

# CHS Lib Guide: Writing a Literature Review

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Honors Biology Courses  
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## **A Literature Review:**

- Discusses published information in a particular subject area
- Is a combination of summary (recap) & synthesis (reorganization of information-new ideas, intellectual progressions of the field/topic, new & old ideas combined, evaluation of Literature, etc.)
- Provides you with a quick overview or starting point for current research

## **Standard Criteria:**

- Three resources (minimum) for each review
- Resources can be online scholarly journals, news articles, videos, textbooks/books
- You must include definitions and/or background history for anything that is not common knowledge.
- Make sure your topic isn't too broad. Narrowing your topic will limit the number of sources you have to read in order to get a good handle on the material.
- Your sources need to be current, especially in the sciences. If the material was published more than two years ago, it could be obsolete.
- Make sure your Literature Review is surrounded around a connected theme.
- Unless a thesis is required, you may not need one. However, make sure your readers know what to expect.  
Example: *The current trend in treatment for congestive heart failure is surgery and guided therapy focusing on nutrition and physical activity.*

## **Organization:**

- You must have an Introduction, Body, & Conclusion
- You can organize your review several different ways:
  - 1) Chronological: write about the materials according to when they were published (regardless of the subject of the material)
  - 2) By Publication (ONLY if there is an important trend): practices of the researchers who wrote/conducted the studies changed
  - 3) By Trend: Examine the sources under another trend (like the history of a topic)
  - 4) Thematic: organize the review around a topic or issue, rather than a progression of time (understand time is still important, especially if you are looking at how technology has changed)
  - 5) Methodological: focuses on the methods of the researcher or writer

## **Composition:**

- 1) Use evidence.
- 2) Select only the most important points in each source to highlight.
- 3) Use quotes *sparingly*.
- 4) Summarize & synthesize your sources within each paragraph.
- 5) Keep your voice—start and end your paragraphs with YOUR ideas and YOUR words. The sources should support what you say.
- 6) Cautiously paraphrase—make sure you represent the author's information or opinions ACCURATELY in your own words. Make sure you cite the source & don't plagiarize.
- 7) Give yourself plenty of time to revise & rewrite your draft.