

Writing a literature review

- 1 Choose appropriate bibliographic software (for example, Endnote, Mendeley, Papers or Zotero).
- 2 Decide on a citation style.
- 3 When you are reading your sources, divide them into rocks, gravel, and sand, where: rocks = essential, salient; gravel = respectable, relevant; sand = deserving a mention if space allows.
- 4 Plan your review around the rocks. Only worry about where to include the gravel (and then sand) once the rocks are in place.
- 5 Allocate space accordingly. Allow sufficient space to discuss each 'rock' in detail. Keep the treatment of 'sand' sources brief and brisk.
- 6 Tell a story. In particular, when writing paragraphs, avoid beginning each opening sentence with a citation – otherwise the review will sound more like a library catalogue.
- 7 Ensure your review is critical. In particular:
 - a. make sources speak to each other – where are they in agreement, where are they inconsistent with each other, and how does one source lead to or connect with others?
 - b. ask yourself what's central/marginal, salient/tangential, strong/weak, good/bad, or right/wrong?

This resource is published as the eleventh in the Writing Protocols series.

Resources

Irene Daly, 'Using bibliographic software' (*Write your research: writeyourresearch.wordpress.com*) reviews a range of software tools.

The University of Leeds library website provides guidance on, and practical tools for, referencing: <http://library.leeds.ac.uk/skills-referencing>.

Jeanne Godfrey, *How to use your reading in your essays* (Palgrave, 2009) provides practical guidance at an introductory level.

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