

Literature Review

The purpose of a literature review is to look at what has been done and use that information to design new research on the 'blank spots or blind spots' - the things that might be missing or the things we don't see. Below is some extracts from an example of a very short literature review for an undergraduate assignment. As you progress into Honours, Masters or a Higher Degree by Research, you will be expected to write much longer and more detailed reviews.

Sample literature review

Assignment instructions:

You are required to research 18 year olds and their voting patterns in Australia since 2004. Have there been any changes and what are the possible reasons for this? Consult 10 texts and include them in your List of References. Use the Harvard style of referencing. Word limit: 1,000

Student literature review	Purpose
Introduction (extract)	
<p>In recent years, there has been increasing speculation that young people are progressively disengaging from the democratic process. The voting patterns of 18 year olds is a neglected topic in academic research, but there are a number of recent studies that shed light on whether Australian 18 year olds' voting habits are changing and the reasons for the changes. In this paper, the reasons for these changes will be explored through an analysis of qualitative and quantitative studies that investigate voting patterns and behaviours amongst first-time voters. The review will draw on research conducted over the three Australian election cycles, from 2010-2019 and provide a summary and statistical analysis of data related to voting patterns. Findings from the statistical analysis will be assessed against qualitative data extracted from surveys and interviews of voters. These findings will provide background context to the statistical analysis and contribute further to understanding the extent to which young people are engaged with the political process and the reasons behind such behaviours.</p>	<p>Like an essay, the literature review includes an introduction that provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context/background to the topic. • The problem you want to focus on. • Definition of key terms, if you are using them. • Purpose of the review and the literature you will be referring to. • An outline of the structure of the paper. <p>In this review, the student will use the data to see if there is a problem with youth voter engagement, and then look at papers that are more qualitative (i.e. interviews with young adults) to explore the reasons behind the numbers.</p> <p>The purpose of this review is to investigate what has previously been researched about the voting patterns of 18 year olds, and use that information to create new knowledge about young voters.</p>

Body Paragraph 1 (extract)	
<p>Samuels and Buncl (2006) found that 18 year olds were not very engaged in politics in Australia. However, by 2012, a number of studies had located some changes in the voting patterns of the age group (Hodges 2012; Leong 2009; Magnussen 2009; Nyugen 2011), while some others (Rippleside 2010; Tropea 2014; Underwood 2011) concluded that in several states of Australia, there had been very little change. It appears there are regional variations in voting behaviours among 18 year olds, depending on the state or territory of Australia. One striking example is in Victoria, where in 2004, when 90% of 18 year olds voted for the first time (Rippleside, 2010:15). In 2013 this proportion had dropped to 47%, which was a very significant change. The reason for this, Rippleside argues, is that survey responses showed overwhelmingly the interviewees said they were too busy working to remember to vote (2013:16).</p>	<p>The author has picked out themes to discuss in the review.</p> <p>This paragraph, begins by summarising the key findings by Samuels and Buncl (2006). They use these findings to introduce the first theme of 'engagement'.</p> <p>After introducing the idea of engagement, the author compares the findings of Samuels and Buncl to more recent literature by a range of different authors. These statistics are then used to argue that many voters were too busy to vote, which does not necessarily mean they were disengaged.</p>
Body Paragraph 2 (extract)	
<p>Tropea (2014:5), however, argues there are other reasons for the drop in voting rates in Victoria, that Rippleside has not mentioned. Tropea found when interviewing a sample of Victorian 18 year olds, they were seriously bored by politics and disengaged to a far greater extent than in other states, as shown by Assad's study (2009) for the whole of Australia. Here Assad found that NT, SA, NSW and ACT 18-year olds were increasingly becoming involved in politics and voting rates were high. She explained this by looking at the proximity of voting centres to people's suburbs and concluded that when 18 year olds live near polling booths they always vote (Assad 2009: 33-40) and when there were sausage sizzles (barbeques) at the polling booths, more people were likely to vote.</p>	<p>Any good argument, needs to consider alternative viewpoints.</p> <p>Here the author has identified a disagreement between authors. In this case, they have found that Tropea suggests that the reason for the variations in voting in Victoria is due to boredom rather than being busy.</p> <p>Other factors are explored, as are variations in engagement from state to state.</p>
Conclusion (extract)	
<p>Despite the disagreement between researchers as to the reasons behind variation in voter behaviours, the findings of this review support the notion that young voters are on the whole are disengaged with the political process, but that there are also significant variations from state to state. There may also be a number of contributing factors that need to be further researched in order to better understand some of the reasons behind voter disengagement.</p>	<p>The author concludes by acknowledging the disagreement between authors, then takes the findings to pinpoint what we have learned from doing this review.</p> <p>In this example, it doesn't matter so much what the reasons are. The fact is there is a widespread disengagement in politics amongst young voters.</p> <p>The student also suggests that further research may be required.</p>

Further tips on writing a literature review

Introduction

In your introduction and throughout your paper, explain how the literature you have chosen is **relevant** to the context of your topic. It is a good idea to create a criteria for selecting sources, as you go through your library search.

Your job is not to repeat the findings in a research paper, but to see **how the findings connect to your own topic**.

Try reading as many **primary** research papers as you can (i.e. lab reports, case studies, etc.).

Reviews can focus on many things. Some focus only on the limits of definitions or particular research methods or the history of an idea and how it changes over time.

Your focus will depend on the assignment question, or the research questions you have been asked to develop.

Use the **reading matrix** in the Study Support guide to help you take effective notes for your review.

Body of the review

Your job is not to just list what each author says one by one but to read through the literature to find **common themes** rather than listing the authors ideas as 'he said' she said'.

Note above how multiple studies/authors are referenced together to show that the idea is present in a wide body of literature.

Use the common themes to develop a point of view on the topic.

Present your point of view using the literature to **support any claims** you want to make. In doing this, you will find that there are **gaps** in what we know about a topic and that is where you could develop your own research question.

To make your writing **flow** each paragraph needs to show **connections** between sentences, ideas and the question you are investigating.

To show connections between ideas, use **linking words and phrases**. Using linking words also helps you to paraphrase ideas (see examples below).

When referring to literature, avoid using the same **reporting verb**. Use words like 'suggests', 'argues', 'believes', 'concurrs' etc. Learn more about [reporting verbs](#).

Conclusion

Here the author considers what all of this means for any **future research direction**. So, they might use this finding, to now **develop their own research questions** to design their own study.

Language tip: Clarifying the purpose of your review

Avoid language that is too vague or general when introducing the purpose of your review.

Too vague or general	Clearly defined
<p>The aim of this review is to describe the history of</p> <p>The aim of this review is to describe the different research that was used to...</p> <p>The aim of this review is to describe the literature on ...</p>	<p>This paper/review...</p> <p>provides an overview of ...</p> <p>reviews the evidence for ...</p> <p>traces the development of ...</p> <p>explores the ways in which ...</p> <p>will critically examine the view that ...</p> <p>proposes a new methodology for ...</p> <p>examines the relationship between ...</p> <p>will compare the different ways in which ...</p> <p>investigates the factors that determine ...</p>

Explore further phrases at Manchester Academic Phrasebank:
www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/introducing-work/

Language tip: Linking ideas

A literature review should flow between sentences as well as paragraphs. One way to connect each theme to the next, is to use linking phrases to show agreement and disagreement between studies.

Examples of phrases that you can use to express agreement:

A number of studies located some changes in the voting patterns of the age group (Hodges 2012; Leong, 2009; Magnussen, 2009; Nyugen 2011).

Ngyuen (2011) and Smith (2016) **concur that** ...

Both Ngyuen (2011) and Smith (2016) **have argued that** ...

Examples of phrases that you can use to express disagreement:

Tropea's study **differs from** Rippleside's in a number of respects.

By contrast, Tropea (2014) argues that there are other reasons for the drop in voting rates.

On the other hand, Assad's analysis implies that this is not the underlying cause.

Tropea (2014:5), **however**, argues there are other reasons for the drop in voting rates in Victoria, a point that Rippleside (2014) has failed to mention.

A number of studies located some changes in the voting patterns of the age group (Hodges 2012; Leong, 2009; Magnussen, 2009; Nyugen 2011), **while some others** (Rippleside 2010; Tropea, 2014; Underwood 2011) concluded that in several states of Australia, there had been very little change.