



Scholarly Reading Guide: Reading the Literature Review, Methodology, and Discussion

Reading Literature Reviews

In literature reviews, authors often mention previous studies and theories, limitations of previous research, research questions, and research to be explored.

What Is a Literature Review?

Literature reviews supply background on the topic, discuss prior studies, or give the history of a subject (depending on the discipline). While reading literature reviews, **one goal is to understand how the research article uses past studies or theories in order to conduct research.** Consider the following:

- Generally, authors will mention past studies in order to argue that their research is important and should be conducted. While reading, note the past studies that are mentioned. This helps you see the connections between the prior studies and the current one you are reading.
- To better comprehend the literature review section of an article, you might find it helpful to see how different types of literature reviews in different disciplines use evidence or organize their literature review.

For more on the different ways authors organize literature reviews, see [Types of Literature Reviews](#).

When reading literature reviews, you might notice certain types of language that is used to discuss prior studies and theories. Consider the following common language and phrases authors use in the literature review:

Academic Phrases & Sentences in Literature Reviews¹

Previous studies/literature

- Previous research showed ___.
- A series of recent studies has indicated that ___.
- This has been used in several studies to assess ___.
- Previous studies have shown ___.
- Several studies suggest that ___.
- This has also been explored in prior studies by ___.
- Prior research suggests that ___.
- Previous studies have emphasized ___.

Limitations of previous research

- A number of questions regarding ___ remain to be addressed.
- A closer look to the literature on ___, however, reveals a number of gaps and shortcomings.
- This question has previously never been addressed because ___.
- Previous studies by ___ cannot be considered as conclusive because ___.
- Previous studies have almost exclusively focused on ___.

¹ Extracted from [Academic Phrases for Writing Literature Review Section of a Research Paper](#) by REF-N-WRITE, 2017

Research questions

- Furthermore, ___ is arguably an important question to be addressed.
- The question now is how ___ can be used to explain ___.
- Study addresses the research question ___.
- In order to properly address this question, we ___.
- An important question associated with ___ is ___.
- A critical open question is whether ___.
- A still unsolved question is whether ___.

Research to be explored

- As the authors note earlier, more work is necessary to _____.
- Additional studies to understand more completely the key tenets of _____ are required.
- The unexpected findings signal the need for additional studies to understand more about _____.
- This paper addresses _____, so far lacking in the scientific literature.

The exact phrases in the table might not be the exact phrases in the research article you are reading. However, understanding the type of language that is often used in literature reviews can help you read the literature review in your discipline. Being aware of how language is used to discuss certain elements in a literature review can reveal a greater understanding of what is being discussed in the scholarly article.

Reading Methodology

The methods researchers use directly impacts the results and how those results are interpreted. Since the methods researchers use vary significantly by discipline, the wording in methodology sections also greatly varies. For more on methodologies, visit this resource: [Academic Phrases for Writing Methods Section of a Research Paper](#).

Reading Results & Discussion

The results and discussion section of scholarly work generally includes the following three elements: findings, comparisons, and limitations. Reading for these elements can help you understand the connection between what you are reading and other research in your field or discipline.

- Findings: the result of the study or methodology used
- Comparisons: the connection between the current work and prior studies
- Limitations of the work: such as a lack of prior research studies on the topic or participants available

Academic Phrases & Sentences in Results & Discussion²

Findings

- Our findings on ___ at least hint that ___.
- This is an important finding in the understanding of the ___.
- The present study confirmed the findings about ___.
- Another promising finding was that ___.
- Our results demonstrated that ___.
- This result highlights that little is known about the ___.
- Together, the present findings confirm ___.

² Extracted from [Academic Phrases for Writing Results & Discussion Sections of a Research Paper](#) by REF-N-WRITE, 2017
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- The implications of these findings are discussed in ___.
- The results of the experiment found clear support for the ___.
- This analysis found evidence for ___.
- Planned comparisons revealed that ___.

Comparisons with prior studies

- These results go beyond previous reports, showing that ___.
- In line with previous studies ___.
- This result ties well with previous studies wherein ___.
- Contrary to the findings of ___ we did not find ___.
- Others have shown that ___ improves ___.
- By comparing the results from ___, we hope to determine ___.
- When comparing our results to those of older studies, it must be pointed out that ___.

Limitations of the work

- One concern about the findings of ___ was that ___.
- Because of this potential limitation, we treat ___.
- The limitations of the present studies naturally include ___.
- Regarding the limitations of ___, it could be argued that ___.
- Another limitation of this ___.
- This limitation is apparent in many ___.
- Another limitation in ___ involves the issue of ___.
- The main limitation is the lack of ___.

Again, even if the article you are reading does not contain the exact examples above, being aware of the common language used in these sections can help you understand the type of language you will come across while reading these sections. Once you find these three elements within the results/discussion section of a scholarly article you are reading, you will begin to see it is connected to other scholarly work.

Summary

Our Scholarly Reading Guide resource series was developed as a way to provide English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners the opportunity to better read and comprehend scholarly texts.

We hope this guide will provide you with strategies for more productive scholarly reading. If you have questions, please contact elc@vanderbilt.edu.

Find this guide and more online at: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/elc/resources/scholarly-reading-guide/>