

### What is a Literature Review?

- A critical appraisal/ evaluation/ assessment/ critique of existing research on a topic or in a specific field.
  - It **summarises** research in the field (like articles, books, etc.).
  - It critically evaluates the **strengths and weaknesses** of that research.
  - It assesses the ways in which existing research **contributes** to knowledge in the field, e.g. common or particularly original readings among scholars in that area.
  - It maps the **impact** of this research, e.g. the extent to which the research successfully reflects lived experiences, and/or the extent to which such theories contribute to practical contexts.
  - Most literature reviews analyse **many sources** in order to paint a broad picture of the field of study.
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### Why are Literature Reviews valuable?

- They provide information about the field for other scholars.
  - They allow students to demonstrate their knowledge/ reading within the topic.
  - They encourage students to engage with scholarly works in the field.
  - They encourage contextual awareness.
  - They enable scholars to identify gaps in current scholarship about a topic. This helps scholars to formulate more original and ground-breaking ideas, theories, and experiments.
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### Literature Reviews assess the strengths and weaknesses of criteria such as:

- Central **theses**, conclusions, and key findings of the sources, i.e. Were these reasonable, convincing, and applicable? Why/ why not?
- **Arguments** made within the sources, i.e. Were these arguments logical? Were the interpretations fair or were the connections tenuous?
- The authors' **methodologies** (how they conducted the research), i.e. Did they take a materialist approach (mapping their ideas alongside society/ culture/ science), or did they use a particular critical lens (postcolonialism, feminism, Marxism, etc.), or were they grounded solely in theory? How effective were these choices? What did they do in their lab experiments, and were these good/ replicable choices?
- **Theoretical frameworks**, i.e. how appropriate were the theoretical frameworks used? Were there better frameworks that would have been more appropriate? Why/ how?
- How appropriate were the **sources** the authors used? I.e. evaluate the bibliographies of each source and how the authors used them, and ask yourself: were they a bit dated? Are these essential studies in the field, or are they outliers? Do you know of any foundational or important works that would have been more relevant/ appropriate?
- Were there any **gaps, omissions, errors, or oversights** in the sources?
- **Contextual awareness**: how do the sources relate to the field more broadly, and to each other? Do the sources make sufficient contributions to scholarly discourse? What are those contributions and why are they valuable (or not)?

## Structure and Checklist

