting (Patel et al 2019). Through the literature review process, students gain the ability to critically assess academic sources, condense significant findings, and communicate complex concepts in a clear and succinct manner (Greenhalgh 2014). The improvement of their skills not only improves the caliber of their dissertations but also positions them for future scholarly endeavors.

Therefore, postgraduate students writing academic dissertations must conduct strong literature reviews. It exhibits their knowledge and understanding, aids in the identification of research gaps, ensures methodological rigour, supports theoretical frameworks, and improves their academic writing and communication abilities. In order to prepare a strong literature review for an academic dissertation, this post will go through 10 effective steps. Following those guidelines will enable postgraduate students to create a solid literature review that improves the overall strength and significance of their dissertations.

## 2. Common Mistakes in Literature Review Writing

The literature review is an important part of an academic dissertation since it gives readers a thorough comprehension of the body of knowledge on the subject at hand. However, there are a few blunders that postgraduate students frequently make throughout the literature review process that might undermine the usefulness and quality of their dissertations. Lack of depth and scope in a literature study is a common error among postgraduate students. To obtain a solid comprehension of the research issue, it is crucial to carefully review the pertinent literature. However, postgraduates sometimes squander the chance to get a wider perspective by limiting their review to a few important sources. They may make the error of ignoring more recent research and other viewpoints in favour of concentrating only on the ground-breaking achievements in their field (Rocco and Plakhotnik 2009). When choosing and reviewing material, it is essential to follow a systematic and comprehensive approach in order to avoid making this error.

Lack of synthesis and integration of the evaluated literature is another prevalent error. Postgraduates frequently fail to adequately synthesise the results from several studies, instead choosing to summarise certain sources. Postgraduates frequently fail to recognise recurring themes and linkages across the studies when they offer their literature evaluation as a collection of disconnected summaries (Ibrahim 2017). To correct this oversight, postgraduate students should look for trends, gaps, and disputes in the literature and incorporate the results into a compelling story that furthers their research goals.

Additionally, postgraduates frequently commit the error of avoiding direct engagement with main research publications in favour of relying disproportionately on secondary sources. Secondary sources, like literature reviews and textbooks, might give a helpful overview, but they might miss out on subtleties and more recent advancements in the field. To provide a thorough and current literature review, postgraduates should aim to incorporate a balance of primary research publications and secondary sources (Booth et al 2012). To get a clear perspective on the status of knowledge today, postgraduate students should critically assess and analyse primary research studies.

Lack of a critical analysis of the included literature is another key error made by postgraduates. The quality, limits, and relevance of the examined studies should be rigorously evaluated before simply summarising or reporting the results can damage the literature review. Researchers have emphasised that postgraduates should use critical thinking techniques to evaluate the literature's strengths and limitations while pointing out any biases or methodological errors (Baumeister and Leary 1997). Postgraduates can show a greater comprehension of the subject and add to the body of knowledge by critically examining the literature.

Finally, a disjointed framework and poor organisation might undermine the coherence and usefulness of the literature review. Postgraduates frequently make the error of compiling their summaries into an unorganised collection without a distinct topic or chronological organisation. Hart (2018) advises postgraduates to carefully prepare the structure of their literature review, assembling linked research and ensuring a logical flow of ideas. It will be easier for readers to browse the review and understand the important findings if the structure is developed in a manner that is consistent with the research questions or themes.

## 3. Steps to Write Literature Review

Here are 10 guidelines for creating a strong literature review for a dissertation. Graduate students who follow these instructions carefully can write excellent literature reviews for their own projects.

### 3.1. Step 1: Define the scope and objectives

Clearly describe the subject matter of your literature review by mentioning the main ideas, inquiries, or goals you wish to cover. This will assist you in maintaining concentration and preventing information overload. A vital first stage in the research process is the specification of the goals and scope of a literature review. It aids in setting the parameters of the study, choosing what to include and leave out, and giving the literature review a clear direction (Creswell 2014; Jesson et al

2011). The objectives of your review serve as a road map for the process; they express the review's aim, direct the selection of research, and assist in establishing the standards for judging the value and calibre of the literature (Fink 2014).

To keep the literature review modest, pertinent, and focused, its topic must be precisely defined. In addition to offering a justification for the inclusion and exclusion of particular literature, it aids researchers in identifying the crucial themes, concepts, and theories that need to be investigated (Greenhalgh 2014). Therefore, one of the most important steps in the research process is to specify the goals and scope of your literature study. It aids in setting boundaries, choosing pertinent studies, and giving your review a distinct direction. You can make sure that your literature review is targeted, manageable, and pertinent to your research issue by clearly defining your objectives.

### *3.2. Step 2: Conduct a comprehensive literature search*

To find pertinent and current sources for your literature review, you must conduct a thorough literature search. To find pertinent literature, do consult academic databases, scholarly journals, conference proceedings, and pertinent books. To show that you are aware of the state of research in your subject, be sure to incorporate recent studies. For recognising existing information and comprehending the current level of research on a given topic, a thorough and methodical literature search is essential (Cooper 2021).

It's crucial to conduct a thorough literature search using a variety of sources. To ensure they collect a wide range of pertinent literature for their evaluation, researchers should look through a variety of academic databases, journals, books, and conference proceedings (Neuman 2014). To make sure that your literature review accurately reflects the most recent state of knowledge in your industry, you should also incorporate new studies into a thorough literature search (Hart 2018). Therefore, by completing a thorough literature search, you can be confident that you've taken into account a variety of pertinent sources and have a current understanding of the research that has already been done in your field. The credibility and breadth of your literature study are enhanced by this strategy.

### *3.3. Step 3: Organize your sources*

One of the most important steps in the literature review process is organising your sources. Establish a method to effectively manage your sources. To keep track of your citations and quickly create your bibliography, think about using reference management software like EndNote, Zotero, or other appropriate software. In order to manage the enormous volume of literature, it's crucial to organise your sources. Long-term time and effort savings can be realised by developing a systematic and organised method for managing your sources, which will enable you to quickly locate and cite the pertinent material (Booth et al 2008).

Utilising reference management software to efficiently organise your sources has several advantages. You can organise your references based on several factors such as author, year, or topic by using reference management systems like EndNote or Zotero, which make it simple to generate citations (Machi and McEvoy 2016). To make it simpler to synthesise and incorporate the literature into your review, it is advised that you make an annotated bibliography or use note-taking techniques to keep track of the important material from each source (Webster and Watson, 2002). You may maintain track of the literature you have examined, quickly find pertinent information when needed, and produce an organised and logical literature review by properly organising your sources.

### *3.4. Steps 4: Read and analyze the literature*

Another crucial phase in the literature review process is reading and evaluating the literature. Read the chosen articles, books, and other sources thoroughly. Make notes on the most important conclusions, methodology, gaps in the literature, and any pertinent quotes or figures. Search for trends, themes, and connections as you read from various sources. The major findings, methodology, and arguments given in the literature must be understood by carefully reading the chosen articles, books, and other sources (Hart 2018).

While reading the literature, it's important to take careful notes. You will be able to analyse and synthesise the literature more skillfully if you make notes on the main conclusions, methodologies, strengths, shortcomings, and any pertinent quotes or data (Ridley 2012). Additionally, you should study literature with more scepticism. It's because assessing the research's advantages, disadvantages, and restrictions can enable you to spot gaps and patterns in the literature and lay the groundwork for your own investigation (Booth et al 2008).

### *3.5. Step 5: Identify key themes and arguments*

Finding the main ideas and points of contention is also an important step in the literature evaluation procedure. Please arrange your materials into groups according to common themes, research methods, or theoretical frameworks. Identify the key points of view and arguments made in the literature. This will assist you in organising your literature review and constructing a compelling story. You can organise the literature and comprehend the primary arguments, concepts, and theories that emerge from the available research by identifying significant themes (Machi and McEvoy 2016).

It's critical that you recognise the arguments and viewpoints offered in the literature. You can critically evaluate the available research and comprehend the many points of view on the topic by recognising the primary arguments and perspectives (Webster and Watson 2002). Finding common themes enables you to combine data from different studies and make connections between them, which helps you gain a more thorough grasp of the research issue (Rocco and Plakhotnik 2009). You can rationally organise the literature, comprehend the many views and arguments put out in the existing study, and synthesise data from several sources by identifying major themes and arguments.

### *3.6. Step 6: Develop a logical structure*

The process of conducting a literature review must also include creating a logical structure. To ensure a coherent flow of ideas, make an outline for your literature study. Usually, it starts with an introduction that places the subject in perspective and emphasises the significance of the research field. After that, you can arrange your review according to themes, chronological order, theoretical frameworks, or any other format that works. This method will aid in organising your review, presenting the main ideas and arguments in a logical order, and leading the reader through the literature in a straightforward and orderly fashion (Hart 2018).

It is crucial to develop a coherent framework for your literature evaluation. You can convey the current research in a logical and consistent manner by segmenting the literature into parts or groups based on topics, hypotheses, or research questions (Cooper 2021). There is no longer any question about the need for a logical format for your literature review because it makes sure that it flows well, presents a clear narrative, and draws attention to the links between various studies and themes (Booth et al 2008). By doing so, you can efficiently arrange and display your literature review, making it simpler for readers to understand your points of view, recognise the connections between various research, and appreciate the review's overall coherence.

### *3.7. Step 7: Write clearly and critically*

Writing clearly and critically is crucial for the literature review process, therefore don't forget to do it. Each paragraph should begin with a topic phrase that clearly states the major idea or contention. Highlight the main areas of agreement and disagreement while summarising and synthesising the most important results from the research. Examine the benefits and drawbacks of the current research to maintain a critical mindset. Write concisely and clearly since doing so will help you engage readers, explain your thoughts clearly, and present the main points and conclusions from the literature in a clear, accessible manner (Booth et al 2008).

Writing critically entails assessing the benefits, drawbacks, and restrictions of the prior research, offering a fair analysis, and adding your own interpretations and insights (Ridley 2012). You must also criticise accepted theories, raise doubts about presumptions, and point out any gaps or disagreements in the literature in order to add to the scholarly conversation in your field (Greenhalgh 2014). Additionally, it can interest readers, convey your views clearly, and add to the intellectual debate in your field. Writing a critical essay entail assessing the available research, delivering fair opinions, and adding your own analysis and interpretations.

### *3.8. Step 8: Provide coherence and synthesis*

Connecting the concepts offered in various sources and highlighting any gaps or unresolved problems in the literature is another effective step. Aim for a comprehensive and well-integrated review that shows you are aware of the state of the field and how your research fits within it. When writing a review, it's important to synthesise the main ideas, claims, and conclusions from the literature. It's also important to uncover connections and interconnections across research and create a coherent, integrated review (Hart 2018). Synthesis is the process of combining many viewpoints, theories, and empirical results from the literature in order to spot trends and produce fresh ideas or frameworks (Booth et al 2008).

A well-written literature review contributes to the creation of new knowledge in your subject by demonstrating your comprehension of the body of existing research and pointing out any gaps or inconsistencies (Green and Johnson 2014). By offering coherence and synthesis, you may integrate the main ideas, contentions, and discoveries from the literature, spot trends and linkages, and help your area gain fresh insight and understanding.

### *3.9. Step 9: Revise and refine*

Revise and improve your literature review after finishing the first draught. Make sure the wording is precise, academic in tone, and clear. This phase is essential to guaranteeing the quality and clarity of your literature review. Check for consistency in formatting, citations, and referencing in accordance with the needed citation style. You can improve your review's organisation and coherence, your arguments and ideas, and its alignment with your research goals by going through the revising process (Booth et al 2008).

Seeking feedback from peers, advisers, or mentors can also help you identify areas for development and polish your literature review because they can offer insightful observations and views (Ridley 2012). Careful editing and proofreading are

also necessary at the same time. To make sure that your views are successfully conveyed and that your review reaches the highest standards of quality, it is crucial to edit and proofread it for grammar, clarity, and coherence (Machi and McEvoy 2016). All of these steps can make your arguments more convincing, improve the review's structure and coherence, take into account outside input, and guarantee that your work is of the highest calibre.

### 3.10. Step 10: Seek feedback

Last but not least, getting input is a crucial phase in the literature review process because it helps you make your work more rigorous and high-quality. Do not hesitate to present your literature evaluation to your adviser, peers, or colleagues for criticism. Think about their advice and make the necessary revisions. Your literature review can be strengthened and improved by incorporating other points of view. You can gain insightful knowledge, discover blind spots, and improve your arguments and analyses by asking for feedback from peers, mentors, or authorities in your field (Booth et al 2008).

Receiving input from others is an essential step since it enables you to get insight from many viewpoints, spot any potential flaws or holes in your literature study, and make the necessary changes for improvement (Cooper 2021). Your arguments will become clearer as a result of those helpful criticisms, and your literature review will be of higher quality overall (Machi and McEvoy 2016). Because of this, asking for input from peers, mentors, or subject-matter specialists in your field enables you to learn insightful lessons, get useful criticism, and improve your literature study to ensure its rigour and quality.

## 4. Final Considerations

Any academic dissertation must include a literature review. It is essential for determining the study's course and ensuring that high standards are upheld throughout the research process. It provides the researcher with the background knowledge needed to build a significant and well-structured academic dissertation, acting as the research's basis. A candidate for a postgraduate degree should understand the critical function that a strong literature review plays in postgraduate academic dissertations and why it is necessary for students to pay special attention to this area of their research.

It should be emphasised once more that a strong literature review gives the researcher a comprehensive overview of the available research and reveals any gaps in that research. It provides a thorough overview of the literature that is available and informs the researcher of the work that has already been done and still needs to be done. The researcher can make sure that their research is expanding on the body of knowledge rather than duplicating it or omitting crucial areas of study by doing a thorough and exhaustive literature search.

Setting the research's background requires a strong literature evaluation. It gives the reader the background knowledge and information they need to comprehend the research and its importance. The researcher can show how their study fits into the larger context of the topic and advances knowledge in that area by highlighting the important themes and ideas from the current literature.

In other words, creating a solid and properly supported research approach depends on a thorough and well-justified literature evaluation. Finding appropriate research approaches, methods, and procedures that have been used in prior studies on related themes is made possible by the literature review. Utilising the literature review process gives the researcher a background that allows them to choose a framework that fits their specific research goals while also guaranteeing that the method they choose is valid and dependable.

Additionally, a strong literature review aids the researcher in assessing and critiquing the body of prior research. Researchers will be able to judge the reliability and calibre of the current literature through evaluation and critique. The review will point out any gaps, discrepancies, and inconsistencies in the existing literature and emphasise any areas that need for additional study. The research questions and hypotheses are strengthened as a result of this procedure.

A strong literature evaluation also enables researchers to spot potential areas for further study. The researcher can offer possible research subjects for the future and show how their study has ramifications for the larger field by pointing out gaps in the existing literature. It is crucial to suggest potential areas for future research because it creates a comprehensive foundation for those researchers to build upon.

To sum up, a strong literature review is essential for postgraduate academic dissertations. It is essential for establishing the research's background, expanding on prior knowledge, identifying research gaps, and identifying potential for future studies. Students can make sure that their study is of excellent quality and contributes significantly to their subject by taking the time to create a complete and comprehensive literature review. Neglecting this component of their research will prevent postgraduate students from gaining the critical advantages that a strong literature review offers, which will lead to a subpar dissertation and less of a contribution to the field. Because it is a crucial step in the research process, students must approach their literature review with care, dedication, and rigour.

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## Conflict of Interest

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