Literature Review

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Literature Review

A literature search involves searching books, journals, reports and more for information on a particular topic.

You need to be very systematic when looking for information, otherwise you’ll waste time and may miss relevant references.

It may take one of the following forms:

• Annotated bibliography which will include comment on key themes or trends.

• Critical assessment (or narrative review) which identifies weaknesses and gaps in the research, indicates differences in views between authors, and raises questions. It will show relationships, so that key themes emerge.
Literature Review

It will identify:
• What has been said on a topic.
• Key authors writing in the area.
• Main theories.
• Questions and controversies.
• Methods and methodologies used to carry out the research.

IT IS NOT
• A list of everything that has been published on your topic.
• Descriptive only - it must include comment and analysis.

IT SHOULD NOT
• Contain material unrelated to your topic - all sources must be relevant.
Where to start?
Define your topic

The multifunctional roles of vegetated strips around and within agricultural fields.
Practical

Write down your research proposal title
Ask yourself:
What question(s) are you trying to answer?

What evidence exists regarding the effects of field margins on nutrients, pollutants, socioeconomics, biodiversity, and soil retention in boreo-temperate systems?

These may need to be included as search terms.
What question are you trying to answer? Write it down.
What are the key concepts?

The multifunctional roles of vegetated strips around and within agricultural fields.
Are there alternative ways to describe your keywords?

vegetated strips
field margin
hedgerow
shelterbelt
riparian buffer
etc.

agricultural fields
grassland
farmland
meadow
pasture
etc.

How do you come up with this list of terms?
How to identify the right search terms?

Check:

• Books

• Carry out a preliminary search in USearch

• Carry out a preliminary web search

• Can you find one good journal article? Which terms have been used to describe it?

• Has an author been recommended to you? What terms are used to describe his/her publications?
Practical

Do a quick search in USearch – list the terms appearing.

Look in the Library Catalogue for an ebook on your broad topic – look for some relevant search terms.
Combining search concepts

**AND** and **OR**

Use **OR** to add alternative ways to describe your search terms

e.g. vegetated strips **or** hedgerows

will find results containing **any** of these terms

This will **increase** the number of results
Combining search concepts

**AND** and **OR**

Use **AND** to combine different search concepts in your results.

**e.g. vegetated strips **and** agricultural fields**

will find results containing both **vegetated strips** and **agricultural fields**

This will **decrease** the number of results.
Practical

Look at your list terms:
Write down the terms you will combine with OR
Write down the terms you will combine with AND
Search operators

Truncation and phrase searching

Use an asterisk * to find different endings for a search term
  e.g. **farm** will find
  farm
  farmland
  farmed
  farming etc.

Use double quotation marks “ ” to keep terms together in your results
  e.g. “vegetative strip”
Search operators
Proximity / Adjacency Operators

Use these to search for two or more words within a specified number of words, in any order

e.g.  **vegetated W/3 strip** in Scopus
or  **vegetated Near/3 strip** in Web of Science

will find a phrase such as  **vegetated buffer strip** or  **vegetated filter strip**

* *Individual databases use different operators – always check the HELP section for further information*
Search operators

Wildcards

Use this to replace a single character within a word*

  e.g. organisation

will find organisation or organization

* Most databases will use the ? symbol – always check the HELP section for further information
Practical

Look at your list terms:
Could you use truncation, phrase searching, wildcards or proximity operators with any of your terms?
Write these down.
Limits on your searches

Consider:

limiting by publication year

limiting by publication type e.g. peer reviewed journals

limiting by language

limiting by geographic region
Practical

Make a list of any limits you are going to apply.
Identify appropriate sources for your topic

**Books** – use our Library Catalogue for print and ebooks (much material housed in our Special Collections room is listed in the Library Catalogue)

**Grey Literature:**
– professional body websites; government websites; charities; statistical sites; council websites
- Existing theses or university repositories
- Conference papers (e.g. from Web of Science)

**Newspapers** – Nexis database covers local, national and international newspapers (we also have historical newspaper collections e.g. Nineteenth Century British Library Newspapers)

**Databases** – Use our A-Z list of Databases; search by keywords and or author

**Key Journal titles** – “hand search” key journal titles. Use our Electronic Journals collection
You will need to adapt your search approach for each type of resource

Books – search using broad terms; No complicated search strings

Grey Literature:
- Websites, theses & repositories - one or two broad search terms
- Conferences – use search strings

Newspapers – use search strings

Databases – use search strings

Key Journal titles – No complicated search strings
Practical

Start to make a list of the sources you are going to use.
Evaluating what you find

• Too little information
  
  use broader search terms
  
  think of synonyms and alternative keywords
  
  try different combinations of your keywords use the OR connector

• Too much information
  
  think about your terms are they too broad
  
  think about the topic; can you narrow it to specifics?
  
  add in limits e.g. population group, publication years
Save what you find!
Record complete details of all useful references

Various ways to do this:

- write them down
- print the reference
- save them within the databases (create a personal account)
- use an online bibliographic management program such as RefWorks
If you need help, please get in touch:

Library Contacts:

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Useful Guides:

Digital and Information Literacy Skills

Geography and Gis Library Subject Guide

Environmental and Marine Sciences Library Subject Guide