A QUICK GUIDE TO
LITERATURE REVIEWS

A LIT REVIEW'S PURPOSE
It summarizes, analyzes, and synthesizes a topic’s main findings from prior research.
It explains your assessments for what is strong, weak, inconclusive, and/or missing from the existing literature.

DO THESE FOUR TASKS

IDENTIFY WHAT SIMILAR STUDIES EXAMINED
What did the studies ask?
What did they use?
  • Theories, variables, cases, data

IDENTIFY WHAT EACH STUDY CONCLUDED
What did the researchers find?

SYNTHESIZE THE COLLECTIVE RESULTS
Sort the works into three categories:
  • What they agree about
  • What they disagree about
  • What they overlook

CRITIQUE THE QUALITY & QUANTITY OF THE ACCUMULATED RESEARCH
What are the valid key findings?
Where is more work needed?
  • New variables, cases, or theories

ORGANIZE BY THEME OR THEORY

Don’t simply summarize each source and its main findings, paragraph by paragraph.

✓ Explain how sources relate to each other.
✓ Synthesize how they inform your research question and planned exploration.

Adapted from

More Resources
How to critique a text (Strategic Reading II)
GWC Literature Reviews Page
GWC Literature Reviews Recorded Workshop