A literature review is a survey of scholarly material that is relevant to a particular topic. It can include scholarly articles, books, dissertations, conference proceedings, and other academic sources.

**ACADEMIC RESEARCH PAPERS VS. LITERATURE REVIEWS**

1. Main purpose of an academic research paper: develops, sustains, and proves an argument
   a. Utilizes your own insight and hopefully contributes something new to the discussion
2. Main purpose of a literature review: summarizes and synthesizes the research on a topic.
   a. Summarizes the views of others and does not contribute your own unique argument.

**USING A LITERATURE REVIEW IN AN ACADEMIC PAPER**

While literature reviews are not an academic research paper, you may be able to make use of a literature review within a larger academic paper.

- Some include a literature review to clearly show where the paper stands in relation to other scholarship in the field.
- Even if the paper does not require one, grounding yourself in the research will be immensely helpful as you seek to develop your own unique thesis.

**GOALS OF YOUR LITERATURE REVIEW**

By the time you have finished your literature review, you should successfully do the following:

- Provide a comprehensive survey of the literature relevant to your topic.
- Take the literature and synthesize the information into a summary.
- Offer a critical analysis of the information that you gathered in the survey.
- Present the literature in an organized way.
- Explore the most important scholarly contributions relevant to any given subject; these sources should ideally be up-to-date and peer-reviewed.

Note: For detailed information on how to compose a literature review, see our handout entitled “Literature Reviews: Part 2.”