

Literature Review Pointers

1. Get familiar with economics journal sources and how economics articles are categorized according to keyword and *JEL* Code. You should be searching for research articles using ECONLIT (available through the Library's database section). Searching on Google will often link you to work that has not been published. It is ok to cite unpublished work, but you will not be able to "count" this work among your cited papers (see 3 below).
2. It is easy to find lots of articles on one topic, but difficult to sort out which ones are important and relevant to your specific topic. You need to find the most relevant articles for your topic, and tell the reader why these are relevant articles for your topic specifically. To identify whether an article is important for your research, first read the abstract (if the article has one), then skim through the paper's introduction, results, and conclusions. This abstract will convey the skeleton of the article and the general approach used.
3. You must have *at least five* relevant research papers cited in your paper. These five papers must be published in peer-reviewed economics journals and should represent the views of a variety of researchers from several different years (depending on your topic). Once you find a good recent article, look at the literature review and references for that article, and see if there is an article there that you should read. You should read more than this to familiarize yourself with how the specific topic fits into the general literature in a broader sense. This will require that you find more than five papers, as many of them will not directly bear on your topic.
4. The literature review serves two functions:
 - (i) Motivate why this is an important question that other researchers have studied.
 - (ii) Give the reader an overview of what other researchers have found.

If someone has done a similar analysis to yours, tell us, and then explain how yours is different. Explain their findings, and then follow up with what you expect to find, and compare.

5. People have a tendency to simply report the results of others. Remember, you are telling a story and explaining to the reader where other work fits into and helps tell the story. In terms of writing, putting together a well-written, interesting literature review will probably be the most difficult part of your paper. You don't need to summarize all of the findings from the research papers you cite, focus on those aspects of these papers that are relevant for your study.
6. To begin, I would recommend drawing up an outline of your literature review. When writing your literature review, you want to organize the research of others into themes that you want to convey to the reader. Again, do not simply list the results of others. Think about how the research papers you've found compare to each other (as well as your own). You can even group them in pairs or threes and discuss differences/similarities among the papers in a group. Within a research topic there are usually common empirical approaches and other issues. Look for these similarities once you've read through and taken notes on the papers you intend to include in your literature review.
7. Be aware of plagiarism. The definition of plagiarism is in the *University Policy Manual*. The best way to get a sense for how to appropriately cite and attribute material is to read economics research articles. Avoiding plagiarism doesn't mean rewriting someone else's ideas in your own words. If you are using someone else's idea, you must cite it.