

Literature Review

What is a Literature Review?

A literature review examines existing research on a topic. Like an essay, it organises key ideas, compares, and contrasts authors' views, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and offers critical analysis. However, instead of arguing a position, a literature review summarises debates and knowledge to clarify your focus, methodology, and contribution. After you have conducted an initial literature search, you can begin planning.

Planning

Step 1: Write annotated bibliographies

First, create annotated bibliography entries for each article (see our helpsheet, *Annotated Bibliography*). Summarise the article and note its relevance. This helps to reveal common themes in authors' arguments.

Step 2: Apply the 'Yes-No' method

This method involves setting out the literature into categories for clarity:

- **YES:** Supports the statement
- **NO:** Opposes the statement
- **YES, BUT:** Supports *but* raises concerns (e.g., over-reliance, inequity)
- **NO, BUT:** Opposes *but* allows exceptions (e.g., special cases)

Organise the literature by category to see who says what.

YES	Yes, BUT	No, BUT	NO
(Davies, 2030) (Scott, 2032)	(Lee, 2028) (Xi, 2029)	(Albon, 2031)	(North, 2028) (Inman, 2031)

Grouping literature: You may organise sources by themes such as chronology, differences in approach, or proximity of related studies.

Step 3: Write an outline

A literature review includes an introduction, body, conclusion, and logical paragraphs.

Introduction

An introduction should provide your reader with answers to the questions:

- What is your topic?
- Why is it important to investigate this topic?
- What are the key themes that are going to be discussed?

Example

Academic success in higher education is shaped by numerous factors, including the use of study support services. **This literature review examines four main themes identified in existing research.** These themes include the influence of study support services on students' **self-concept**, their **motivation**, their **autonomy**, and their **self-control**. By analysing these perspectives, **this literature review aims to clarify the relationship between study support services and academic achievement, while identifying gaps for future investigation.**

Themes/Scope Identified

Themes Highlighted

Concluding Sentence



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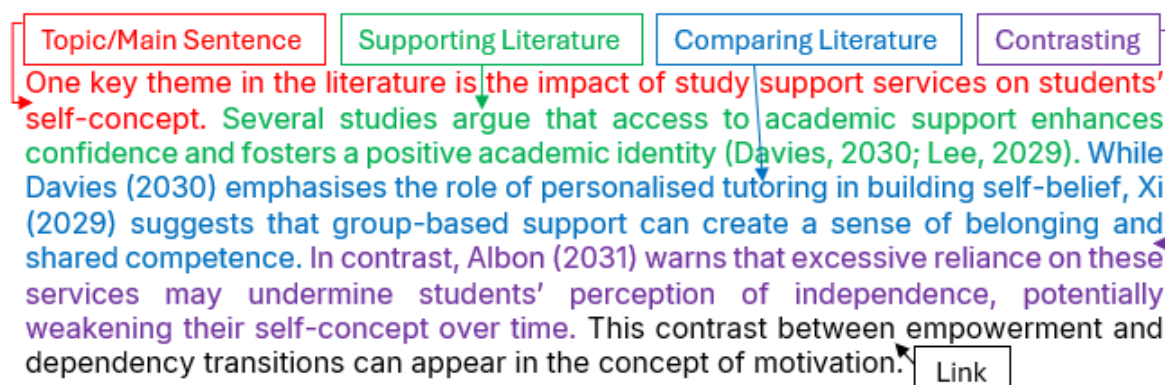
Explain yourself: Use clear language to state your purpose (e.g., "This review aims to define..." or "This chapter examines..."). Guide readers through connections in the literature with phrases like "Within the literature, numerous studies..." or "There is broad support for..."

Body

Break topic into themes that emerged from your literature search. Each paragraph should:

- State main idea (topic sentence)
- Compare/contrast literature; note gaps
- Analyse and evaluate
- Summarise and link to next idea

Example



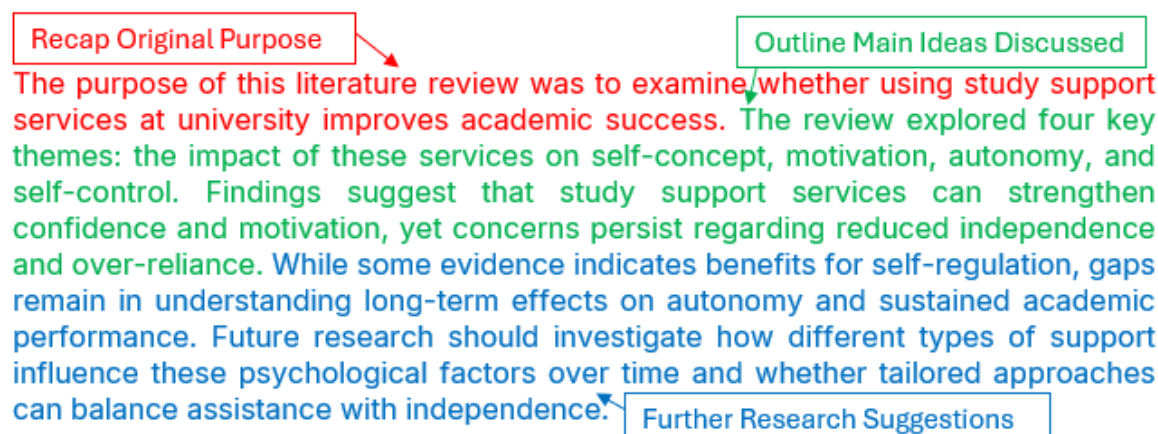
Citing others: Avoid a repetitive 'shopping list' style. Vary citation by making either the information or the author prominent:

- Information prominent: "The theory of X is confirmed... (Albon, 2031)."
- Author prominent: "Davies (2030) describes..."

Conclusion

- Summarise the key findings within the literature and main discussion points
- Restate your argument for final conclusions

Example



Related Helpsheets

- Annotated Bibliography
- Incorporating Evidence



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