

Literature Review Paper: Guidelines for PhD Students

The purpose of the literature review paper is to:

1. promote advanced knowledge of the literature related to the chosen thesis topic
2. promote early engagement in thesis proposal development
3. provide the foundations to focus thinking about potential research questions
4. engage the student, supervisor and thesis committee members in the process of dissertation development.

The literature review paper is not intended to replace the introduction/background chapters in the traditional thesis format but may serve as a component of those chapters or one of the publications (in a thesis by publication) in the final thesis.

- The literature review paper topic and type should be discussed and approved by the student and supervisor **by March 1st of Year 1**.
- The literature review paper should have clear relevance to the anticipated substantive topic of the student's doctoral research. Students may elect to undertake a structured (e.g., systematic review, scoping review) or unstructured (e.g., narrative review) literature review. The overall presentation of the literature review paper will be similar to a manuscript prepared for publication in the student's field of study (normally 5,000 words in length). This will facilitate student publication of the literature review paper in the future. Students are not required to identify a specific journal for publication consideration but should consult with their supervisor for the most relevant format. An abstract for the paper is not required.
- As with all thesis work, the student should submit drafts to their supervisor (and supervisory committee as deemed appropriate by supervisor), allowing sufficient time for review and provision of feedback.
- The literature review paper is submitted to the thesis supervisor **by September 30th of Year 2**.
- The thesis supervisor and at least one additional thesis committee member provide written and verbal feedback on the submitted literature review paper to the student at a supervisory committee meeting, usually within 3 weeks of submission.
- Successful completion of the literature review paper is documented on the '**Record of Supervisory Committee Meetings**' and comments should reflect the committee members' appraisal of the paper. If the literature review paper is not approved at the September submission, the student will have an additional opportunity to **revise and re-submit by December 1st of Year 2**, taking into account the written feedback provided by the thesis committee members.

- Procedures for submission, review, and delivery of feedback for the December admission proceed as for the September submission, with documentation of completion of the literature review paper and a progress rating reflective of the committee’s appraisal of the thesis on the ‘**Record of Supervisory Committee Meetings**’.

Guidelines for appraisal of the literature review

Overall, to determine whether a literature review paper merits approval as completed, the appraisers will examine the literature review paper for: **coherence with the stated purpose and goals, evidence of critical analysis and synthesis, and clarity of communication**. Guidance on expected components are outlined below but should be adjusted as appropriate for the type of literature review being conducted. Format and expectations (e.g., word count) should be confirmed with the supervisor in advance.

Expected components:

1. **Introduction** that includes
 - clear explanation of the problem or topic of interest
 - description of the relevance/importance of the topic
 - clear statement of the purpose and objectives of the literature review paper.
2. **Methods/Approach** section that includes, as applicable:
 - description, including justification, of the method or approach used for the review
 - succinct description of search strategies used, and initial results obtained (e.g., inclusion and exclusion criteria, dates, etc.)
 - description of, including justification for, methods of appraisal for the review.
3. **Results/Synthesis** section that includes
 - synthesis of the state of the knowledge (including quality and scope) based on the review of the literature.
4. **Discussion/ Conclusions** section that includes
 - discussion of the major findings of the literature review and synthesis
 - discussion of the major strengths and limitations of the current literature on the topic
 - discussion of implications for the student’s own doctoral research (e.g., purpose, research questions, preliminary methodological ideas, etc.)
 - discussion of implications of results for research, theory, policy and practice, as appropriate.