**Literature Review/ Background Research**

The purpose is to offer an overview of significant literature published on a topic and the primary resources on a topic.

Other purposes:

Place each work or resource in the context of its contribution to the understanding of the subject under review.

Describe the relationship of each work to the others under consideration

Identify new ways to interpret, and shed light on any gaps in, previous research

Resolve conflicts amongst seemingly contradictory previous studies

Identify areas of prior scholarship to prevent duplication of effort

Point the way forward for further research

Place one’s original work (in the case of theses or dissertations) in the context of existing literature

**The literature review itself, however, does not present new primary scholarship.**

**Four stages of writing --**

Problem formulation—which topic or field is being examined and what are its component issues?

Literature search—finding materials and resources relevant to the subject being explored

Data evaluation—determining which literature and resources make a significant contribution to the understanding of the topic

Analysis and interpretation—discussing the findings and conclusions of pertinent literature and resources

**Literature Reviews/Background Research should comprise the following elements:**

An overview of the subject, issue or theory under consideration, along with the objectives of the literature review

Division of works and resources under review into categories (e.g. those in support of a particular position, those against, and those offering alternative theses entirely)

Explanation of how each work or resource is similar to and how it varies from the others

Conclusions as to which pieces and resources are best considered in their argument, are most convincing of their opinions, and make the greatest contribution to the understanding and development of their area of research

**In assessing each piece, consideration should be given to:**

Credibility—What are the author’s or source’s credentials? Are the author’s arguments supported by evidence (e.g. primary historical material, case studies, narratives, statistics, recent scientific findings)?

Objectivity—Is the author’s perspective even-handed or prejudicial? Is contrary data considered or is certain pertinent information ignored to prove the author’s point?

Persuasiveness—Which of the author’s theses are most/least convincing?

Value—Are the author’s arguments and conclusions convincing? Does the work ultimately contribute in any significant way to an understanding of the subject?