WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW: FIRST STEPS

Overall purpose: to summarize and synthesize the arguments and ideas presented in a body of literature related to your research question

- Which literature to include

  Empirical studies
    Old and new
    Seminal articles
    Current articles
  Theoretical/conceptual work
    Articles that lay out a theoretical framework or model related to your question
  Previous review articles
    Literature reviews that have been published before
  Descriptions of particular methods
    If you are using an unusual method (so that it needs justification)

- Organization

  Organize around the ideas, rather than the articles
    Themes, issues, concepts, questions
  General structure
    Introduction; statement of scope
    Themes, each in turn
      As listed in the introduction
      Each closing with a very brief summary, if they are more than a paragraph or two
    Conclusion: connecting the literature to your research question

- Writing tips

  o Use evidence
  o Be selective
  o For a particular article, you don’t need to report everything discovered
  o You don’t need to include every article you find
  o Use quotes sparingly
  o Keep your own voice
  o Be clear about which ideas are yours and which are from the sources you’ve read
  o Use caution when paraphrasing
  o Be accurate
  o Use your own words
  o Use headings to help the reader