**What is a literature review?**

A literature review is a summary and synthesis essay. The purpose of a literature review is to summarize and synthesize the ideas of others (in published literature) on a subject; it does not argue a point like a persuasive essay does. In fact, a literature review does not take a position on any of the information presented. Oftentimes, a literature precedes an argumentative or persuasive essay, and the literature review essay is used as a way to explore the subject in depth so that you are aware of the various perspectives on a particular topic. A literature review also can be used to provide a historical context or background on a topic or subject, as well as highlight gaps in the existing body of literature, and any controversies as well. To synthesize information means to take several sources of information, find similar connections, as well as where they disconnect, and rewrite the information into your own words. Furthermore, when you synthesize information, you write about your sources according to topic and not source by source as explained further below.

**How does a literature review differ from an annotated bibliography and references page?**

An annotated bibliography can also summarize and evaluate published sources, but it does this one source at a time. There is no synthesis because each source is evaluated and summarized individually. [Click here to see an example annotated bibliography](https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibrary/GraduateStudentWritingResource/WritingALiteratureReview.aspx#anbib).

A references page does not give any summary or evaluative information; it is only a list of full citations for sources that are used in a particular paper. [Click here to see an example reference page.](https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibrary/GraduateStudentWritingResource/WritingALiteratureReview.aspx#exref)

**What are the benefits of a literature review?**

A literature review is a way to think critically and deeply about a subject. In addition to summarizing source information, you will offer critical and reflective thought on the research sources. It is not enough to simply insert research into a paper and call it a researched paper; anyone can do that, but it doesn’t always make sense and it doesn’t always add any new thinking on the subject. The whole reason for writing an essay is to contribute to the body of knowledge on the subject, to offer new insights, new perspectives, and new ideas to what others have already written. When you understand your subject enough to offer critical analysis of what others have to say about a subject then you are an important contributor. The literature review is one step to helping you get there.

**How do you write a literature review?**

A literature review is an essay; therefore, it will have an introduction, body, and conclusion. The following are suggestions for how to compose a thoughtful and well organized literature review.

**Introduction**

A literature review begins by introducing the topic of research and presenting the various ways that topic is viewed in the literature you have reviewed. For example:

Depression is a broad and deep subject that can be viewed in many different ways. Studies about the brain’s anatomy and chemistry provide information and insight into various ways to treat depression, including medication, psychotherapy, and electroshock therapy. The most popular treatment in contemporary American society is medication. Over 43% of those diagnosed with depression are actively taking anti-depressants; 17% are in psychotherapy alone (with no medication), and 2% have undergone electroshock therapy (Smith, 2008). While most Americans opt to take medication to treat depression, literature on the subject suggests that medicinal treatment alone is less effective than psychotherapy in that most patients who use only medicine have recurring episodes of depression for the rest of their lives, while most patients in psychotherapy appear to “recover” in that they report fewer instances of recurring depression.

The introduction of a literature review should end with a thesis that is relevant to your findings from your review of the literature; however, it should not be persuasive or take a stand on the subject. You are simply summarizing and synthesizing what you learned. The thesis in the example above is:

While most Americans opt to take medication to treat depression, literature on the subject suggests that medicinal treatment alone is less effective than psychotherapy in that most patients who use only medicine have recurring episodes of depression for the rest of their lives, while most patients in psychotherapy appear to “recover” in that they report fewer instances of recurring depression.

Another example of a literature review thesis could be:

The articles presented here discuss the effectiveness of the treatments along with their pros and cons. They focus on the differences between psychotherapy and medication in treating people’s depression and improving their lives.

**Body**

In the body of a literature review, you summarize, evaluate, and interpret the sources you have researched on your topic. How you arrange those sources is what makes a literature review different from an annotated bibliography. Instead of short summary paragraphs that follow each source, you will integrate the sources so that you have an actual discussion on the literature you’ve found so far. In a literature review, you arrange the sources and your discussion of them by categorizing them according to the various perspectives or subtopics you are finding on your subject. For instance, using the example above, the student could arrange his body by discussing all of the sources he’s researched that focus on and encourage psychotherapy to treat depression. Then he would write about and discuss those sources that focus on using medication to treat depression. He could also arrange his literature review by discussing subtopics, such as effectiveness of medicine vs. psychotherapy, the different symptoms that each treatment type addresses, and then the side effects of each treatment.

The body of the literature review is not only summary and interpretation, but it might also include evaluation of sources, answering whether you found bias in an article and how that affects your use or reading of that research source. For instance, you might say that while a certain article supports your overall goal in the persuasive essay by taking the same position on the subject as you do, the article was also written for a trade magazine, which implies an agreeable audience, and you noticed some of the loaded language being used in the article, such as “profit-mongering pharmaceutical companies that make money off of vulnerable patients.” Because of this, you would be more selective in your use of this article in a subsequent essay because it shows obvious bias.

**Conclusion**

The conclusion for a literature review is a wrap up of the essay, but it should provide readers with more than an overview of what they have already read. It might conclude by indicating what direction the research led you to explore that you didn’t expect, mention areas that surprised you or were new to you while doing the research, or the gaps in the research so far and areas you have yet to explore and cover.

[Click here to see an example literature review](https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibrary/GraduateStudentWritingResource/WritingALiteratureReview.aspx#litrev).

*The following examples are simply examples; they are not templates and should not be used as such. Note that each source is treated as a separate entity. There is only summary and no synthesis.*

**Example Annotated Bibliography Entries**

Hugonnier, B. (2007). Globalization and education: Can the world meet the challenge? In M. M. Suarez-Orozco (Ed.), *Learning In the Global Era: International Perspectives on Globalization and Education* (pp. 137-157). Berkeley, CA: University of CA Press.

This chapter emphasizes the main theme of this book – immigration. Due to globalization on all levels, mostly economic, people are moving around the globe much more than at any other time in history. Reasons for this mobility are mostly economic, such as jobs moving to other countries, which change the needs and demands of the workforce and leads people to have to constantly retrain and learn new skills. It also considers two key questions: Can educational institutions keep up? Do they? No concrete conclusions are made.

Magyar, B. (2006). Humanistic and academic core values: The responsive and responsible reform of the European university. *Higher Education in Europe*, 31(4), 391-394.

This article discusses the fundamentals of the Bologna Process and outlines the challenges European universities face. One of the key issues is the difference between the university being proactive or reactive. “The university should not only be responding in a proactive manner to social needs, but should also be able to shape those needs. There is a need for universities to be responsible in a proactive way rather than to merely act in a responsive way” (p. 392). The challenges seem to be well worth their effort as the author clearly supports the Bologna Process and what it will bring for Europe in the years ahead.

Olaniran, B. (2007). Challenges to implementing e-learning in lesser-developed countries. In A. Edmundson (Ed.) *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges* (pp. 18-34). Hershey: Information Science Publishing.

This chapter re-emphasizes my initial thoughts when I first began my inquiry into global learning: how do different cultures interact with the technology in an online classroom. This chapter is mainly a literature review on globalization in education and provides some examples of how collectivist vs. individualistic cultures view technology in online education, as well as the role of the instructor. Collectivists are more inclined to feel out of control and want the teacher as a guide throughout the course. Individualistic cultures are more in-tune with the Western philosophy of online education being the responsibility of the learner and where the instructor acts more as a guide.

[Back to the text](https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibrary/GraduateStudentWritingResource/WritingALiteratureReview.aspx#top)

*The following examples are simply examples; they are not templates and should not be used as such.*

**Example Reference Page**

**References**

Allen, I.E. & Seaman, J. (2008). *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States*, 2008. United States: The Sloan Consortium.

Boix Mansilia, V. and Gardner, H. (2007). From teaching globalization to nurturing global consciousness. In M. M. Suarez-Orozco (Ed.), *Learning in the Global Era: International Perspectives on Globalization and Education* (pp. 47-66). Berkeley, CA: University of CA Press.

Catterick, D. (2007). Do the philosophical foundations of online learning disadvantage non-Western students? In A. Edmundson (Ed.), *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges* (pp. 16-129). Hershey: Information Science Publishing.

Edmundson, A. Ed. (2007). *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges*. Hershey: Information Science Publishing.

Friedman, T. (2006). *The World is Flat*. London: Penguin Books.

Gärdenfors, P. (2007). Understanding cultural patterns. In M. M. Suarez-Orozco (Ed.), *Learning in the Global Era: International Perspectives on Globalization and Education* (pp. 67-84). Berkeley, CA: University of CA Press.

Hugonnier, B. (2007). Globalization and education: Can the world meet the challenge? In M. M. Suarez-Orozco (Ed.), *Learning in the Global Era: International Perspectives on Globalization and Education* (pp. 137-157). Berkeley, CA: University of CA Press.

Liu, Y. (2007). Designing quality online education to promote cross-cultural understanding. In A. Edmundson (Ed.), *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges* (pp. 35-59). Hershey: Information Science Publishing.

Magyar, B. (2006). Humanistic and academic core values: The responsive and responsible reform of the European university. *Higher Education in Europe*, 31(4), 391-394.

McCarty, S. (2007). Theorizing and realizing the globalized classroom. In A. Edmundson (Ed.) *Globalized E-Learning Cultural Challenges* (pp. 90-115). Hershey: Information Science Publishing.

[Back to the text](https://kucampus.kaplan.edu/MyStudies/AcademicSupportCenter/WritingCenter/WritingReferenceLibrary/GraduateStudentWritingResource/WritingALiteratureReview.aspx#top)

*The following example is simply an example; it is not a template and should not be used as such. Note that in the Literature Review section, sources are discussed according to the various aspects of this topic and not source by source. This is an example of how you synthesize information vs. simply providing summaries.*

**Example Literature Review**

**Globalization in Higher Education: Challenges & Opportunities**

**Diane Martinez**

As the world becomes more connected electronically, interaction between cultures is not the exception, but very much characteristic of mainstream communication practices today. For example, customer service phone calls routed to India are common for many American companies, as are online helpdesk queries. National boundaries, while still physical, are crossed virtually every day via Internet technology. In essence, global boundaries have become quite permeable. This is evidenced most especially in economic terms in many societies, but cross-cultural exchanges are also becoming regular occurrences in higher education. Online education has grown at exponential rates in the past few years where the “12.9 percent growth rate for online enrollments far exceeds the 1.2 percent growth of the overall higher education student population” (Allen & Seaman, 2008, p. 1); consequently, online education plays a critical role in the globalization of higher education as a whole because of the masses of people it reaches and serves within and across national borders.

Educating people from different cultures is a trying prospect. Even in today’s society where access to people in different countries is relatively easy, and we engage in cross-cultural activities on almost a daily basis, the fact is, we still know very little about other cultures and how to educate students from countries outside of our own. To further complicate matters, when dealing with online education, we must also address the unique relationship each culture has with technology, as well as varying degrees of access and an assortment of hardware and software products.

Ultimately, our goal in understanding other cultures is to have respect. In education, we further that notion of respect from mere understanding (education) to fostering effective and harmonious working relationships. To achieve mutual respect, however, we have to explore the question of responsibility. For instance, what are the responsibilities of an institution in delivering education to students from different countries? What are the responsibilities of students?

To get to the heart of assigning responsibilities and then integrating the necessary changes in curriculum and methods of delivery, it is beneficial for us to learn the basics about how other cultures teach and learn. We also have to define globalization. Globalization is a term that is commonly used, but it has multiple connotations and denotations that can confuse attempts to be globalized. It is also important to study the challenges that emerge as we try to institute globalization into our classrooms. The purpose of this paper is to review literature associated with defining globalization in order to understand the complexity of globalization in online education and the research associated with this topic.

**Literature Review**

When it comes to studying globalization in higher education, it is beneficial to first define the term itself, which, as seen in the literature below, is not a cut-and-dry task. While some authors attempt to define the word, others imply a definition through issues surrounding the concept of globalization.

One of the most interesting and illuminating points about studying globalization, especially in an online environment, is that the term often conjures up images of classes that have students scattered throughout the world interacting with one another in a common setting – the online classroom. But what is interesting to note, is that students do not necessarily have to be geographically placed all over the world in order to experience cross-cultural interactions because of the high rate of immigration worldwide.

The United States is in the midst of the largest wave of immigration in its history, with over a million new immigrants per year for a total foreign-born population of over 35 million people, equaling 12 percent of its total population. In Canada, Switzerland, and Australia the rates of immigration are nearly double the US rate. (Suárez-Orozco, 2007, p. 9)

Thus the mobility of the world’s population is providing opportunity for global instruction even within a country’s own boundaries. Suárez-Orozco (2007) asks the most pressing questions surrounding education as we enter an era where culture and country are becoming almost invisible, at least initially. He asks: “What is globalization? Why does it matter to education?” (p. 7). To begin, he makes several attempts to define globalization:

1. “Globalization is the ongoing process of intensifying economic, social, and cultural exchanges across the planet” (p. 7).
2. “Globalization is about the increasing integration and coordination of markets, of production, and of consumption” (p. 7).
3. “Globalization is about the exchanges of cultures that make the old boundaries, as well as the aspired cultural coherence and homogeneity of the nation-state, increasingly untenable” (p. 7).

It is difficult to argue with any of these definitions, as all are true at least at some level and in some contexts. Economics is the driving force behind globalization; thus, economic forces are fueling migration around the globe, which means the world’s economies are producing new challenges, opportunities, and synergy than ever seen before. Educational institutions must know what these challenges and opportunities are in order to know how to educate people to deal with and take advantage of them. Suárez-Orozco contends that that “the schooling of youth today is largely out of sync with the realities of a global world” (p. 2). The three principle ways this is seen are that:

1. Schools do not engage youth in learning
2. “Schools are failing to properly educate and ease the transition and integration of large and growing numbers of immigrant youth arriving in Europe and North America” (p. 3).
3. Youth are under-enrolled and the quality of education in poor regions of the world is alarming.

These three areas of concern are overwhelming enough for one country or culture to deal with, but when compounded with the idea of dealing with them in terms of other cultures, the challenges that lie before us are quite incredible, but not insurmountable if we can truly understand all facets of globalization.

In an effort to further understand and define globalization, some researchers try to explain globalization through the goals they see it bringing to education and ultimately the world, as with Boix Mansilia and Gardner (2007) who stated that the goal of globalization in the classroom is to have students be “reflective agents and actors – citizens of today and tomorrow” (p. 56). According to the authors, this can be achieved through a global consciousness that entails sensitivity, organization or global understanding, and self-representation.

Gärdenfors (2007) reminds us that simply teaching students about other cultures does not necessarily equate to learning and understanding, which, to him, is the ultimate goal of globalization. One cannot simply feed facts about another culture or country to students and expect them to understand, much less internalize, the differences and similarities between cultures; they have to learn to perceive the patterns of other cultures, such as patterns evident in language. He further explains that when we do recognize patterns in other cultures, however, we often do so with a closed mind because their patterns do not fit our patterns. Gärdenfors suggests then that one of the best ways for students to learn about another culture is to learn the language and immerse themselves in the culture. An incredible and exciting challenge for online education is to explore ways to allow this to take place.

Roosens (2007) discusses the political and religious implications surrounding globalization, which include debates over language and preserving one’s heritage, and Wikan (2007) provides a chilling account of the problems of integration among cultures around the world by detailing an account of a Muslim woman who was killed by her brother in an honor killing even though the Muslim family had lived in Sweden for 12 years.

Globalization in online education is not complete without a discussion about technology. Olanarian (2007) provides a literature review on the challenges we face with globalization in terms of cultural differences and approaches to technology. McCarty (2007) posits that to be called global means one has to interface with more than one country and with representatives from developing and developed countries. He claims that the goal of the globalized classroom is to empower students with new ideas and technology, not to change the culture of the learners. Palaiologou (2007) takes on the challenge of defining culture, a term that goes hand-in-hand and is sometimes used synonymously with globalization. He claimed that culture is “descriptive and/or comparative” and not “predictive or quantitative” (p. 76). This is actually the first problem when addressing globalization in an online environment because we want to talk about culture, but we have no concrete definition of it. Then we throw into the mix the idea of a cyberculture or an information culture and things quickly become confusing.

From just the literature associated with this class, it is evident that the term globalization is not concrete in any fashion. It is a Pandora’s Box, but the assortment of definitions and issues that this concept brings to discussions about global education does not have to equate to chaos. It is clear that the diverse issues and questions that arise simply from the definition of this term present our future with opportunity and not global fatalism. One way that opportunity is evident is that online education, because of its virtuality and the major strides we are making with Internet-based technologies, is still relatively unexplored territory, which makes pioneering in this area so exciting. How can we use technology to connect cultures in ways that physical barriers prevented us from exploring in the past? Online education is not the last frontier, but it is certainly territory we need to cross to find a new world.

*A recording of the Writing a Literature Review workshop can be seen and heard by clicking on the link:* ***http://khe2.acrobat.com/p95724567/***

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