

# Writing Literature Reviews

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## Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you'll learn the steps to creating a literature review including

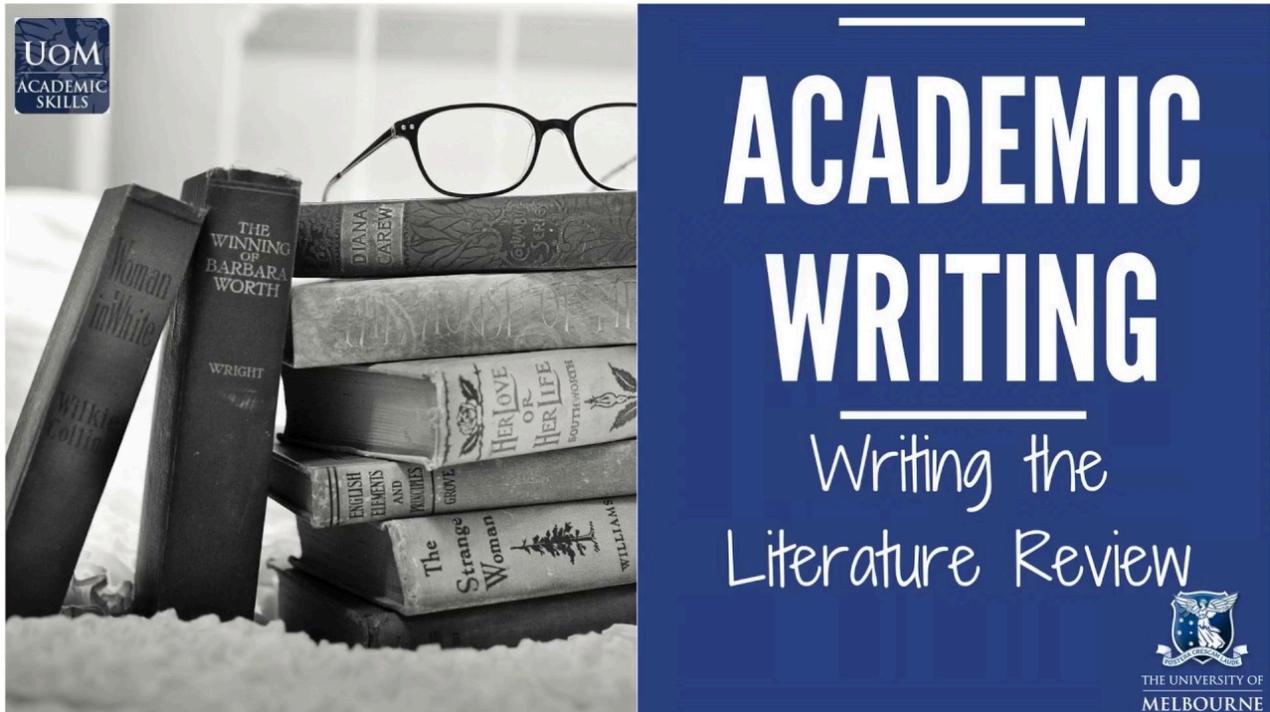
- writing an introduction, body paragraphs, a discussion/conclusion, abstract, and other elements
- drafting and getting feedback
- revising your literature review

**Note:** Because this chapter involves the steps for writing your Literature Review, the discussion questions in each section will be more involved than in other chapters, so give yourself extra time. But never fear! They will all lead to writing a better paper.

## 12.1 Draft and Synthesize

At this point, I want you to watch this 10-minute video because it both reviews what we've talked about thus far and provides great ways to get started on the actual writing of your paper. Here are some highlights to pay attention to:

- questions to ask as you take or review your notes that will guide your writing
- suggestions for how to organize your notes. (Or actually, I should spell it "organise" with an "s" since the video comes from Australia.)
- ways to add interpretation to what you say about your sources
- language to use to comment on the studies you're summarizing and synthesizing
- examples of literature review synthesis



[Watch on YouTube](https://youtu.be/70n2-gAp7J0)

<https://youtu.be/70n2-gAp7J0>

### Video Review

What three strategies or elements from the video do you plan to incorporate into your own Literature Review?

## Start Drafting

Now it's time to start drafting your paper. Follow the structure from your outline and start filling in the missing parts. Get out your notes and remind yourself of the sources you plan to talk about. You don't have to write your paper from beginning to end in order—you can go to the parts that feel the easiest and start there. Here are some places you can start:

## Bullet-Point Draft



Writing your Bullet Points should be as fast as this Bullet Train. Photo by [Fikri Rasyid](#) on Unsplash

I often have my students start with a Bullet-Point draft that takes the ideas they've been outlining and fills them in with more details but only in bullet-point form. The beauty of bullet points is that they keep you from getting caught up in the language and style and allow you to focus simply on your main points. You can smooth out the sentences and transitions later, but for now, just get your ideas on the page.

## Write the Introduction

Another way to get started is to just write the Introduction. You already have a thesis statement that can go at the end, so now you can start introducing your topic and its importance, setting up your Literature Review. See below for more specific help with Introductions.

## Write a Body Paragraph

Or a third place to start is to jump into writing a body paragraph that synthesizes your sources—the way you did in that synthesis activity earlier. Take your notes and choose one set to talk about in paragraph form.

Don't think too hard about getting things perfect when you're drafting—that's what revision is for. Just focus on getting started and filling in some of the missing pieces. If you get stuck, do some brainstorming activities to get your creative juices flowing. Once you have something written, I suggest seeking feedback to make sure you're going in the right direction. In fact, I recommend getting as much feedback as possible along the way.

### Start Writing

Now it's your turn to choose somewhere to start writing—choose either a bullet-point draft, the introduction, a body paragraph or something else. Then write the equivalent of at least one paragraph.

# How to Write Each Section

Now that you've jump-started the writing process, we'll go through each of the parts of your paper more in depth to help you fill out a complete draft.

## Introduction

Once you know what your main points will be, you're ready to introduce your ideas. As in any paper, you can't just jump right into your thesis statement and points; you need to set the stage first. Here are the elements of a good introduction to a literature review:

A good introduction

- introduces the topic and indicates its importance (impact on individuals)
- gives a context for the research question
- defines key terms, concepts, and/or theories
- explains what search methods were used and how many and what types of sources were reviewed (this is sometimes optional)
- suggests the organization of the rest of the paper

Remember in some style guides, you don't need to title your Introduction "Introduction"—you simply center the title of your paper at the top of your page (with no bolding or other formatting) and then jump right into your first paragraph.

**Tip:** You don't always know where you're going when you start a paper, so just get a good draft of an introduction down. Then when you finish writing a first draft of your paper, read your conclusion and consider using some of it in your introduction instead. I often tell my students that conclusions make good introductions because you finally know exactly where you went in your paper. Either way, you'll want to revisit your introduction once your paper's done so you can adjust it to better match where your paper went.

### Introduction

Get a start on your introduction by writing an opening sentence that introduces your topic and/or indicates its importance. Post that here. Then you can use that to jump start the rest of your introduction.

## Body

The body of your paper is where you can develop your points and use your newfound synthesis skills. Remember the [synthesis activity with the videos](#) you did in the last chapter? As you create a draft, you can start composing paragraphs using your awesome notes just like you practiced with those videos. Try to incorporate several sources into each paragraph to be sure that you're synthesizing and not just summarizing or listing without making connections. Your color-coded notes can help you be sure that each paragraph contains multiple sources.

In the body of your paper, you should

- synthesize previous studies to inform the reader of the state of research
- “identify relations, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the literature” ([APA Manual](#), p. 8)
- group your points into major headings and subheadings (You choose the arrangement based on what you’ve found: similar concepts or theories, similar methods, chronological development, controversies, etc.)
- support all points with evidence drawn from sources or with sound reasoning and in which all borrowed information is documented.
- summarize sources most of the time, paraphrase sometimes, and use quotations very sparingly—only when specific wording is poignant or can’t be said in any other way.

One way to talk about your sources is known as the CEC Method: Claim-Evidence-Commentary.

### *Claim + Evidence + Commentary*

Just like any paragraph, you should start with a Topic sentence that acts as a mini-Thesis statement or a general Claim about your topic. Then you need to give **evidence** to support that claim. In a literature review, your evidence comes in the form of studies that have been done—all those brilliant notes you’ve been taking. This is where you can synthesize your sources and show that they are related under the umbrella of a topic. However, just listing or summarizing sources does not make the connection between them and your topic sentence clear. This is where **commentary** comes in. Your job is also to comment on and interpret the significance of your “evidence” so your audience can understand the connections between them. In the [next section](#) we’ll talk more about how to do this, especially how to incorporate metacommentary into your paragraphs. In synthesis, your language is the key.

## **Add Metacommentary**

Metacommentary is the key to synthesis. metacommentary (aka metadiscourse) is a type of commentary that guides your reader and helps them interpret the sources and evidence you’re presenting. Think of it as really powerful transitions. First, let’s remind ourselves what transitions are. Transition words act like signposts—they guide your reader through your points. They can also glue your ideas together so they feel more cohesive. Beware that transitions can definitely be overdone, but I’d say most students in general could use more transitions in their papers rather than fewer.



Add signposts to your writing to guide your reader. Photo by [Dallas](#) on Flickr.

Here’s an awesome [list of transition words](#) (also linked in the frame below) that are grouped by category from the famous Purdue OWL (Online Writing Lab—scroll down to see the list). You can also download a great handout by the University of Maryland [here](#).

I always suggest that my students keep a categorized transition list like this handy as they write so that when you know you want to connect ideas in a certain way (e.g. to show contrast), you can easily find a good list of options (e.g. in contrast, conversely, etc.). Not only will transitions help your ideas feel more connected, they will also smooth out your writing style like butter.

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You might think you can just stop at transition words, but metacommentary is much more than just sprinkling some "therefore's" and "however's" throughout your paper—metacommentary actually takes your synthesis to the next level. Remember the Claim-Evidence-Commentary pattern I've mentioned? The commentary part of that sandwich is where you should focus right now. What do you comment on? You can either highlight why a source is important or connect it with other sources. This is your chance to point out the answers to the four questions you looked for in your note-taking:

1. What do researchers agree and disagree about?
2. How are researchers narrowing or changing their focus to create new information?
3. What are each study's limitations and strengths?
4. What's the next step in research—what should be studied in the future? (The research gap)

You can think of metacommentary as a sandwich with your name on it. If my student's name were Alisa, here's what an "Alisa sandwich" would look like:

#### **ALISA—SOURCE—ALISA**

- First, Alisa starts with a claim about what's happening in the field or about a particular subsection or focus of the field. This could serve as a topic sentence for a paragraph, for example.
- Second, she sets up the source with guiding language like transitions and references to her past points or sources.
- Third, she talks about the source itself and summarizes pertinent information.
- Lastly, Alisa comments on the source and/or connects it to her main point or to next source.

This metacommentary is a lot like the interpretation mentioned in the video at the beginning of this chapter. This type of "sandwich" can occur several times in a paragraph as you synthesize your sources. Here's a sample paragraph from Chris, a Public Health student, (check this) who wrote a paper called "The Causes of a Behavioral Pandemic: Screen-time Addiction and Consequent Depression Among Adolescents." I've bolded the metacommentary Chris had added to guide his readers and to connect his points together.

***Even though there have been far fewer studies on adolescents than adults, adolescent studies have consistently shown that those who are more physically active experience less depressive and associated symptoms, as well as a greater overall state of well-being (Kremer 2014). These studies have also shown that low levels of vigorous exercise in youth can independently cause depressive symptoms. One longitudinal study revealed that over 30% of children who participate in high levels of screen-time use experience moderate to high levels of depressive symptoms (Kremer 2014). Additionally, another study of children in the United States demonstrated that those who participated on a sports team were less likely to exceed recommended screen-time limits established by the US Department of Health. This study also demonstrated that as the number of total physical activity sessions increased among youth, both during free time and at organized events, children were less likely to exceed recommended screen-time limits (Carlson 2010). In this study, children who were more physically active consistently showed lower rates of depression and other emotional disorders. Therefore, evidence across multiple studies suggests that participating in screen-time activity may not be the direct cause of depressive symptoms, but rather the sedentary lifestyle and lack physical activity it causes among youth. With this recent***

*evidence, experts are beginning to search for ways to replace screen-time participation of adolescents with physical activities.*

Note how the last few sentences of this paragraph consist entirely of metacommentary—points that connect to the bigger picture of Chris's literature review. Also notice how Chris uses transition words and phrases to glue his points together so it doesn't come out of the blue when he brings up a new study. Chris also talks about more than one study in this paragraph, demonstrating his ability to synthesize and not just summarize. Without the metacommentary, it would be much harder to see the connections between the studies and how they fit into the bigger picture. Finally, Chris indicates the implications of these studies and points to what researchers are doing next. This has a dual purpose of reminding readers why this topic is important as well as indicating where he will go in his next paragraph (about physical activities). Metacommentary is powerful!

Metacommentary takes practice, but you can do it! And it will not only make your points stronger, it will make it easier for your audience to read and understand—which should always be your goal.

## If You Get Stuck

Literature reviews can be hard. If you get stuck, I have a little trick I tell my students. For your first draft, try starting every sentence with "Researchers . . ." I know this seems formulaic, but if you can keep your focus on what particular researchers did or what they agree or disagree on, you'll avoid the most common pitfalls of literature reviews: sounding like a typical argumentative research paper. If your focus is always on what researchers are doing or what they've found, then at the very least you'll stay in the realm of the literature review genre. Later you can go back through and change up your sentence structure, but I've found that this is an easy way for students to get through a first draft.

## A Quick Word on Verb Tense

Students often ask about verb tense in relation to literature reviews—do you say that someone "conducted a study" in past tense? But then what if you're saying that "researchers agree" about something? That's in present tense. I use this rule of thumb: if you're talking about something specific that was completed in the past, use the past tense. If you're talking about a current attitude or something currently accepted in a field, then use present tense. For example, if you say that you conducted a review of the literature, then that's over and done with, so you should use the past tense. Or if you want to talk about a particular study that was done, then use the past tense, too. But if you want to say that researchers in general currently agree about something, then you can use the present tense.

Things get a little trickier when you talk about what's happened by researchers in the field in general rather than talking about a specific study. For example, if many people have studied hoverboard technology, then you should talk about it in that same tense—they "have studied." That's called the present perfect tense (the verb "to have" + past participle). You don't need to remember the name—just the fact that you can use this tense when you want to say that researchers in the field "have done" something in general or that a review of a topic "has been done." So here's a table based on the work of Feak and Swales (2009) to sum this up:

<b>Tense</b>	<b>Reference</b>	<b>Example</b>
Past Tense	A Single Study or Event	McFly (1989) investigated the usefulness of hoverboards in a chase.
Present Tense	Generally Accepted Knowledge of the Field	One of the most promising areas of hoverboard technology is the use of electromagnets (Allain, 2015).
Present Perfect Tense	An Area of Inquiry	The usefulness of skateboards in a chase has been widely researched (McFly, 1985; McFly, 1989; McFly, 1990).

Verb Tenses to Use in Literature Reviews

## Discussion/Conclusion

Your last section will either be called discussion or conclusion (or will possibly not have a heading depending on your teacher's preferences or the style guide you're following). In an effective Discussion (aka Conclusion) section you should

- do more than sum up what you have said (though you should do that as well)
- explain where there are gaps and limitations in the previous research done
- indicate recommendations for future research based on those gaps

At the end of this section,

- restate your position (thesis statement)
- show the implications of your findings

## References

You must also include a list of your References (also known as a Bibliography or Works Cited page depending on the documentation style) showing all the sources you referred to in your paper. Your references page must be in alphabetical order and formatted according to your chosen style guide (see [Chapter 9: Talking About Sources](#)).

## Other Elements

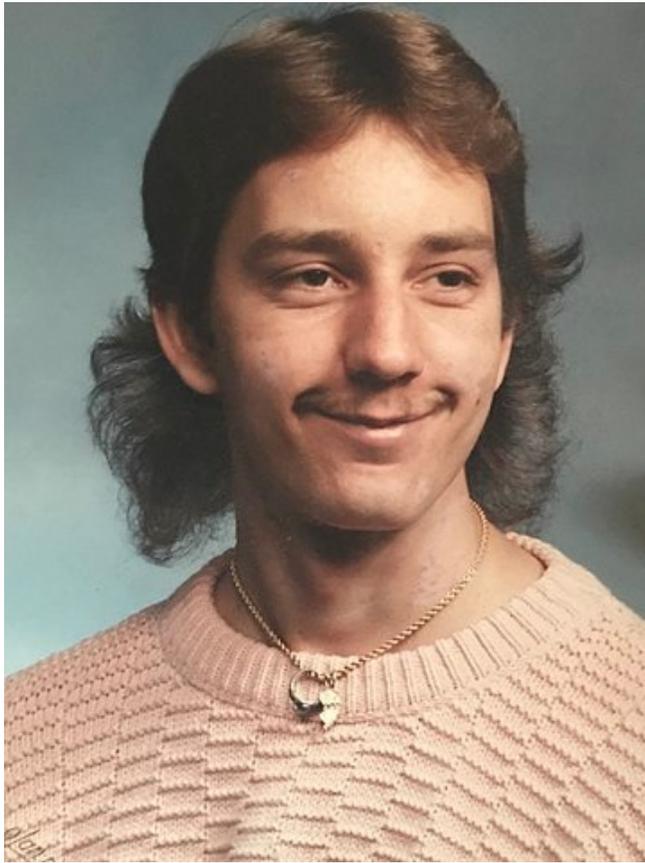
Your teacher might require you to include these other elements in your Literature Review paper. Be sure to follow the format from your style guide.

## Title Page

I've waited until now to talk about titles because it's wise to wait until you have a good draft before you choose a title. Why? Because you often don't know exactly where your paper will go until you've written it out. Your title is your readers' first entry into your paper, so you want it to be interesting and also reflect what's inside. Your title should also include as much information as possible while remaining appropriately short and sweet. For example, the [APA Manual](#) recommends not using extraneous words but sticking to the main point of your paper. My student Justin's title follows this model:

*Implications of Chinese Involvement on Africa's Economy*

He basically summarizes his main point in one succinct statement—the ultimate summary. APA would be proud.



The Mullet. Business in the front, party in the back. Image on [Wikimedia](#)

However, depending on your sub-field in the Social Sciences, many scholars like to do what I call a "reverse mullet." As you might know, the rad '80s mullet haircut that's short on top and long in the back has been described as

***The Mullet:***

***Business in the front, party in the back.***

A mullet starts with the serious and ends with the fun. But academic titles often do the reverse: they have an interesting introductory phrase, then a colon, and then the standard, more serious title. That's why I call them the Reverse Mullet:



Reverse Mullet: Party in the front, business in the back. Photo by [Weidmaier](#)

#### **The Reverse Mullet:**

#### **Party in the front, Business in back**

A reverse mullet title gets the reader's attention before adding the serious explanation. For example, one of my students named Katelyn wrote her Literature Review on how much high school students' perception of their teachers was influenced by their teachers' apparel. Her title included a Reverse Mullet structure:

#### ***Keeping it Class-y: How Formality of Teacher Apparel Affects***

#### ***Student Perceptions of the Teacher in the Classroom***

Because her field is education (Social Science Teaching), this second type of title structure is appropriate and adds interest. You can talk to your writing teacher or the professors in your major to find out which type of title would be most appropriate for you to use in your field. If you want to just play it safe, stick with a plain title, but know you might be missing a chance to draw your readers in.

What else should go on your title page besides your title?

- Your Name (centered)
- Your Teacher's Name (centered on the next line)
- A Page Number (in the top right corner that's continued throughout the paper)
- Optional: the Name of the School or Department
- Optional: the Name/Number of Your Course (e.g., English 300)
- Optional: the Date

Your title and these additions should go in the middle of the page. Of course, your teacher is the best person to ask about formatting requirements and will usually give you clear instructions. If you have questions, ask.

## Abstract

You should save writing your abstract for last because it's a summary of your completed paper. You can try writing a preliminary abstract now as a type of outline, but you run the risk of finding out that once you're done with your paper, you actually went in some different directions. My advice is to hold off and wait to write the abstract until the end. You can create a page after the title page where your abstract will go, but to emphasize that you should write this last, we'll wait to cover the details of writing an abstract until the next section.

## Appendix

If you have tables or figures ( or formulas or other data) that are too big to be added inside the text of your paper, you can put them at the end. If you only have one Appendix, you can call it just that. But if you have more than one, call them Appendix A, Appendix B, etc. and refer to them as such in the text of your paper.

## Tables and Figures

One more element that could be helpful to your paper is to include tables and/or figures. You're probably familiar with Tables (you know, the boxes with lots of horizontal and vertical cells). A Figure is any type of image, graph, or chart besides a table. You can use tables or figures from your sources as long as you cite them properly. You can also create your own table or figure either from existing data or to explain a concept. See [Chapter 6: Design](#) for the details of how to create, use, or format tables and figures. Just remember to check your style guide; for example, in APA Format, you need to title and number your tables and figures separately.

I hope you feel like you have a better sense of the structure for your own Literature Review. In the next chapter, we'll talk about how to start drafting your paper.

## 12.2 Write an Abstract



We're not talking about this kind of abstract! ([Public Domain](#))

Not that kind of abstract! As great as abstract art is, what you need now is the abstract of your paper. (Note: some teacher's won't require an abstract, so you can skip this section in that case.) Why do you think I've saved the abstract for last even though it's the first thing your audience will read (after your title)? You guessed it: it's because the abstract is a summary of everything you've talked about in your paper, so if you haven't written your paper yet, it's pretty hard to summarize it.

A lot of students think that the abstract is a *preview* of your paper that simply invites the reader to learn more. But that's not the purpose of the abstract, that's the purpose of the *Introduction*. If your paper were a movie, your abstract would *not* be the movie trailer. A movie trailer is an invitation to see more without giving away too much; that's the point of your *Introduction*. Instead, your abstract would be the movie *plot synopsis*. It would have a big SPOILER ALERT sign in front of it because in it you want to give away all the punchlines from your paper. In fact, the more you include your most important points or findings, the better. Because readers might only ever read your abstract, you want the most important information there. Then just like you did in your own database searching, they will decide based on the abstract whether they should open your paper and read more details. Your job is to make sure they have the best information to do that.

An abstract has a few main parts that mirror the parts of your paper but in miniature. First, in 1-2 sentences, you should introduce the topic, its importance, and the problem or question you tried to answer. Then you should succinctly explain your methods (database searching) and the scope of your project. The last and largest part should consist of your main findings such as the main areas of inquiry where researchers are congregating. You should include the major strengths and limitations (gaps) you found in your review. Finally, you should explain any implications of your study and suggest where future research should go. See? A miniature paper. It should be so miniature, that an abstract should usually not exceed 250 words. At the end, you can also list a few Keywords to make it easy to search for your paper on databases.

To solidify your understanding of how to write an abstract, watch this 3-minute video from the University of Melbourne that takes you through a good example. Try not to get distracted by their awesome Australian accents.



[Watch on YouTube](http://services.unimelb.edu.au/academicskills)

Now if you would like more details, you can refer to this explanation.

## 12.3 The Real Last Step: Revise (and Revise and Revise)



Revision means re-vision. Photo by [pine watt](#) on Unsplash

The best writers revise (and revise and revise). Think back to [Chapter 3: Writing Processes](#) and the section on Revision. You need to think like your audience, which means you have to get out of your own head and think mindfully. One way to do this is to *revise with purpose* or in other words, with specific goals in mind.

You can't revise without a decent draft, so don't blow off the first draft deadline. The better your first draft, the better your paper will be in the end because you'll have enough time to really look at your paper. Actually re-look at your paper, or in other words, re-vise. Get it? Re-vision?

So how can you get out of your own head? Two ways: people and levels. The first way to get a fresh perspective is audience-oriented revision: peer review, teacher conferences, writing center appointments, and other outside feedback from real, live people.

## Get Feedback!



Seek feedback! Photo by [Jon Tyson](#) on Unsplash

When you find out how other people react to your paper, it will give you invaluable perspective into what's working and what's not. This is feedback and is extremely valuable. Your teacher should help you do these kinds of peer reviews and revisions in class.

One of the most valuable ways to improve your paper is to get feedback. Feedback can come from anyone—peers, teachers, relatives, Writing Center tutors, roommates—just be sure to choose someone you trust who also knows about good writing and won't hesitate to tell you where you can improve. I don't know your grandma, but if she's the type of grandma who will tell you your paper is great no matter what's in it because you're just so nice, then run away! Okay, don't really run away from your grandma—she's probably very loving and supportive. Give her a hug instead. However, don't give your paper to your grandma to critique in that case. *My* grandma is actually a fantastic writer and wouldn't be afraid to tell me where I can improve. *Do* give your paper to someone like *my* grandma.

*Here's a tip: Most universities have a Writing Center where you can take your paper to a Writing Tutor for help and feedback for free. Do it! It's free! And they can even meet with you online.*

We're lucky at BYU that we have our very own [Research and Writing Center](#). They can help you with any stage of the writing process from selecting a topic to citing sources to synthesis. If you're not on our campus, look up your school's writing center.

As an undergrad, my husband didn't start out with the best writing skills, so he used to take his papers to the BYU Writing Center over and over and over. I think they made the rule that you can only go once a day because of him. And guess what? It helped! His grades went up! That was his secret to success that I'm passing on to you. Your teacher doesn't have time to personally meet with each student over and over and over, but the Writing Tutors are literally paid to do just that. Well, maybe keep your visits to only one per day, but you get what I mean. Take advantage! Make an appointment right now! Did I mention that it's free?

If you need more motivation to just do it, watch [this "motivational" video](#) by Shia Le Boeuf.

## Revise by Levels

The second way to improve your paper is to go through a layered revision process focusing on global and then local issues. As you re-see your paper, take my advice and tackle Global Revision before you focus on Local Revision. What do I mean by that? Let me tell you a quick story.

### A Revision Story Involving Cats

When my family and I were moving to our town, we looked at a lot of houses online. We fell in love with a beautiful old house that had been totally renovated but was selling at a shockingly low price. When we finally visited the house with our realtor, we discovered why it had been on the market for so long: it smelled like cat pee. Like really, really smelled. It turns out the house had been occupied by what many people would call a "crazy cat lady"—an older woman who lived with at least 50 cats. Then tragically, a fire completely destroyed the house (I'm pretty sure the woman and her cats survived).



To protect the innocent, this is not the infamous cat house but is close to what it looked like. Photo by [Jessica Furtney](#) on Unsplash

The home owner used \$400,000 of insurance money to beautifully restore the house. They rebuilt the intricate wooden staircase, restored the stately crown molding, installed lush carpet, and added upgrades to a gorgeous kitchen. The only problem was that they did their restoration in the wrong order—they took care of the *local issues* of paint color and carpet thickness while ignoring the more *global issue* of the smell. Eventually, they had to rip up all their work in the basement in order to treat the floor with a special enzyme that combated cat urine. If they'd just treated the cat smell first, then they could have saved themselves thousands of dollars, hours of work, and could have sold their house for a much higher price.

### The Moral of the Story

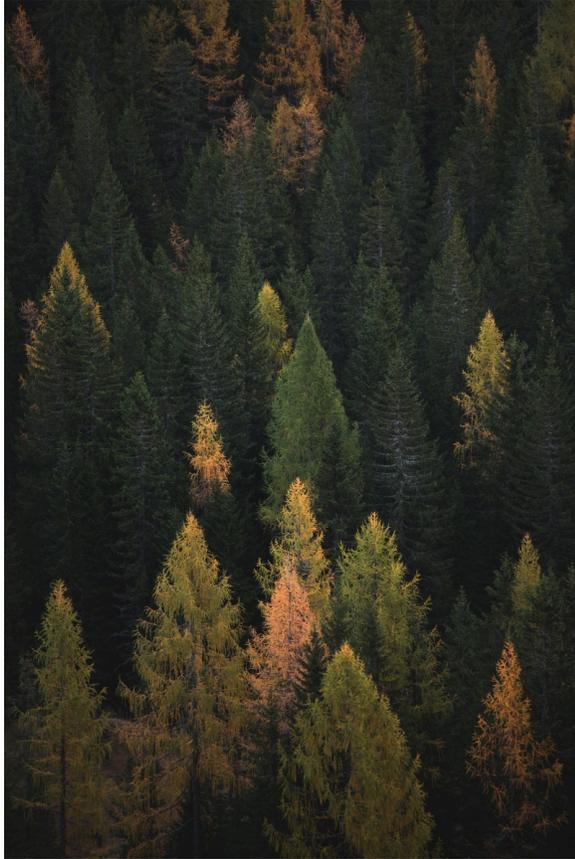


Always get rid of the cat pee (global issues) first! Photo by [Andrew Umansky](#) on Unsplash

What does all this have to do with revision? You've got it—treat the *global issues* first! Get rid of the cat pee! Don't worry about *local issues* like flowery language or sentences that connect perfectly to each other if you're just going to have to completely renovate that section later. Work on the *global issues* like ideas, logical order, and evidence first and wait until those are intact before focusing on the details. Put another way, whole-paper and paragraph-level revisions should come before sentence-level and word-level changes.

As a final gift, fantastic BYU Family Science professor Julie Haupt offers the following path for doing four purposeful revisions—two global revisions and two local revisions. If you really want to improve your literature review, follow these steps.

## GLOBAL REVISION—The Forest



First, look at the forest, not the trees. Photo by [Frederico Bottos](#) on Unsplash

### Level 1: Structural Review (Global)

**Purpose:** The structural review examines the document as a whole to see if all requirements are met and the document's organization is sound.

**Meet Assignment Requirements.** Ask yourself if your paper meets all the requirements of the assignment? Look at your structure and make sure you have all necessary sections such as the following:

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Introduction (with Thesis Statement and/or Organizing Statement)
- Body with Headings
- Conclusion/Discussion
- References

**Include a Thesis and an Organizing Statement.** Does the current version of the thesis statement match the tone, scope, and organization of the body text? Does an organizing statement after the thesis introduce the major topics and the order they will appear in the body (e.g., "In this review, I will first discuss . . . then . . . and finally . . .")

**Use Headings.** Is the body text subdivided in a logical way with evidence-based information located in appropriate sections? Are the major sections roughly symmetrical (in terms of length)? Are the headings brief, yet descriptive? If

subheadings are used, does the major section contain at least two? Are all levels of headings separated by text?

## Level 2 (Global): Paragraph/Logic Review

**Purpose:** The Paragraph/Logic Review is designed to review each paragraph for cohesion and compliance to the CEC (Claim-Evidence-Commentary) format.

**Sequence Paragraphs Effectively.** When reading only the first sentence of each paragraph, does the logical pattern of the paper emerge? Do the claims made in these topic sentences coordinate well with the thesis of the paper?

**Check Topic Sentences and Cohesion.** Does the topic sentence or claim provide an effective overview of the information that is located in the paragraph? Is the claim supported by several points of synthesized evidence, rather than a single study? Does each paragraph seem well directed and cohesive? Do the sentences build one upon another within the paragraph in a logical way?

**Evaluate Paragraph Length.** Are any paragraphs too long (longer than approximately ½ page)? Are any paragraphs too short (approximately three sentences or less)? Do paragraphs transition well from one to the next and use transitional words to connect ideas?

## LOCAL REVISION—The Tree



In Local Revision, you'll pay more attention to the details of the "tree." Photo by [Petr Kratochvil](#) on Pixabay

## Level 3 (Local): Formatting Review

**Purpose:** The Formatting Review is designed to make sure all style and formatting conventions are explicitly followed to help the paper reflect a high level of professionalism.

**Check Document Formatting.** Do the title page, abstract, body text, and reference page appear in the correct page formatting as required? (Check your discipline's style guide for details.)

**Examine the Reference List Closely.** Are all references in the reference list ordered alphabetically? Is the reference list spaced with no extra gaps between paragraphs? Are all references (e.g., journal articles, internet resources, or books) listed in the correct format? Is every reference on the reference list cited at least once in the body and does each in-text citation have a corresponding reference in the reference list?

**Make a Final Check of the In-Text Citations.** Is all information properly cited with an in-text citation when needed? Do all in-text citations include the year next to the author(s)? When more than one citation is listed within parentheses are they separated by semi-colons? Do they need to be ordered alphabetically by first author's last name?

**Use "et al." Correctly.** Check your field's style guide for multiple authors. If a study has multiple authors, do you include the correct number of authors' names in the in-text citation? Do you include the correct number of authors in the references page?

## **Level 4 (Local): Finishing Review**

**Purpose:** The Finishing Review is an opportunity to look closely at sentence construction, language, hedging, and grammar/punctuation.

**Review Phrasing with a Read-Aloud Session.** Read your paper aloud. Since having to read a sentence twice to get its meaning or "tripping over" phrasing can be an indication of awkward construction, are all sentences easily read aloud? Are any sentences so long that they have become difficult to comprehend, but could be split without changing the meaning?

**Use Non-Biased, Non-Absolute Language.** Do all references to people comply with the "people first" designation and avoid inappropriate uses of terms for various groups? Are the findings and summary statements in the review properly "hedged"?

**Check Punctuation and Grammar.** Are all commas, semicolons, colons, hyphens, and other punctuation used correctly throughout the document (including the reference page)? Are common grammar mistakes, such as parallelism, subject-verb agreement, misuse of pronouns, and other grammatical issues corrected?

### **Conclusion**

I know Literature Reviews can be daunting, but I hope that after reading this chapter you feel better prepared to tackle this bodacious writing assignment. As you practice writing, you'll find that it'll get easier and easier until it's as intuitive as riding a hoverboard.



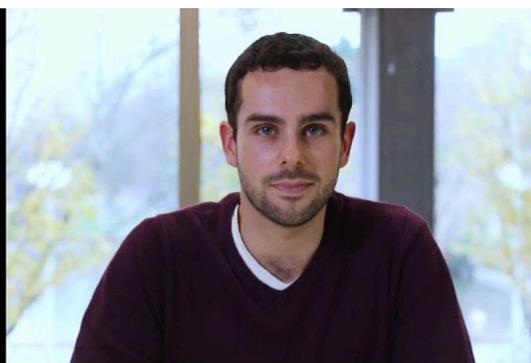
Writing a Literature Review can be as easy as riding a hoverboard.

### \*Bonus Video

If you're still confused or would like more guidance on writing a literature review, here is an optional 25-minute video that thoroughly goes through the entire process of writing a literature review. As an extra bonus, it's made by Michael Paye from the University of Dublin who has an awesome Irish accent. Enjoy!

# HOW TO WRITE A LITERATURE REVIEW WITHOUT MELTING DOWN

MICHAEL PAYE  
UCD WRITING CENTRE



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Cristie Cowles Charles teaches writing and literature courses at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. She enjoys sparking a love for writing in her students—or at least a love for having had written (it's always worth it in the end, right?). She thinks pumpkin pie counts as a vegetable, is married to a super hot mechanical engineering and neuroscience professor (yes, they exist), and adores her five magnificent children.

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