# Alternative Format: Conducting a Literature Review

## Landing Page

Welcome and thank you for accessing this toolkit which has been designed to help support you with your academic skills development during your time at Edge Hill.

Click 'Get Started' to start the toolkit from the beginning or alternatively select the most relevant heading(s), from the contents below.

We recommend completing the sections in order, but you are welcome to work through this toolkit in the way that suits you best.

## Accessibility

### Our commitment to accessibility

As an Edge Hill student you are part of an incredibly diverse learning community. As part of our ongoing commitment to ensure an equitable and inclusive learning experience for all students, we have placed accessibility at the heart of UniSkills support, which enables all students to participate.

### Alternative Formats

This is an alternative format for the Conducting a Literature Review toolkit.

## Welcome from UniSkills

**“**Hello, we are the Student Engagement team – otherwise known as UniSkills! We are the people you’ll meet (in real life and online) through various support channels, as we help you develop your academic skills while studying at Edge Hill University. Later in the toolkit you will have the opportunity to explore our wider support**,** but this is your chance to find out more about the team”

Access the video below to hear more about UniSkills and how to use this toolkit from our friendly Student Advisor. Alternatively, you are welcome to access the transcript as a **Word version** or **PDF version**.

# How this toolkit can help

Access this short video**,** featuring one of our friendly academic skills advisors, who will tell you more about why academic writing is important. Alternatively, you are welcome to access the transcript as a **Word version** or **PDF version**.

Top tip: Already received some assignment feedback or wish to jump to a specific word or phrase within this toolkit? You can click on the magnifying glass in the top left-hand corner of the navigation panel to access a search box, search for key terms and learn more about that skill. Depending on the device you are using to access the toolkit, and whether you are in portrait or landscape mode, you might need to click on the 3 lines '≡' in the top left-hand corner of your device to access the search box instead.

## Toolkit objectives:

This toolkit will support you to:

- Recognise the difference between an essay and a literature review.
- Plan and carry out your literature search.
- Evaluate the sources you find.
- Identify an appropriate structure for your literature review.
- Write your literature review.
- Highlight how you can access further help and support from the UniSkills team.

Completing this toolkit supports the following graduate attributes:

- Literacy and Digital Literacy
- Critical Thinking
- Planning and Organisation
- Communication

# The basics: What is a literature review?

A literature review finds and evaluates a number of sources about a topic. In this section we'll build on that simple definition by breaking down the process, key terms and skills you'll need to complete your own literature review.

## What do we mean by literature?

In an academic context, literature means sources of evidence. Exactly what sources are appropriate to focus on in a literature review will vary from subject to subject. It's worth carefully checking any guidance available from your tutors.

## Textbooks

Textbooks on your topic can provide valuable background information such as definitions of key subject terminology, providing a better understanding for you and/or the reader.

Edited books include chapters written by different authors, so may provide varied perspectives on the same topic. A great place to start with textbooks is your online Reading List.

## Research Articles

Perhaps the most common source used for literature reviews is a research article from an academic journal. A research article reports on original primary research. Academic journals focus on specific topics and are usually written by subject experts, academics and professionals.

Many academic journals are peer reviewed, meaning the articles they contain have been quality checked by other subject experts.

Discover More and Subject Resources are both great places to get started with research articles.

Note: Not all journal articles are research articles!

## Fiction

Students in some subject areas may be required to use **fiction books** such as **novels** as sources for a literature review.

## Literature Reviews

You may be able to use existing literature reviews on your topic to inform your own literature review. You should always check with your tutors.

Reading literature reviews on your topic - even as background - will help you become familiar with the style in which they're written, as well as how they're structured. You may also get a sense of any debate or consensus on the topic, which can boost your knowledge, understanding and confidence.

## What do we mean by review?

A literature review shouldn't just summarise what sources have said about a topic. Unlike book or film reviews, which are based on reviewers' subjective opinions and don't necessarily draw on evidence to support those opinions, a literature review should always analyse and evaluate sources - as well as their perspectives on the topic - by citing evidence. In doing so, a literature review builds a more objective viewpoint on a body of evidence, allowing you to arrive at rational conclusions and reasoned value judgements. In practice, this means you will need to cite the main sources of evidence - often primary research articles - as well as additional sources. These additional sources will vary greatly from subject area to subject area, but may include the following:

- Grey literature – for example, newspapers, blogs and podcasts.
- Legislation – for example, an Act of Parliament.
- Information on professional standards, policies or frameworks.

## How is a literature review similar to an essay?

Just like an academic essay, the basic structure of a literature review typically includes:

- An introduction (typically between 5% and 10% of the word count).
- A main body made up of paragraphs (between 80% and 90% of the word count).
- A conclusion (between 5% and 10% of the word count).

When writing a literature review, as when writing an academic essay, the style of writing should be formal. For general support with formal writing, visit our Academic Reading and Writing webpage.

Just like an essay or report, you will be expected to cite sources of evidence throughout.

But it's important to realise essays and literature reviews are very different.

## How is a literature review different to an essay?

**Activity**: A stack of cards that have written statements relating to the objectives of a literature review. The task is to distinguish which statements are true and false.

True:

- To establish the credibility of your project.
- To explain how your project could be a starting point for new research.
- To connect prior research with your own project.
- To demonstrate the breadth and depth of your independent research.
- To demonstrate you have learned from others.
- To analyse and evaluate your chosen sources.
- To summarise selected sources which represent existing knowledge on a topic.

False:

- To exhaustively evaluate all existing knowledge on a topic.
- To spend an equal amount of word count and time on each of your chosen sources.
- To list your sources and explain why you have chosen them.

Top tip: One way in which a literature review is structured differently to an essay is that it may include headings and subheadings for different sections. These make the literature review easier to navigate for readers and may help you as the author when it comes to planning and writing.

A literature review can be a standalone assignment, or may form part of a research project, report or dissertation. As discussed above, some journal articles - known as review articles - are made up of literature reviews. This toolkit has been designed to support you to complete any of these.

**Activity: 'A literature review can be…'** – a list of multiple-choice options (tick all that apply).

- A standalone assignment
- Part of journal article
- Part of a dissertation
- Part of a research project

- Part of a report
- A whole journal article

For additional resources to support your academic writing and critical writing skills, visit the Academic Reading and Writing webpage.

# Familiarise yourself with literature reviews

In this section you can explore example of how literature reviews are typically structured and written to boost your knowledge and confidence.

## Abstracts

Like academic journal articles, example literature reviews you find online are likely to include abstracts. Check guidance from your tutor(s) as you may or may not be required to write an abstract for your own literature review.

## Abstracts – style

Abstracts are written in a direct, concise and informative style. Because of this they might read as dense or concentrated. Their explicit purpose is to provide the reader with a clear overview of the literature review.

Top tip: Try not to be put off by unfamiliar or formal academic language. If you come across a word you don't understand, either try to work out its meaning from contextual clues by reading the sentence it belongs to in full, or alternatively search the word's meaning online.

## Abstracts – structure

Abstracts for literature reviews vary considerably in terms of structure. Some are formatted as a single paragraph. Others feature headings which split the content into succinct statements. E.g. Aims, Design, Methods, Results. Even these headings differ greatly from literature review to literature review.

## Abstracts – structure

Although literature review abstracts are quite different to one another, they often include the following content:

- **Aim(s)** – a single sentence explaining the aim or aims of the literature review.
- **Intended Audience** - a brief statement about who the literature review may be of interest to.

- **Data Sources** - some abstracts clearly state what databases or other sources were used, along with filters used in literature searches.
- **Methods / Approach** - this explains the process used to select the literature and may state how many sources were used. The approach used may also be mentioned here. E.g. Thematic, methodological, hybrid, or chronological.
- **Results or Findings** - a brief summary of the key findings or results, with some context for how these addressed the aim(s).

## Paragraphs

Much like an academic essay, the main body of a literature review should be broken into paragraphs. Using a paragraph framework such as PEEL or SEED can help you write effective paragraphs. PEEL and SEED are very similar, so it's entirely up to you which you prefer. Both PEEL and SEED are explained in the accordion below.

**What's PEEL?**

- **P**oint - a single sentence which introduces a new topic with a simple statement. **E**vidence - several sentences which provide sources to support the point. **E**xplanation - several sentences supporting or challenging what's been mentioned in statement and evidence, placing the information in context. **L**ink - a single sentence to summarise the point(s) of the paragraph, or to signal transition from the current paragraph's topic to the next.

**What's SEED?**

- **S**tatement - a single sentence which introduces a new topic with a simple statement. **E**xpand - several sentences to provide background or context, demonstrating knowledge and understanding. **E**vidence - several sentences to provide further sources of evidence to support or challenge what's been said already. **D**evelop - a single sentence mini conclusion to summarise the key point(s) of the paragraph, to to signal transition from the current paragraph to the next.

## Literature review examples

If you'd like to familiarise yourself with literature reviews further, below are examples from ten different subject disciplines. Alternatively, you can search for literature reviews related to your subject area in **Discover More** or via your **Subject Resources**.

**Biology**

LI, M. ET AL., 2022 The Detection of Pine Wilt Disease: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Molecular Sciences* [online]. 23(18), 10797.

Available from: https://doi.org/10.3390/ijms231810797 [15/08/2024].

**Business, Management and Accountancy**

BROCCARDO, L. ET AL., 2023. How digitalization supports a sustainable business model: A literature review. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* [online]. 187, 122146. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.122146 [15/08/2024].

**Computer Science**

BATTAL, A., AfACAN ADANIR, G. and GÜLBAHAR, Y., 2021. Computer Science Unplugged: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems* [online]. 50(1), pp. 24–47. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/9402607411 [15/08/2024].

**Counselling**

BOERMA, M. ET AL., 2023. Review: Recommendations for male-friendly counselling with adolescent males: A qualitative systematic literature review. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* [online]. 28(4), pp. 536–549. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12633 [15/08/2024].

**Criminology**

VAN ES, R.M.S., KUNST, M.J.J. AND DE KEIJSER, J.W., 2020. Forensic mental health expert testimony and judicial decision-making: A systematic literature review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior* [online]. 51, 101387. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2020.101387 [15/08/2024].

**Geography and Geology**

AMERIT, B. ET AL., 2023. Commercialization of biofuel products: A systematic literature review. *Renewable Energy Focus* [online]. 44, pp. 223–236. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ref.2022.12.008 [15/08/2024].

**Health**

MCCORMICK, S. AND LAMBERSON, J., 2024. Interventions for test anxiety in nursing students: A literature review. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing* [online]. 19(2), pp. e404–e411. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2024.01.005 [15/08/2024].

**Law**

SCHMITTAT, S.M., 2022. Prior Conviction Evidence: Harmful or Irrelevant? A Literature Review. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology: The Official Journal of the Society for Police and Criminal Psychology* [online]. 38(1), pp. 20–37. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-022-09557-z [15/08/2024].

**Social Work**

RUIZ-FIGUEROA, I., MINGUELA, M.Á. AND MUNUERA, P., 2024. A Social Work Analysis of Facilitators of and Barriers to Adopting Technology in Older Adults: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journal of gerontological social work* [online]. 67(5), pp. 639–659. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2024.2339977 [15/08/2024].

**Teacher Training and Education**

NECA, P., BORGES, M.L. AND PINTO, P.C., 2022. Teachers with disabilities: a literature review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* [online]. 26(12), pp. 1192–1210. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1776779 [15/08/2024].

See the Related resources section of this toolkit for additional ways to locate literature reviews, as well as books and other resources to support you to write your own.

# What's your topic?

You might have already been given a specific topic or question as part of a standalone literature review assignment. Alternatively, if your literature review is part of a longer dissertation or research project, you may be required to come up with a suitable topic or research question. Either way, taking time to define your topic will be time well spent.

## How do you define your topic?

When it comes to defining a topic, there's no universal format that works for everyone. Some students like lists. Others prefer mind maps. You may choose to make notes on a device, while some of your peers work best on paper. Choose a format you feel comfortable with, as we all learn differently.

Importantly, don't try to keep all this information in your head. Externalising information helps you to process it.

The questions below can help you decide on a topic, or to investigate and define a topic.

**Ask yourself:**

- What are the keywords or phrases most closely related to my topic?
- What theories or concepts underpin these keywords or phrases?
- Are there any current issues or debates around these?
- What is the scope of my literature review?

You may not be able to answer these questions right away. Some initial reading around a potential topic - or on your chosen topic - can boost your confidence, build subject knowledge and help to demystify terminology or concepts that you find unclear.

**Activity**: Jargon Buster – matching the correct definitions to the words **keyword, concept** and **theory**.

- **Keyword** - a word or phrase used to find information on a topic in a search engine or database.
- **Theory** – an idea which attempts to explain a fact, event, or phenomenon.
- **Concept** – a thought or abstract idea.

Top tip: If you need to come up with a research question, it can be helpful to state this as a problem to be solved. Then try reframing the problem as a question your literature review will investigate different answers to.

# Identify your keywords

Identifying keywords from a literature review can be tricky. Below is a useful process to go through, which will help you begin your search strategy and search databases more efficiently.

There are four specific strategies you can use to identify keywords in an academic text:

- **Title**: Read the title carefully to understand the main focus areas.
- **Subject**: Focus on the main subject or theme.
- **Closely related words**: Consider words and phrases closely related to your specific topic and broader subject area.

- **Synonyms**: Think about synonyms, acronyms and/or alternative terms – noting these alternatives down will help you when you create your search strategy.

## What's not a keyword?

Identifying what's not a keyword involves recognising words or phrases in a title that are not central to the main topic or themes.

Here's some information to help you identify what's not a keyword:

- **Definite and indefinite articles** – words like **the**, **a**, and **an** are not typically keywords.
- **Conjunctions** – words such as **and**, **or**, **but** are usually not keywords.
- **Prepositions** – words like **of**, **in**, **for** are often not keywords.
- **Generic adjectives and adverbs** – words such as **comprehensive**, **recent**, **modern** may not be keywords unless they are crucial for specificity.
- **Redundant terms** – a **Literature Review** is not a keyword (it provides context about the type of study being conducted).
- **Repeated words** – sometimes, words are repeated for emphasis or grammatical reasons, but may not all be keywords.
- **Dates and locations** – unless the specific time period or location is essential to the topic, they may not be keywords.

# How to make a search strategy

A search strategy is a structured approach to searching databases. A search strategy is made up of a combination of keywords, phrases, and filters.

Filters are sometimes referred to as limiters and expanders. This is because they reduce (limit) or increase (expand) the results in a database search.

Common examples of filters are: format, full text, date range, peer reviewed, and language.

## Why make a search strategy?

- A search strategy is an organised way to search an academic database.
- A search strategy can reduce stress levels by make you feel more in control.
- A search strategy is an efficient way to search, saving you time and effort.

- Having a search strategy means you can search multiple databases using the same search string and filters, or by adapting these slightly as necessary.
- A carefully constructed search strategy is likely to yield relevant results.

## Four elements of a search strategy

There are four elements that provide an explanation of a key ingredient or element of a search strategy.

**Identify**

Use the assignment title and Learning Outcomes (LOs) to identify any keywords.

- Make a note of the keywords in whatever format works best for you.
- Keywords can be single words or phrases of two or more words.
- Try to connect the keywords you identify to any closely related concepts or theories, using your own subject knowledge. This may help with building out your search strategy.

**Explore**

Take time to explore alternative terms. By this we mean different ways you might say or write a certain keyword or phrase. Remembering you are a subject specialist, and a database is not helps with this part of making a search strategy.

Examples of alternative terms:

- **Acronyms** - it may be that you can include an acronym in your search strategy. E.g. National Health Service OR NHS. This may broaden the results.
- **US and UK spellings** - the majority of people who speak English as a first language, speak US English. US and UK spellings differ in key ways. E.g. organization and color (US) v organisation and colour (UK). You can include different spellings using the OR Boolean operator, or alternatively in many but not all databases the asterisk wildcard. Boolean operators and wildcards are explained in full later in this lesson.
- **Synonyms** - a keyword or phrase may be referred to using closely related words or phrases that mean the same or a similar thing. Making a note of some of these can help you build out your search strategy. E.g. Ecosystem, habitat, biosphere, ecology.

- **Language differences** - these go beyond different spellings and can depend on lots of different factors. E.g. The same pain-relieving medicine is referred to as Paracetamol in the UK, Europe and many other territories but is called Tylenol in the US and Japan.

A useful resource to explore alternative terms and definitions is CREDO Reference.
Searching CREDO provides multiple encyclopaedia definitions, as well as a mind map feature which displays connected terms.

**Define**

Define your search strategy further by carefully considering the inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria you will use to filter your results. Such filters are sometimes called expanders and limiters.

Examples of inclusion criteria to narrow your search:

- **Format** - E.g. physical book, eBook or article.
- A specific date range – E.g. 2019 to 2024.
- **Full text** – so you don't hit any frustrating paywalls.
- **Location** - E.g. including UK or "United Kingdom" in your search string if you want results from or about the UK can be beneficial.

Exclusion criteria can be tricky to plan for. Often a few initial trial and error searches will give you an idea of any unhelpful or irrelevant results you'd prefer to weed out.

- **Language** - we recommend selecting only languages you are fluent in, as academic articles will be written in a formal academic or scientific tone. Selecting a language or languages can quickly eliminate lots of results written in other languages, narrowing your search.
- **Location** - can be used as an exclusion criterion, for instance when applying the NOT Boolean operator to weed out research written in or about a specific territory. Boolean operators are explained in full later in the lesson.

**Plan Where to Search**

Where to search is an important consideration because you will want reliable and relevant results. Below are typical academic databases you may want to include in your search strategy. The exact nature of the topic you want information on may help you decide which databases are most relevant.

- Discover More

- Journal collections and databases available via your Subject Resources webpage
- Google Scholar

## What should my search strategy look like?

There is no universal format for making a search strategy. If you are recording it informally for yourself, use whatever format works best for you. This could for example be a simple list, orderly mind map, or flowchart. Alternatively, it may be that you're asked to show your search strategy and record the number of results from it in a specified format within your assignment's appendix. In this case, often a table is used which records the databases you searched, key words and expanders/limiters you used, and the number of results each search came up with. This is so in theory someone - another researcher, for instance - could reproduce your searches exactly as you ran them. An example of how you might format a search strategy table is below.

Top tip: Always check your module handbook, year of study handbook or specific assignment guidance from your tutor(s).

| **Database and Date Accessed** | **Search String** | **Filters / Expanders and Limiters** | **Results** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Discover More DD/MM/YYYY | The keywords you used go here, including "**phrasal search**" and **Boolean operators** (AND, OR, NOT). | **Format**: Article, **Full Text**, Peer Reviewed, Date Range: 2019-2024, **Language**: English | **n=** Number of results |
| Google Scholar DD/MM/YYYY | The keywords you used go here, including details of "**phrasal search**" and **Boolean operators** (AND, OR, NOT). | **Format**: Article, **Full Text**, there is no option to filter by Peer Reviewed in Google Scholar, Date Range: 2019-2024, **Language**: English | n= |

Top tip: Academic databases work in similar ways, but they are not identical. For instance, the table above mentions Google Scholar has different filters to Discover More. Even so, a search strategy can help you search multiple databases in an efficient and less time-consuming way. In some cases, it can be useful to comment critically on the differences between databases to show off your evaluation skills.

## How to use phrasal search

If your search strategy includes a keyword which is a phrase of two words or more, using phrasal search can make a significant difference to the number and relevance of search results. Phrasal search makes a difference to your results because instead of searching for two words separately throughout the database in whatever contexts it can find them, phrasal search commands the database to search for the exact phrase - those words together in that order. E.g. Searching "national curriculum" will provide far fewer, more relevant results than searching national curriculum. This means it's always worth using phrasal search as long as the database supports it (most do). You can also use phrasal search multiple times in your search string.

## How to combine keywords

All academic databases include at least three **Boolean operators: AND**, **OR**, and **NOT**. Boolean operators are written in **UPPERCASE** (all capitals). When you search, each Boolean operator commands the database to perform a different operation. Click through the tabs below to investigate Boolean operators and how they can help you refine your search strategy.

**AND**

AND narrows your search. It's really useful if you are getting a huge number of search results. When you use AND, sources must include both of your keywords to be included in your search results. AND is probably the most commonly used Boolean operator.

- E.g. nursing AND communication will not return results which only mention nursing or only mention communication.
- E.g. - searching "nineteenth century" AND Victorian AND science means the source must mention nineteenth century, Victorian and science.

As the second example above suggests, you can use more than one Boolean operator in your search string, and you can also use phrasal search with Boolean operators.

**OR**

OR broadens your search. A helpful way to think of this is either/or. OR is especially useful when using the alternative terms, synonyms or related concepts from earlier in this lesson if you aren't getting enough search results.

- E.g. “inclusive learning" OR "adaptive teaching".
- E.g. volcano OR volcanic.
- E.g. nurse OR nursing.
- E.g. “early years” OR “early childhood”.

As the above examples suggest, phrasal search can be used with the OR Boolean operator. OR can also be used more than once in a search string.

**NOT**

NOT excludes a word or phrase from your search results. NOT can be very useful in removing irrelevant sources from your search results. It can also help you differentiate between connected terms, allowing you to be really specific. NOT will include the first term you use and exclude the second. It isn’t always possible to remove every irrelevant source from your search results, but NOT can help reduce them significantly. NOT is probably the hardest Boolean operator to plan to use. Sometimes your initial trial and error searches will suggest irrelevant sources you can eliminate by using NOT as part of your search strategy.

- E.g. teaching NOT “primary education”.
- E.g.: “end of life” NOT “palliative care”.
- E.g. “streaming movies” NOT cinema.

As the above examples suggest, phrasal search can be use with the NOT Boolean operator. The NOT Boolean operator can also be combined with other the AND or OR Boolean operators in a search string.

# Search the literature

Running efficient literature searches in academic databases is a key part of conducting a literature review. In this section we'll explore some of the resources available to Edge Hill students, with activities designed to help you practise literature searching.

## Discover More

Discover More is a great place to start searching for relevant literature upon which to base your literature review. It's not subject-specific, so refining your search results is important. Using a combination of keywords, Boolean operators, and phrasal search, enter a search string. For example: "corporate social responsibility" AND "brand reputation". Other considerations are included in the accordion below.

### Filters

When you enter your search string in Discover More, and your search results are displayed, you can immediately **refine** these further using the **filters** down the left hand side.

Typical **filters** in a Discover More literature search might include:

- **Format** - select your preferred source type. E.g. Print Book, eBook, or article.
- **Content Type** - options include Full Text or Open Access, Non-Fiction and Peer-Reviewed. These terms are explained below.
- **Publication Year** - it's always best to specify a custom year range manually in Discover More, rather than relying on the pre-set options.
- **Language** - select the language(s) your sources are written in. It's easy to overlook but excluding alternative languages can help refine the number of search results.

### Systematic searching

If your assignment requires you to include evidence of your search strategy, often referred to as systematic searching, you should make a note of the number of search results once you've applied the filters.

### Advanced search

A basic Discover More search will search for your keywords in the sources' titles by default. Use the Advanced Search function, which is accessed from the top left directly below the Edge Hill University logo, to give yourself more options, such as Search Index.

**Activity: Trial and Error** - before you commit yourself to a precise search strategy, it can be useful to try out one or two initial trial and error test searches. This can help you to further refine your search strategy.

**Saving your searches in Discover More**

- Once you're happy with the search string you're using, sign in at the top right hand corner of Discover More.
- You can now save your search, including the search string, any filters you have applied, and your results, by clicking the purple Save Search heart icon.
- Alternatively, use the Save button in the top right of each result to add individual results to Saved Items.
- From Saved Items, you can create a list. A list works just like a folder, keeping your search results as organised as you want or need them to be.
- To get back to your saved searches, saved items, or saved lists at any time, just log-in to Discover More and access the drop-down menu which appears under your name in the top right corner.

## Subject Resources

Accessing your Subject Resources is a fantastic way of quickly locating academic databases relevant to your subject area or field of study. Although each database or journal collection in Subject Resources looks different, they all work in similar ways. This means you may be able to enter exactly the same search string in Discover More and other databases, but you will likely need to make slight adjustments to the filters you select.

**Additional resources tab in Subject Resources**

Your Subject Resources webpage includes a tab for additional resources, such as Statista and Sage Research Methods.

**Statista** provides statistics on a topic you specify, working much like a search engine.

**Sage Research Methods** can demystify various aspects of research, including qualitative and quantitative methods, data collection, ethics, and more. Both of these can be valuable resources when it comes time to define, explain, quantify, analyse or evaluate your chosen literature.

## Google Scholar

An academic database which is freely available online, Google Scholar can provide relevant results as part of a literature search. It has several features to recommend it, as well as a key limitation. We'll break these down below so you can make best use of Google Scholar.

- **Cited By** - under each search result, the Cited By hyperlink gives you instant access to other sources which have cited that result. This can be a quick way of building up supporting literature, or in some cases additional literature which challenges your chosen articles. Either can be useful in a literature review, as no matter what approach you take, it will involve analysis and evaluation.
- **Related Articles** - next to Cited By, Related Articles is another hyperlink under each search result that provides a further list of hyperlinked results. As with Cited By, this can be a quick way of building up a supporting evidence base for your chosen articles.
- **All Versions** - Google Scholar also provides access, where available, to different versions of search results. For instance, an article may have begun life as a conference paper, then become an online pre-print article, before being published in a journal.
- **Library Links** - Switching on Library Links in Google Scholar displays a column of hyperlinks to the right of your search results. These links provide alternative access to sources EHU staff and students have subscriptions for. In some cases this allows full text access, where Google Scholar does not. To switch on Library Links click on the top left menu with three horizontal lines. Select Settings. Select Library Links. Type in Edge Hill University if it doesn't already appear and hit the magnifying glass button. Select Edge Hill University from the results.

Google Scholar does not have a filter to refine results to only peer-reviewed articles. As a workaround, using the Library Links access explained above can sometimes help you identify if an article is peer-reviewed.

**Save items in Google Scholar** – to save a citation in Google Scholar, you need to be logged in to your Google account. Then, select Save immediately below the search result. Once saved, you can access your saved citations from My Library, located in the top right corner of Google Scholar.

## Additional sources of information

It's likely you will need to include additional sources of information to support the chosen sources which make up the focus of your literature review. Additional sources can provide foundational information, fresh perspectives, supporting evidence, critique, context, professional standards, underpinning legislation, and more. These additional sources, including grey literature, should be included in your references as with a typical essay. However, if you've been asked to include a record of your search strategy, for example as a table in the appendices, your additional sources would not typically be included here.

# Types of Literature Review

There are various different types of literature review. In this section we will explore four of the most common types. Each of these types focuses on analysing specific aspects from the sources of literature you gather. It's important to know what type of literature review you're doing before you begin to evaluate the sources, so your evaluation is focused in the right places.

Top tip: Check any guidance documents provided by your tutors or supervisor, as these may specify what type of literature review you should do. If this is unclear after reading the information in the accordion below, you might benefit from contacting your tutor / supervisor for further advice.

## Thematic

A thematic literature review analyses and evaluates research based on identified key topics or themes. This approach allows for a more cohesive and comprehensive understanding of the literature on a given topic by focusing on the major themes that emerge across multiple studies. A thematic approach can be useful for identifying trends as well as any gaps in research. These can be used to recommend future research.

For example, in a thematic literature review analysing the impacts of social media use, themes might include:

- Positive uses of social media
- Cyberbullying and online harassment
- Concerns around mental health such as anxiety and depression
- Issues of self-esteem and body image

Put simply, you will need to identify sources which include themes relevant to your own research question or topic.

Although several sources may feature the same themes, they won't necessarily agree about them. This disagreement or discourse around the themes is vital when you discuss and evaluate the sources. You might ask yourself:

- Why do the sources disagree? What is the disagreement based upon?
- Is the alternative perspective on the topic credible or insightful?
- Is there a clear consensus on the topic, with an insignificant number of outliers?

## Methodological

Methodological literature reviews evaluate how research studies have been conducted. A methodological approach means you must carefully examine the techniques, tools, procedures, and research designs employed by researchers, so that you can evaluate their effectiveness, strengths, weaknesses, and suitability for the research questions they aim to address.

To help break that down you might ask the following questions:

- What is the research design? E.g. qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.
- How has data been gathered? This is the methodology. E.g. interviews or surveys.
- Is the methodology appropriate for answering the research aims?
- Is the methodology reliable? Does it produce accurate results?
- Is the combination of research design and methodology typical?
- When was the research study conducted? Is it current or not?
- What's the sample size? This is the number of participants.
- How do the different studies' methodologies compare? How are they different?
- How diverse is the population / sample? E.g. age, ethnicity.
- How might population diversity (or lack thereof) impact the study's results?
- What are the results or findings?
- Do the results seem accurate?
- Do the authors acknowledge any limitations? How might these have affected the results?
- Are there any noticeable gaps in data? Are these explained?
- How do the results from each study compare?
- How generalisable or scalable are the results?
- Was the research conducted in an ethical way?
- Can you identify any possible biases? Do these undermine the study?

## Hybrid

It may be that you've been asked to produce a literature review that isn't neatly thematic or methodological. Rather, it's a blend of both these approaches. You may, for instance, need to analyse the methodologies used in your chosen research studies, but then also discuss the themes that emerge from the literature.

This may seem confusing, so let's break it down further with a possible structure:

- Introduction - state the scope and objectives of the literature review.
- Initially, to aid clarity and focus, keep thematic and methodological sections separate.
- Identify key themes.
- Summarise key findings about each theme.
- Identify the research design and methodology used in each study.
- What are the strengths and limitations of each methodology?
- Later sections will weave together the thematic and methodological approaches.
- How do different methodologies address the same themes?
- Does the choice of methodology impact thematic findings?
- Consider the broader social, cultural, or temporal context. E.g. How might a specific situation impact the choice or efficacy of the methodology, or how effectively the themes were addressed?
- How generalisable or scalable are the results?
- Recommendations - were there underexplored themes which would benefit from further research? Are there improvements you can suggest to the methodology?
- Conclusion – summarise the key insights from both your thematic and methodological analyses.

## Chronological

A chronological literature review organises sources in the order they were published. This approach:

- Highlights the development of knowledge and ideas within a particular field over time.
- Makes clear how knowledge has built upon previous findings, significant breakthroughs and ongoing debates.
- Allows readers to understand how theories, methodologies, and findings have developed and influenced each other.
- Offers a clear timeline of academic progress.
- Identifies key milestones, trends, and shifts in attitudes and/or understanding.

As the chronological approach is all about when key changes took place, you may benefit from creating a timeline to help locate the potential sources of evidence. This could be on paper, but if you prefer working digitally, SmartArt in Word can be used to plot timelines. Office 365 also includes an app named Whiteboard, which can be used to create cause and effect diagrams.

If you use a chronological approach, you may need to consider:

- Do your chosen sources include the most significant works and key publications within the timeframe? If major contributions are omitted, this could lead to gaps in understanding developments within the field.
- Will the sources help you present a clear and logical timeline of developments? The sequence should be easy to follow, and each study should be placed in historical context. This helps readers appreciate the circumstances influencing the research.
- The significance of each source, its impact on subsequent research, and any controversies or debates it may have sparked.
- How each source builds on or diverges from previous research.

Further reading: Part 1 of the 2021 eBook How to Write Your Literature Review by Bryan Greetham explains different types of literature reviews in more depth.

# How to evaluate the literature

In this section we'll explore strategies for evaluating the sources you find in your literature searches, so you can make informed decisions about what evidence to include in your literature review.

## Scoping the literature

The initial way to evaluate sources you find is scoping. At this stage you do not need to read the entire source. Asking the following questions as you search can help inform you whether or not these sources could form the basis of your literature review or provide support or critique as additional sources of evidence.

- Does the title closely match your keywords?
- Do the source's keywords closely match those from your search string?
- Looking at the date of publication, is the source definitely current or appropriate to your specified date range?
- From superficially skim reading the abstract, does it seem relevant to your topic?
- Is the source peer-reviewed, if this is essential to your literature review?
- Are the authors experts in their field? Can you check their qualifications and/or affiliations?

Top tip: Asking these scoping questions should filter out some irrelevant or less credible results.

## Take it easy

If some of the potential sources seem complex or difficult to read, try scoping the easier ones first. This can help you make progress quickly, building your confidence and boosting your subject knowledge before you go back to tackle the more challenging sources.

## On closer inspection

For each academic journal article you want to scope, focus on the abstract, introduction and conclusion. Depending on your discipline, it may be that discussion or findings sections take the place of the conclusion. At this stage, you still don't need to read the whole source. Below are key strategies and terms for scoping the abstract, introduction and conclusion.

**Abstract**

As an overview, the abstract is packed with lots of information in a condensed form. Here you will likely find what was researched, where and when the research took place, as well as how and why the research was conducted.

**What?**

Simply put, what were the aims of the research? Can you paraphrase these as a single sentence? A useful technical term is coverage. Coverage means the range of topics or concepts the author covers in the article. Coverage indicates what the author discusses or analyses, and in what depth. Does the coverage match your research question, topic or themes closely enough for you to use this article?

What academic or professional discipline(s) do the researchers come from? Do these match your own field of study? Are they likely to provide insightful alternative perspectives?

The abstract may provide a summary of key research findings. This might be placed in context in the text or presented as numerical data. Do the findings seem relevant to your own literature review?

**Where?**

The location where the research took place can be very important due to legal and ethical implications. Recall the guidance on building a search strategy from step 2. Perhaps you tried to weed out research from certain territories or tried to focus on research conducted in a single country. Check to make sure the location is relevant to your own topic. Check where the researchers are based, as not all

researchers conduct research in territories where they live and work. For instance, researchers based in the UK could have conducted research in China, or vice versa.

**When?**

Your initial scoping of the basic bibliographic information may have already established when the article was published, but the abstract may reveal specifically when the research took place. These dates may be different, as publication in an academic journal can take a considerable amount of time. Considering this can help you work out an article's currency.

**How?**

Authors may specify inclusion and exclusion criteria they used to define the scope of their coverage. This helps you identify what aspects have been included in the analysis and what has been left out, ready to compare and contrast with other articles. It's helpful to think back to step 2 here, in which we discussed how you can develop a search strategy. The author(s) are describing their own search strategy - even if they don't use that specific term.

The abstract will typically explain whether research was qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. This is usually referred to as the research design. In some instances, the abstract will also detail what research methodology was used. E.g. interviews, or a survey. This can help you quickly identify articles which used a certain research design or methodology, and decide to include them in your literature review, or alternatively weed them out at this stage.

Beyond research design and methodology, the abstract may provide additional details such as how data was sampled, who the participants were and how many participants were used, as well as ethical approval and other ethical considerations.

**Why?**

As mentioned above under What? an abstract will ordinarily describe the aims of the research. Often it will also explain why the research was necessary, what gap in research it sought to fill, who might benefit from it, and who the intended audience for the research is.

When making decisions about what sources to include in your literature review, it's important to remember the articles don't need to be perfect. Peculiarities, inaccuracies or omissions can be useful for you to unpick and unpack later when you analyse and evaluate them more fully.

## Introduction

Scoping the abstract may have helped you eliminate some potential sources.
Now scoping the introduction should provide more depth and detail about each of the headings used to scope the abstract and may provide additional details too. Rather than repeating each of the headings, below we have included examples of what additional information you might be able to find - as well as how that information can help you decide whether the source is a good fit for your literature review or not.

### Quality of Writing

Is the introduction well-written? Is it clear or difficult to understand? Is it structured in a logical way?

### Concepts or Themes

Check if the introduction mentions important concepts or themes, and whether these match or differ from your own focus.

### Theoretical Framework

Does the introduction mention any key theories which underpin or relate to the research? Do these seem familiar to you, or are they unfamiliar? Do they seem relevant to your topic?

### Historical Context

The introduction may provide some historical background for the research. This can help to identify pre-existing research gaps or problems, as well as contextualising the research in relation to what's gone before in a field of study. This is particularly important if you decide to adopt
a chronological approach to your own literature review.

### Literature Review

It's possible the article's introduction will include a literature review or summarise the findings of one. Does this provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the state of current research in the topic? Or does it mention specific examples of current research? Even if this article doesn't end up being used as part of your literature review, you might be able to find useful additional sources from this section.

### Research Question or Hypothesis

Does the introduction include a clearly articulated research question, or alternatively a hypothesis? Do either of these fit well with your own aims and topic?

**Future Research or Practice**

Does the introduction mention any recommendations for future research or practice?

**Conclusion**

**Findings**

What are the main findings or results? How closely do they fit with your research question or topic? Bear in mind, they don't have to agree with your opinion of the topic. Including articles with varied results will allow you to compare and contrast effectively when you evaluate them fully. Asking the following question about each article can help you build up a mental map of which articles agree, and which disagree: Do these findings support or contradict my research question on the topic?

**Interpretation**

Is the conclusion logically supported by the data and analysis? How have the authors interpreted their findings? Consider the interpretation and implications of the results. Do the authors offer valuable perspectives or contribute to your understanding of the topic? Are there any obvious shortcomings or apparent biases in how they've interpreted the data? Remember, you're not looking for perfect research articles that agree on everything. Being able to discuss suspected biases is a valuable part of your evaluation.

**Limitations**

Identify any limitations acknowledged by the authors to understand the reliability of the study's findings.

**Practical Applications**

Do the authors identify any practical applications or implications of the findings and their relevance to real-world contexts related to your topic?

For further UniSkills support with evaluating sources, access the Academic Reading and Writing webpage.

# How to organise sources

In this section we'll cover strategies and tools for managing bibliographic information as well as organising information from your sources of evidence. It's important to be organised when dealing with a large number of sources, so that the sheer amount of information, concepts and arguments don't become overwhelming.

For referencing information and support, visit the **Referencing** webpage. Your **Subject Resources** webpage also includes a tab with details on referencing.

## Reference Management Software (RMS)

An important part of organising your sources is keeping track of them so you can find them easily whenever you need them. It's possible you'll be using more sources for your literature review than for previous assignments, especially if your literature review forms part of a longer project. EndNote, Mendeley, RefWorks and Zotero are different examples of Reference Management Software (RMS), which can help you record sources as you go along and can make referencing sources less time-consuming.

Top tip: Using Reference Management Software is no substitute for knowing how to reference. In fact, you'll need that knowledge to check the reference list generated by the RMS in case of any errors.

**RefWorks**

- Edge Hill students can sign up for a free RefWorks account.
- The RefWorks Guide can provide further support setting up your account and using RefWorks effectively - it's available from our Referencing webpage.
- You can also book an Information Skills one-to-one appointment for help setting up RefWorks.
- RefWorks can quickly generate reference lists or bibliographies in many different referencing formats. E.g. Edge Hill Harvard, APA, Vancouver.
- The Save to RefWorks button can be added to your bookmarks / favourites bar so you can grab referencing information for sources whilst online.
- RefWorks Citation Manager (RCM) is an add-on for Microsoft Word, which allows users to instantly add in-text citations as they write and generates a reference list based on what sources have been cited in the document.
- If you upload a PDF to RefWorks, for instance an academic journal article, you can annotate it directly in RefWorks with your own notes and highlights.

## Alternatives to Reference Management Software

If you don't want to use RMS, many academic databases offer features to make managing sources more efficient. Three examples are explained below.

**Managing bibliographic information in Discover More**

- You can instantly generate bibliographic information in Discover More in five formats using the Cite button to the right of a search result.
- Using the Cite button allows you to export bibliographic information directly into RMS, including RefWorks and EndNote.
- Discover More doesn't generate an exact match for Edge Hill Harvard format.
- Remember to check for errors and inconsistencies!
- When logged into Discover More, you can save your search string, filters, and search results together by using the purple heart Save Search icon.
- When logged into Discover More, you can save individual search results using the Save button. This adds results to your Saved Items.
- When logged into Discover More, you can save search results in one convenient place by clicking Saved Items and then Create List.
- To access your saved lists, saved items, or saved searches, make sure you're logged in and then use the top right drop-down menu under your name.

**Managing bibliographic information in Google Scholar**

- You can instantly generate bibliographic information in five formats using the Cite button below the title of each search result in Google Scholar.
- Using the Cite button also allows you to export bibliographic information directly into RMS, including EndNote and RefWorks.
- Remember to check the formatting for any errors or inconsistencies!
- Google Scholar doesn't generate an exact match for Edge Hill format.
- You can save individual search results by using the Save button below the title of each search result, as long as you have a Google account.

**Managing bibliographic information in Online Journal Articles**

- When accessing online journal articles via the academic databases in your Subject Resources, many will include a button or link to help instantly cite the source.

- This can save you time.
- Make sure you are organised when saving sources and/or bibliographic information.
- Simple, descriptive file and folder names can help keep you organised.
- As with Discover More and Google Scholar, make sure you check the formatting for any errors or inconsistencies!

## Managing bibliographic information on paper

Some students prefer to keep track of sources on paper. This strategy is fine, as long as you're organised and clear about what information you need to capture. If you're unsure, it's best to check what referencing system your programme uses. E.g. Edge Hill Harvard, MHRA, APA, Vancouver. Be sure to check out the **Plan to Be Critical** section below for a way to make the most of your sources.

## Organising your ideas

As well as keeping the bibliographic information about your sources organised, we strongly recommend keeping information from your sources of evidence organised too. By this, we mean keeping track of any key points, themes, statements, arguments, underpinning theories, statistics, research methods or other evidence that you'll want to make use of when writing your literature review. Organising information in this way helps with structure and planning.

Top tip: A key academic skill when producing a literature review is synthesis. When you begin to build connections between sources, you synthesise them. For example, 'the authors of Articles 1 and 2 may agree on a topic, while the author(s) of Article 3 disagree.' Note: Although this example refers to Articles 1 to 3, you should check guidance or speak to your tutors about how to refer to your main sources.

## Plan to be critical

One efficient strategy for organising information from sources is the plan to be critical, which:

- Includes bibliographic information for each source.
- You can build upon over hours, days, weeks or months as needed.
- Pulls together information that's usually in several different places.
- Creates an overview.
- Invites you to compare and contrast sources.
- Helps focus your analysis with headings.
- Is adaptable for your own specific topic(s).

- Can include thematic and methodological information.
- Makes connections to your Learning Outcomes clear.
- Includes a column for your own critical notes.

## Exemplar plan to be critical resource

Below is an example plan to be critical. Ideally, when creating your own, you should make sure your assignment title or research question is prominently displayed alongside the table, with your Learning Outcomes. These can help you focus and may stop you from going off on a tangent, which is easy to do when dealing with complex tasks and lots of information.

Top tip: Highlighting themes from your Learning Outcomes (LOs) in different colours can help build connections or differentiate sources at a glance.

## Mind maps

If the Plan to Be Critical isn't for you, perhaps you could instead produce mind maps to help organise your sources. On screen or paper, mind maps reveal relationships between concepts, making them ideal for analysing sources of evidence for your literature review.

There are benefits to using mind maps at this stage, as they:

- simplify and summarise complex information, aiding processing and memory;
- prompt critical thinking as you question hierarchies and relationships;
- can help you focus on specific themes or concepts;

Mind maps can be used to organise information in specific ways, such as:

- questions you have about a source;
- which sources connect to which themes;
- which sources agree on a topic;
- gaps in current research;
- which sources use a particular research design. E.g. Qualitative.

# How to write your literature review

In this section we'll explore the process of planning, drafting, editing, and proofreading so you can approach writing your literature review with confidence.

## Planning your literature review

A blank page or screen can be off-putting, but you likely won't be starting with nothing. From the other sections in this toolkit, you may already have created several useful resources.

- The basics - a clear definition of what a literature review is.
- Your topic and keywords - a defined topic and/or research question.
- How to make a search strategy - a search strategy.
- Search the literature - results from your literature searches.
- Types of literature reviews - a clear idea of the approach to follow.
- How to evaluate the literature - analysis, evaluation and scoping tips.
- How to organise your sources - the Plan to Be Critical table, mind maps or notes in your preferred format.

Top tip: There are lots of strategies for planning a piece of writing, so choose the one that feels right for you. Mind maps, essay frames with headings and bullet points, or simple lists are all useful ways to break down the content and make writing your literature review more manageable.

## Writing and rewriting your literature review

After coming up with a plan for your overall structure, it can be beneficial to write a first draft. This will be refined through editing into a final draft.

**Tips for writing your introduction**

Unless otherwise stated by guidance from your tutors, a typical introduction should be between 5% and 10% of the overall word count. As with essays, you may find it helpful to write a loose **first draft** frame or skeleton of your introduction, then come back to it and flesh it out once you've written your main body and conclusion. One way to create a skeleton is with **bullet points**. A literature review is usually written in third person perspective.

An introduction for a literature review should:

- include background information on the topic to provide context;
- explain the significance of the topic and why it is worth reviewing;
- state the research question if you have one;
- define the objectives and scope of the literature review, including key themes or topics;
- highlight any gaps in existing literature the review will investigate;

- mention the inclusion and exclusion criteria you used to select relevant literature;
- outline the structure of the literature review;
- suggest what potential contribution, value or insights your literature review could add to literature on the topic or professional practice.

**Tips for writing about your search strategy**

If you're producing a methodological or hybrid literature review, you should consider including a paragraph which explains your search strategy. Rather than simply describing the search terms you used, try to explain any search tips you used and how they helped to refine your search results. E.g. Peer reviewed, phrasal search or Boolean operators.

If you've been asked to include a table in your Appendices to detail systematic searching, you can refer to it here. E.g. See Appendix A.

Sage Research Methods can provide useful sources of evidence when you are explaining different aspects of your search strategy.

**Tips on paragraph structure**

Using a methodical approach to paragraph structure can help develop your academic writing. PEEL and SEED are both paragraph frames which break up paragraphs in very similar ways.

**P**oint - a single sentence which introduces a new topic with a simple statement.

**E**vidence - several sentences which provide sources to support the point.

**E**xplanation - several sentences supporting or challenging what's been mentioned in statement and evidence, placing the information in context.

**L**ink - a single sentence to summarise the point(s) of the paragraph, or to signal transition from the current paragraph's topic to the next.

**S**tatement - a single sentence which introduces a new topic with a simple statement.

**E**xpand - several sentences to provide background or context, demonstrating knowledge and understanding.

**E**vidence - several sentences to provide further sources of evidence to support or challenge what's been said already.

**D**evelop - a single sentence mini conclusion to summarise the key point(s) of the paragraph, to to signal transition from the current paragraph to the next.

## Tips for writing your main body

If you've been given specific sections to include by your tutors, you should follow that guidance. Otherwise, the main body of a literature review will depend on which approach you've chosen. E.g. Thematic, methodological, hybrid, or chronological. Regardless of the approach, the main body of any literature review should be analytical and evaluative. In addition, a main body tends to include:

- The theoretical framework you used. This means defining the relevant theories and concepts, as well as any key subject-specific terminology;
- Any gaps you identified by reviewing the literature, and the implications of these gaps;
- What future research could resolve any gaps you identified;
- Limitations acknowledged by the researchers, as well as any you identified;
- Strengths and weaknesses of the studies you chose to review;
- A discussion which considers the implications of your findings for the field of study or professional practice;
- If you had a research question, how the findings relate to it.

**Tips for writing your conclusion**

A typical conclusion is between 5% and 10% of your word count. Writing in a methodical way using the PEEL or SEED paragraph frames provides a mini conclusion at the end of each paragraph. This is helpful when you come to write your final conclusion, which should recap over key insights.

The conclusion may also consider what potential contribution the literature review might make to the field of study or professional practice. For example, based on the limitations and any gaps you identified in the literature, what types of future research would be recommended? Or in the case of professional practice, what recommendations can be made to improve policies or procedures in future?

- As in an essay's conclusion, you shouldn't introduce new sources here.
- You can cite sources you previously mentioned.

- The content of your conclusion will depend on which approach you took. E.g. Thematic or methodological.

## Synthesis is a key academic skill

Synthesis is about making connections between sources. It is vital no matter what approach you take to your literature review. Synthesis helps:

- make a cohesive narrative out of your different sources;
- identify patterns or trends you wouldn't notice when reviewing a single source;
- pinpoint gaps in existing literature;
- provide a more comprehensive view of the topic;
- enhance your understanding of the topic;
- show conclusions are credible because they are based on a wide range of evidence;
- facilitate analysis and evaluation of multiple sources.

### How to cite synthesis

How you cite sources will depend on the specific referencing style you are using. E.g. Harvard, Vancouver, APA, MHRA.

If using Harvard, you can cite multiple sources in a single bracket by splitting them with semi-colons. E.g. (Adebayo et al., 2023; Gardiner and Kaminsky, 2022; Zhao, 2024).

Visit the Referencing webpage for further guidance on citing multiple sources.

### Synthesis tips and examples

Sources don't need to agree on everything, or deal with themes or data in precisely the same ways for you to synthesise them. To help get you started, below are three generic examples of how to frame sentences to include synthesis:

1. Articles 1 and 2 both explore X, albeit from different perspectives…
2. Whereas Article 1 highlights the benefits of X, Article 2 discusses the challenges associated with X…
3. Article 1 emphasises the importance of X in relation to the topic. Conversely, Articles 2 and 3 indicate…

Note: Although the examples above refer to generic numbered articles, you should check guidance or speak with your tutor about the preferred way to mention your core sources in the body of your literature review.

Top tip: After you've completed the first draft of the main body and conclusion, you can return to the introduction to clarify the literature review's content and structure.

### Editing and proofreading

For tips on editing and proofreading your literature review, visit the Academic Reading and Writing webpage.

# UniSkills Support at Edge Hill University

As well as our toolkits, there are many ways you can access support for your academic skills development. No question or query is too big or too small. Whether you are new to studying or need to refresh or develop skills, we have a range of options for you to access at both graduate and postgraduate taught level.

### Webpages

Reach your potential and visit our UniSkills web pages**.** Find out more about the support designed to help you develop your academic skills and confidence at university and beyond.  Whatever your subject or level of study, UniSkills has something to offer.

### Workshops and webinars

UniSkills workshops and webinars are an opportunity for a deeper dive into a specific skill that will support you on your academic journey**.** Facilitated by our friendly and knowledgeable Academic Skills Advisors, these sessions provide an informal safe space where you will be supported alongside other students in a small group setting.

### Appointments

All students are able to book a one-to-one appointment. Our experienced Academic Skills Advisors can help you develop your academic skills and strategies throughout your time at university. One-to-one support is available on a wide range of topics including academic reading, writing and referencing, finding information**,** and preparing your assignment for submission**.**

## AskUs

For any questions across any of our library and learning services**,** you can Ask Us online.

## Campaigns

Explore our year-round UniSkills campaigns to enhance your academic journey at Edge Hill. From pre-arrival prep to acing your exams, we've got something for everyone!

# Related Resources

## Books on writing a literature review

In the accordion below are hyperlinked books on writing a literature review. These include books on dissertation writing. All of these books are available as eBooks via Discover More.

**Books on literature reviews (general)**

BOOTH, A., SUTTON, A, CLOWES, M. AND MARTYN-ST JAMES, M., 2022. *Systematic approaches to a successful literature review* [eBook]. Third edition. Los Angeles: SAGE. https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1276799237.

EFRON, S.E. AND RAVID, R., 2019. *Writing the literature review: a practical guide*. New York: The Guilford Press. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1055267226.

GREETHAM, B., 2021. *How to write your literature review* [eBook]. London: Bloomsbury. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1164109666.

See **section 6** of GREETHAM, B., 2019. *How to write your undergraduate dissertation* [eBook]. Third edition. London: Red Globe Press. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1140154492.

MACHI, L.A. AND MCEVOY, B.T., 2022. *The literature review: six steps to success* [eBook]. Fourth edition. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1288671357.

**Books on literature reviews (subject-specific)**

AVEYARD, H., 2023. *Doing a literature review in health and social care: a practical guide* [eBook]. Fifth edition. Maidenhead: Open University Press. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1374431207.

See **chapter 3** of DURKIN, D.B., 2021. *Writing Strategies for the Education Dissertation* [eBook]. Milton: Taylor & Francis Group. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1204141278.

HANTON, S. AND MELLALIEU, S.D., 2015. *Literature reviews in sport psychology* [eBook]. New York: Nova Science Publishers. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1251401425.

KITELEY, R. AND STOGDON, C., 2014. *Literature Reviews in Social Work* [eBook]. Los Angeles: SAGE. Available at: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/859182979.

See **chapter 12** of WALLIMAN, N. AND BUCKLER, S., 2016. *Your dissertation in education* [eBook]. Second edition. Los Angeles: SAGE. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/976441594.

WILLIAMSON, G.R. AND WHITTAKER, A., 2020. *Succeeding in literature reviews and research project plans for nursing students* [eBook]. Fourth edition. London: Learning Matters. Available from: https://edgehill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/1129201836.

## Books on writing a literature review

In addition to searching Discover More for books and eBooks on literature reviews or literature review articles, you can also use the browse journals toggle on the Discover More landing page to access journals via BrowZine.

## Subject Resources

Searching for academic journal articles or existing literature reviews via the academic databases available from your Subject Resources webpage can support you in writing your own literature review.

## Methods Map in Sage Research Methods

The Methods Map resource in Sage Research Methods is an online interactive visualisation which can provide useful information, prompts and sources to support your literature review.

## Support with systematic reviews

Although UniSkills doesn't provide support with systematic reviews, information and support is available from the Research Support webpages.

## Useful Links

This resource from Manchester Academic Phrasebank can help with the ‘phraseological ‘nuts and bolts’ of academic writing.'

You can find our other toolkits on your UniSkills webpages.

## UniSkills blogs

UniSkills write regular blogs, including a monthly focus on library resources and academic skills**.** In these quick reads you can learn about useful resources, how to access them and their benefits to your studies. You might even find us exploring new ways of thinking!

## Other Resources

Check out LinkedIn Learning for access to free, unlimited access to thousands of high-quality online courses and video tutorials written by industry experts.

# Keep in touch

## Library and Learning Services Instagram

Make sure you're following us over on Instagram for all the latest Library and Learning Services news, events and support: @EHULibrary

You'll discover: weekly what's on stories; reminders about upcoming campaigns and events; fun, interactive polls and competitions; hidden treasures from our Archive; and reading for pleasure recommendations.

## Library and Learning Services Blog

In the Library and Learning Services (LS) blog you'll find lots of information, ideas and support curated by a wide range of staff and students from across the service.

Browse through all our useful blogs via the Home tab or visit individual areas of interest via the sub-blog headings along the menu bar.

# Your views count

Thank you for engaging with this toolkit.

We'd love to know what you thought, and you can share your feedback in our short UniSkills Toolkit Satisfaction Survey. The survey should take you no longer than five minutes to complete.

Your feedback helps us to continually improve our support - thank you!

You have now completed this UniSkills toolkit and can close the window. We hope you found it useful, and we look forward to continuing to support you with your academic skills development.