

QUICK GUIDE: LITERATURE REVIEW

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- WHAT IS IT** A Literature Review is an evaluation of previous research on your topic. In your Literature Review you're expected to show that:
1. You recognise the relevant and important research in your field.
 2. You understand this research, by organising and evaluating it.
 3. You see where there is a gap in the research which your study will attempt to fill.
- WHAT TO INCLUDE**
1. At a minimum, you should include the well-established research in the field.
 2. Cover the most recent relevant research.
 3. Include the original research that influenced the field.
- ORGANISATION** Various approaches are used, and can be combined:
1. Thematic: Organised around key themes or debates.
 2. Methodological: Organised around a methodological approach, following the different methods used in your field.
 3. Sequential: Organised sequentially, from the original research that influenced the field to the most recent developments.
- STRUCTURE** Like an essay, a literature review has an introduction, main body, and conclusion.
1. Introduction: This explains the broad context of your research area and the main topics you are investigating. It briefly highlights the relevant issues or debates that have characterised your field of research.
 2. Main body: An analysis and critical review of the literature according to a number of themes or topics or methods that overlap with your research. It should have headings and show how your research builds on what has been done before. Based on previous research, you provide justifications for what you are doing, why you are doing it, and how you are going to do it.
 3. Conclusion: This should summarise the current state of the research in your field as analysed in the main body. It should identify any gaps or problems with the existing research, and explain how your investigation is going to address these gaps or build on the existing research.
- EXAMPLE** All good journal articles include a small Literature Review after the Introduction paragraph. It may not be called a Literature Review, but gives you an idea of how one is written in miniature. Here is one example from a recent paper published in the journal *PeerJ*. Note the style of writing.

*'The opisthobranch sea hare is a circumtropical species found throughout the Indo-West Pacific and Atlantic Oceans (Thompson, 1976). This species is relatively well-studied, including many aspects of their taxonomy (Bebbington, 1974), anatomy (Bebbington, 1977), physiology (Switzer-Dunlap, 1978; Carefoot, 1987), reproductive patterns (Switzer-Dunlap & Hadfield, 1979), diet-derived chemical defense (e.g., Paul & Pennings, 1991; Nagle, Camacho & Paul, 1998; Arthur et al., 2009) and sensitivity to noise pollution (Nedelec et al., 2014). The important role they play in benthic reef ecology is well-established, particularly as a specialist grazer of the toxic cyanobacterium, *Lyngbya majuscula* (Thacker & Paul, 2004), that prevents the settlement of coral larvae (Kuffner & Paul, 2004) and can cause phase shifts from coral to algal dominated reefs (Thacker, Ginsburg & Paul, 2001). However, their embryonic developmental life history has not been investigated and there is a lack of basic information about their initial life stages.'*