

ACE Quick Guide to Creating a Literature Review Reading Log

Keeping a literature review reading log **promotes an organised and structured approach to understanding and critically evaluating** existing scholarly research relevant to your research topic. It also **supports the planning and drafting process**.

The Benefits of Creating a Literature Review Reading Log



Creates a **systematised approach** whereby sources are **stored centrally** and are easy to locate.



Establishes **connections** across the research, **identifying key themes and trends** as well as any **areas of disagreement and controversy**.



Facilitates **critical evaluation of existing research**, highlighting **research gaps** and **potential limitations of various theories, positions, evidence, and methodologies**.




Highlights **implications for your research** and facilitates understanding of **how this will build on or add to the existing body of knowledge in the field**.

Preparing to Create Your Literature Review Reading Log

1. Generate a list of relevant search terms

Once you have **produced a clear and concise summary of your research question, problem, or topic**, you should **generate a list of relevant key words** that you will use as **search terms** to conduct a literature search.



To generate these terms, you should **consider the general topic of your research** as well as any **potential subtopics**. It is important that for each search term you identify, you **think of alternative words or synonyms** to help broaden your search.

2. Conduct an initial literature search using online research tools

Use your **list of key words and synonyms** to search for relevant academic literature using **open access online research tools** such as: [Google Scholar](#), [Directory of Open Access Journals](#), [JSTOR](#) and [Semantic Scholar](#). Ideally, you should **spend a couple of hours developing an initial bank of at least 15 to 20 research papers**.

It is important to try and locate a **wide range of credible and relevant sources**, authored by experts in your field. For example: *chapters in edited collections, conference papers and peer-reviewed journal articles*.

In order to determine if a source is both credible and relevant, **apply the CRAAP test** (California State University-Chico, 2010) which is available to view in our [Evaluating Sources and Reading Critically Quick Guide](#). If the source is both credible and relevant, **save it somewhere to return to once you have conducted your initial search**. You can save online sources to your 'favourites' folder on your internet browser. Alternatively, you can save links in a Word document, Excel spreadsheet, Google Docs, or in a OneNote workbook. It does not matter where you save them as long as you save them somewhere!



3. Read through your bank of initial sources, adding notes to your log

When you have finished your initial literature search and gathered a bank of credible and relevant sources, you can start **reading them methodically**, taking notes in your reading log (see p. 4).

The reading log encourages you to think about and take notes on: (1) **the purpose of the research**, (2) **the methodology used**, (3) **key findings**, (4) **potential limitations**, (5) **implications for your research**, (6) **how the findings link to other sources**. It is important to **allocate a significant period of time for this**. Reading and taking notes constitutes the largest proportion of time in the literature review process.



4. Organise your log into key themes

After reading some of your initial sources and taking notes in your reading log, you may start to notice **emerging themes and trends** in the research.

As your reading log develops, it is advisable to **group the research into key themes and subthemes** (p. 4). This helps to **organise your reading log effectively** so you can easily locate relevant research and will also **assist with the planning and drafting process**.



5. If necessary, conduct a further literature search

It is important to note that **searching for sources is not a linear process**.

Once you start reading through your initial bank of sources, this may prompt you to **explore related sub-themes or issues in more detail**. Therefore, you may need to **conduct a further literature search**. Use the same principles outlined in steps 1 and 2 (p. 2) and start by generating a list of key words and synonyms that you can use to search for further literature in open-access online research tools, applying the CRAAP test to assess the credibility and relevance of each source.



6. Create a plan

Once your reading log is complete or near completion, you can use it to **inform your initial plan for the literature review write-up**.

The purpose and function of a literature review is to **critically analyse and evaluate research on a specific topic in a structured and organised way**. A well-organised and structured reading log that is grouped into key themes and subthemes ensures a smooth planning and drafting process.

Literature Review Reading Log Techniques

There are **many ways to create a literature review reading log** using a variety of different platforms and applications. It is important to **find a system that works for you**. However, two of the most common platforms students use are **Microsoft Word** and **Excel**.

1. Word	Simple and effective way to store research for an assignment. Useful for establishing links between sources.
2. Excel	Visually clear method using rows and columns. Research can be further categorised via filters, colour coding and tabs.

Below is an example reading log using Microsoft Word. You can access our ready to use [Word](#) and [Excel](#) templates by clicking the links. Alternatively, **you can design your own log in your preferred platform** using the key principles and sections outlined in the example.

Literature Review Reading Log Example

2 Make a note of the **purpose of the study**. Why was it conducted? What did it aim to find out?

3 Provide details of **how the research was conducted**. What was the methodological approach? What data collection methods were used?

4 Extract the **main points, key findings, conclusions and recommendations** of the study.

5 Identify **potential limitations of the study**. What could have been done better? What do we still need to find out? Is there bias or has anything been overlooked?

1 For each source included in your log, provide the **reference list entry and in text citation**.

6 Think about the **implications of the research for your project**. How does it support, inform or provide justification for it?

7 Think about how this source **compares to other sources** you have read. Do other studies support or oppose these findings?

8 As you read through your sources, you may start to notice emerging themes and trends. It is advisable to **divide your log into different themes and subthemes**. This helps organise your log and ensures a smooth planning and drafting process.

Reference	Purpose	Methodology	Key findings	Limitations	Implications	Links to other sources
Theme 1						
Theme 2						
Theme 3						



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