LITERATURE REVIEW CHECKLIST

A comprehensive checklist to ensure your literature review meets academic standards and demonstrates thorough research.

□ PLANNING & PREPARATION

Research Question & Scope

- [ ] Clear research question or thesis identified
- [ ] Scope of review defined (time period, geographic area, specific aspects)
- [ ] Key concepts and terminology clearly defined
- [ ] Search parameters established (databases, journals, keywords)
- [ ] Inclusion/exclusion criteria determined

Source Selection

- [ ] Minimum of 15-20 scholarly sources identified (adjust based on paper length)
- [ ] 80%+ sources are peer-reviewed academic journals
- [ ] Sources are current and relevant (typically within last 10 years, unless seminal works)
- [ ] Mix of primary and secondary sources included
- [ ] Diverse perspectives and viewpoints represented
- [ ] Seminal/foundational works in the field included

□ ORGANIZATION & STRUCTURE

Organizational Method

- [ ] Clear organizational pattern chosen:
  - [ ] Chronological (by publication date)
  - [ ] Thematic (by topic/theme)
  - [ ] Methodological (by research methods)
  - [ ] Theoretical (by theoretical framework)
- [ ] Logical flow from one section to next
- [ ] Smooth transitions between ideas and sources
- [ ] Clear subheadings that guide the reader

Content Structure

- [ ] Introduction establishes purpose and scope
- [ ] Body synthesizes sources (not just summarizes)
- [ ] Patterns, themes, and trends identified
- [ ] Gaps in existing research highlighted
- [ ] Contradictions or debates in literature discussed
- [ ] Conclusion synthesizes key findings

□ WRITING QUALITY

Synthesis vs. Summary

- [ ] Sources are synthesized, not just listed or summarized
- [ ] Multiple sources discussed together under common themes
- [ ] Critical analysis provided (strengths, weaknesses, limitations)
- [ ] Your own analytical voice is present
- [ ] Connections between sources explicitly stated
- [ ] NOT organized as "Source A says… Source B says… Source C says…"

Critical Analysis

- [ ] Methodological strengths and weaknesses evaluated
- [ ] Research findings critically examined
- [ ] Theoretical frameworks assessed
- [ ] Contradictory findings acknowledged and discussed
- [ ] Research gaps and limitations identified
- [ ] Future research directions suggested

Academic Writing Style

- [ ] Objective, formal academic tone maintained
- [ ] Third person used (no "I" or "we" unless discipline-appropriate)
- [ ] Present tense used for discussing sources
- [ ] Clear, concise sentences
- [ ] Technical terminology defined when introduced
- [ ] Free from grammatical and spelling errors

□ CITATIONS & REFERENCES

In-Text Citations

- [ ] Every claim from sources properly cited
- [ ] Citation style consistent throughout (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.)
- [ ] Direct quotes used sparingly and properly formatted
- [ ] Paraphrasing done correctly (not too close to original)
- [ ] Page numbers included for direct quotes
- [ ] Multiple authors cited correctly

Reference List/Bibliography

- [ ] All cited sources included in reference list
- [ ] All reference list entries cited in text
- [ ] Alphabetical order (by author's last name)
- [ ] Proper formatting for each source type
- [ ] Hanging indentation applied
- [ ] DOIs or URLs included where appropriate
- [ ] Consistent formatting throughout

□ CONTENT QUALITY

Relevance

- [ ] All sources directly relevant to research question
- [ ] Irrelevant or tangential sources removed
- [ ] Each source contributes to understanding the topic
- [ ] Literature review addresses the research gap

Currency & Quality

- [ ] Most sources recent (last 5-10 years) unless classic works
- [ ] High-quality, credible sources used
- [ ] Seminal works in the field included
- [ ] Predatory journals avoided
- [ ] Wikipedia and non-scholarly sources excluded

Coverage

- [ ] Major theories and frameworks covered
- [ ] Key debates in the field discussed
- [ ] Different methodological approaches represented
- [ ] International/diverse perspectives included (when relevant)
- [ ] Landmark studies in the field referenced

□ RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

Gap Identification

- [ ] Research gaps clearly identified
- [ ] Limitations of existing research discussed
- [ ] Your study's potential contribution explained
- [ ] Justification for your research provided

Theoretical Framework

- [ ] Relevant theories discussed
- [ ] Theoretical lens for your study identified
- [ ] Connection between theory and your research shown

□ TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Length & Format

- [ ] Meets required word count (typically 15-25% of total paper)
- [ ] Proper margins, spacing, and font used
- [ ] Page numbers included
- [ ] Title page formatted correctly (if required)
- [ ] Abstract included (if required)

Sections & Components

- [ ] Introduction with clear purpose statement
- [ ] Body paragraphs with topic sentences
- [ ] Logical progression of ideas
- [ ] Conclusion summarizing key points
- [ ] Smooth transitions throughout

□ FINAL REVIEW

Content Check

- [ ] Research question clearly addressed
- [ ] All claims supported by citations
- [ ] No unsupported opinions or assertions
- [ ] Balance between description and critical analysis
- [ ] Your contribution and perspective clear

Quality Check

- [ ] Proofread for grammar, spelling, punctuation
- [ ] Consistency in terminology and style
- [ ] All acronyms defined at first use
- [ ] Figures/tables properly labeled and cited (if applicable)
- [ ] Word count within required range

Plagiarism Check

- [ ] All paraphrased content properly cited
- [ ] Direct quotes in quotation marks with citations
- [ ] Similarity score checked (Turnitin, etc.)
- [ ] Common knowledge properly attributed
- [ ] No patch-writing (over-reliance on source sentence structure)

Final Polish

- [ ] Read aloud for flow and clarity
- [ ] Peer review obtained (if possible)
- [ ] Professor's feedback incorporated (if draft reviewed)
- [ ] All formatting guidelines followed
- [ ] File saved in correct format for submission

□ QUALITY INDICATORS

Your literature review should: - ✓ Demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the field - ✓ Show critical thinking and analytical skills - ✓ Synthesize multiple sources cohesively - ✓ Identify patterns, themes, and research gaps - ✓ Provide context for your research - ✓ Be well-organized and easy to follow - ✓ Use high-quality, current scholarly sources - ✓ Contribute to academic conversation

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□ COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

- □ Simply summarizing sources one by one
- □ Including too many direct quotes
- □ Using outdated sources unnecessarily
- □ Failing to identify research gaps
- □ No critical analysis (just description)
- □ Poor organization or structure
- □ Inconsistent citation style
- □ Including non-scholarly sources
- □ Plagiarism or improper paraphrasing
- □ No synthesis across sources

□ FINAL SUBMISSION CHECKLIST

Before submitting your literature review:

- [ ] All checklist items above completed
- [ ] Document saved with proper filename
- [ ] Correct file format (.doc, .docx, .pdf as required)
- [ ] Submitted to correct platform/location
- [ ] Confirmation of submission received
- [ ] Copy saved for your records

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Need Help?

If you're struggling with any aspect of your literature review: - Consult your professor or advisor - Visit your university's writing center - Review exemplar literature reviews in your field - Seek guidance from librarians for source selection

Remember: A strong literature review demonstrates not just what you've read, but how you've synthesized and critically analyzed existing research to position your own study.