

# From Reading to Writing a Literature Review: Reading strategies that support genre awareness

## Understanding the Genre: General Reading Tips

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### Identify Exemplary Literature Reviews

Read high-quality examples. Look for literature reviews published in top-tier education journals or those shared by your instructor. These examples can provide a template for structure, tone and depth. You can use databases like ERIC, Education Source, and Google Scholar to find literature reviews. Look for highly cited papers or those published in reputable journals. If you are unsure how to locate an exemplary review, reach out to a librarian for research and database navigation support.

### Analyze Structure and Components

Break down the structure of the literature review. Identify the introduction, body, methods, and conclusion sections. Note how each section serves a specific purpose and what that purpose is.

### Examine Citation and Referencing Practices

Pay attention to how sources are cited within the text and how the reference list is formatted. Identify the citation style used (e.g. APA, MLA, Chicago). Notice how writers integrate content from sources into their writing and for what reasons. Note how authors reference and build upon previous reviews.

### Focus on Synthesis Techniques

Look at how different studies are compared and contrasted. Note techniques for highlighting similarities, differences, and trends. Pay close attention to *how* themes or topics are used to organize the review and how authors transition between themes. As practice, try to model the structure.

### Understand Different Types of Reviews

Read both narrative (traditional) and systematic reviews (much more comprehensive) to understand their differences. Systematic reviews are more structured and rigorous, often following very specific guidelines. Systematic reviews can stand on their own. This means they can be published on their own. There are also those that are incorporated in scholarly articles to situate the research in the field. Usually in a graduate program, you are asked to write more selective and less rigorous reviews.

# Reading to Write: Specific Steps and Techniques

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**1**

**Start  
with the  
Abstract**

- The abstract provides a summary of the review's scope, objectives, methodologies, and key findings. Use it to decide if the review is relevant to your research.
- Note the key themes and main arguments presented. This will guide your focus as you read the full review.
- Use the abstract to inform how you write your annotations of each source identified.

**2**

**Read the  
Introduction  
Carefully**

- The introduction sets the stage for the review. Note how the writer sets the stage, how they articulate the significance of the topic, gaps in knowledge, and the aims of the review
- Identify the thesis or main argument of the review to understand how to approach yours.
- Look for background information that provides context, such as historical developments, key theories, or seminal works in the field. Note how this information is presented and how much.

**3**

**Focus on  
Methods**

- In systematic reviews, the methods section explains how studies were selected, evaluated, and synthesized. Assess the transparency and rigor of the review.
- Understand the criteria used for inclusion or exclusion of studies, databases searched, and time frame considered. Note how writers articulate criteria.
- Look at how the quality of the included studies was assessed. This often involves examining aspects like study design, sample size, and statistical methods.

**4**

**Read the  
Body Text in  
Sections**

- Focus on one theme or subtopic at a time. Note how different themes or subtopics are discussed and integrated.
- Pay attention to the logical flow and connections between sections.
- Note how the review synthesizes information from multiple sources. Observe techniques like grouping similar studies, highlighting differences, and summarizing key points.
- Note how the author integrates and compares findings from different sources.

**5**

**Analyze  
Figures and  
Tables**

- Figures and tables often summarize large amounts of data. Analyze them to quickly grasp key trends and findings.
- Use visual aids to understand complex information and relationships between studies. Mind mapping can help understanding these relationships and connections.
- Evaluate the accuracy and clarity of the data presented. Check if the figures and tables support the narrative in the text.

**6**

**Carefully  
read the  
conclusion**

- The conclusion synthesizes the findings and highlights gaps in the literature. Note any recommendations for future research and how those recommendations are made.
- Understand the overall conclusions drawn from the review. Look for implications for practice, policy, or further research.
- Pay attention to suggestions for future research. These can inform your own research questions and projects. It can also inform how you present this content in your review.

# 7

## Review the References

- Check the reference list to ensure that the review cites reputable sources. Use the reference list to find additional relevant readings.
- Verify the credibility and scope of the review. A thorough and well-referenced review indicates comprehensive coverage of the topic.
- Use the reference list to identify key sources and seminal works that you can read for a deeper understanding of the topic.