



The  
**Literature  
Review**

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issue for further study. Advanced master's theses and all doctoral dissertations use the advanced literature review as a stepping-stone for discovering what is not yet known about the topic.

While basic reviews and advanced reviews seek different outcomes, the manner by which they uncover knowledge and produce a thesis are similar and parallel.

### THE LITERATURE REVIEW DEFINED

A literature review is a written **argument** that promotes a thesis position by building a case from credible **evidence** based on previous research. It provides the context and the background about the current knowledge of the topic and lays out a logical case to defend the thesis position taken. Here is our definition of a literature review:

*A literature review is a written document that presents a logically argued case founded on a comprehensive understanding of the current state of knowledge about a topic of study. This case establishes a convincing thesis to answer the study's question.*

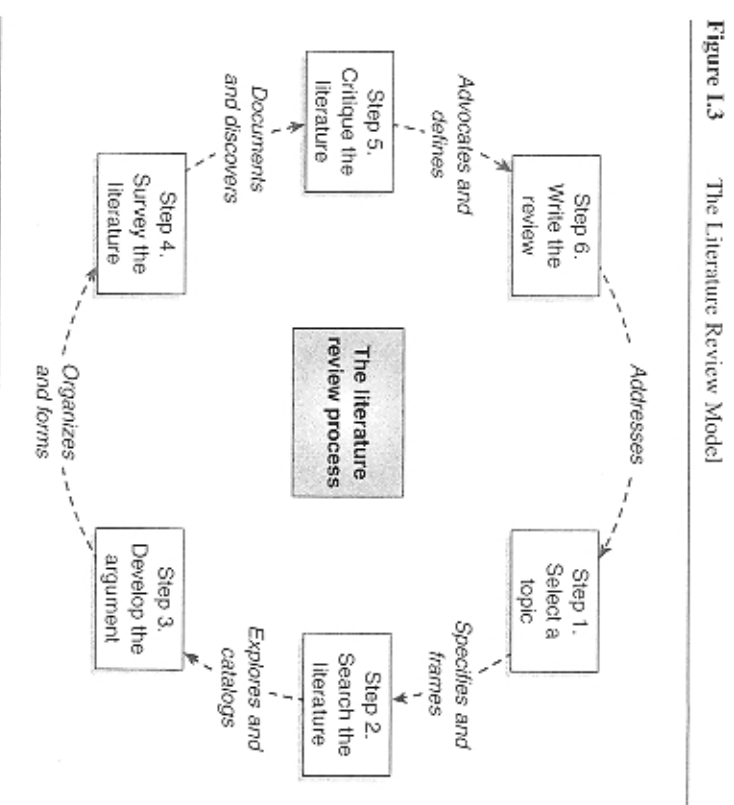
### THE LITERATURE REVIEW PROCESS

A literature review is an organized way to research the chosen topic. Figure I.3 shows the steps for conducting a literature review.

Writing a literature review is developmental, with each of the six steps leading to the next (Figure I.3). The following is a brief explanation of the six steps:

#### Step 1. Select a Topic

A successful research topic is usually the result of an interest in a practical problem. That interest must move from everyday language into ideas that form a researchable topic. This topic must be stated as a well-defined question accessible to a specific academic discipline. Specifying the language, refining the focus of the interest, and selecting the academic vantage point are the tasks necessary to create a research topic. The result is a defined topic that provides the direction for Step 2.



#### Step 2. Search the Literature

A literature search determines what information will be in the review. It does this by winnowing the information to only the **data** that provide the strongest evidence to support the thesis. When searching the literature, you must preview, select, and organize the data for study by using the skills of **skimming**, **scanning**, and **mapping** the data. At this point, you catalog and document the relevant data.

#### Step 3. Develop the Argument

To argue your thesis successfully, you need to form and then present your case. To form your case, you need to arrange your **claims** logically. To present your case, you need to organize the relevant data into a body of evidence that explains what is known about the topic.