



# The Literature Review

All students involved in the research component will complete a literature review as part of that process. Use the information below as a guide. Your aim should be to evaluate and show the relationship between previous research and your current research. In order to do this effectively, you should carefully plan how you will organize your work.

## Functions of the Literature Review

A literature review can be just a simple summary of the sources, but it usually has an organizational pattern and combines both summary and synthesis.

A summary is a recap of the important information in a source, but a synthesis is a re-organization, or a reshuffling of that information. It might give a new interpretation of old material or combine new with old interpretations. Or it might trace the intellectual progression of the field, including major debates.

A review of the literature is an essential part of your academic research project. In a research paper, you use the literature as a foundation and as support for a new insight that you contribute. The review is a careful examination of a body of literature pointing toward the answer to your research question.

### 3 Why do we write literature reviews?

Literature reviews provide a solid background for research investigation. Comprehensive knowledge of the literature in the field is essential to most research papers. Through the literature review you will discover whether your research question already has been answered by someone else. If it has, you must change or modify your question.

*Demonstrate why your research should be conducted*  
*Explain how your work relates to previous research*  
*Summarize important information, but remember to synthesize that information as well.*

1. Interpret information in a new way
2. Trace progression of ideas/debates related to your topic

## Strategies for Writing the Literature Review

A literature review is usually organized around ideas, not the sources themselves like an annotated bibliography. You will not simply list your sources and go into detail about each, one at a time. As you read widely but selectively in your topic area, consider what themes or issues connect your sources together. Do they present one or different solutions? Is there an aspect of the field that is missing? Do they reveal a trend in the field or a raging debate? Pick one of these themes to focus the organization of your review.

You should summarize the work you read, but you must decide which ideas or information you want to add to your research (so you can emphasize them).

### 3 Additional Considerations:

*Use evidence* - Your interpretations must be backed up by evidence to show that what you are saying is valid.

*Use quotes sparingly* - A few short quotes here and there are okay, though only if what the author said just cannot be rewritten in your own words.

*Keep your own voice* - While a literature review presents others' ideas, your voice (the writer's) should remain front and center.

*Use caution when paraphrasing* - When paraphrasing a source, be sure to represent the author's information or opinions accurately and in your own words.

*Provide a foundation for your research*

*Be focused around one central theme or issue*

*Include the most important ideas from each source*

*Provide evidence to support your interpretations*

*Employ a limited use of quotes*

*Paraphrase accurately and in your own words*

<http://www2.uncp.edu/home/acurtis/Courses/ResourcesForCourses/LitReview.html>; <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/>; <http://www.ait.ac.th/education/LanguageCenter/ait-writing-services/guide-book/using-the-literature.html#.U-EzLFYtS68> <http://webs.wichita.edu/depttools/depttoolsmemberfiles/holtfelds/Newsletters/2012%20October%20Oct%20-%20Nov.pdf>

Follow these simple tips to improve the quality of your writing.

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The majority of the times you use the word “that” can be removed from your writing and it will instantly make your sentence stronger.

Example: “You believe that I’m lying but I’m not.” becomes “You believe I’m lying but I’m not.”

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It adds nothing. Remove it to strengthen your point.

Example: “I think this is a good sentence.” becomes “This is a good sentence.”

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In most cases, the “-ing” softens your word and adds no value. Your writing will read better if you avoid it.

Example: “The experiences we’re seeking end up being underwhelming and even disappointing” becomes “The experiences we seek often underwhelm and disappoint.”

## *Michaele Chappell, Ph.D.*



Mathematics

Dr. Michaele Chappell is a Full Professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Middle Tennessee State University where she teaches both mathematics and mathematics education courses to undergraduate and graduate students. From 2004-2006, she served in the role of Interim Chair for the department.

Dr. Chappell began her career in higher education as a McKnight Doctoral Fellow at Florida State University where she graduated in 1991 with a Ph.D. in mathematics education. She then served for over 10 years on the faculty in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

Her research and scholarly agenda has focused on the mathematics achievement of African-American learners at all levels, the professional development of teachers of mathematics—particularly those who practice at the elementary and middle school levels, and the spatial reasoning abilities and mathematical problem solving of both teachers and students. Given such, she has authored numerous publications, comprising of several book chapters and journal articles as well as an edited book series on *Empowering the Beginning Teacher of Mathematics*.

Dr. Chappell has been very active in national projects as well as national and state mathematics education organizations. She has worked as an investigative researcher from 1992-1996 for the QUASAR Project funded by the Ford Foundation; as a workshop leader in 1999 for the Mathematics Teacher Preparation Content Workshop sponsored by the Mathematical Sciences Education Board of the National Research Council; and as a reflective collaborator from 2000-2002 for the Reflections Project sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) and the Duke Energy Corporation. She has served in the role of officer and board or committee member for the Association of Teachers of Mathematics (AMTE) and the Benjamin Banneker Association (BBA).

In 1996, Dr. Chappell became the first McKnight graduate to serve on the board of directors for the Florida Education Fund (FEF) and held two distinct terms on the board until 2005. She has been an invited speaker at several conferences and has provided numerous school practitioners with professional development workshops. Through her teaching, research, and presentations over the past 26 years, Dr. Chappell has demonstrated a breadth of knowledge in mathematics teaching and learning.





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