What is a Literature Review?

A literature review is a summary of previous research on a topic. Literature reviews can be either a part of a larger report of a research project, a thesis or a bibliographic essay that is published separately in a scholarly journal.

Some questions to think about as you develop your literature review:
1. What is known about the subject?
2. Are there any gaps in the knowledge of the subject?
3. Have areas of further study been identified by other researchers that you may want to consider?
4. Who are the significant research personalities in this area?
5. Is there consensus about the topic?
6. What aspects have generated significant debate on the topic?
7. What methods or problems were identified by others studying in the field and how might they impact your research?
8. What is the most productive methodology for your research based on the literature you have reviewed?
9. What is the current status of research in this area?
10. What sources of information or data were identified that might be useful to you?

What is the purpose of a Literature Review?

The purpose of a literature review is to convey to the reader what knowledge and ideas have been established on a topic and what are the strengths and weaknesses. The literature review allows the reader to be brought up to date regarding the state of research in the field and familiarizes the reader with any contrasting perspectives and viewpoints on the topic. There are good reasons for beginning a literature review before starting a research paper. These reasons include:
1. To see what has and has not been investigated.
2. To develop general explanation for observed variations in a behavior or phenomenon.
3. To identify potential relationships between concepts and to identify researchable hypotheses.
4. To learn how others have defined and measured key concepts.
5. To identify data sources that other researches have used.
6. To develop alternative research projects.
7. To discover how a research project is related to the work of others.

Identifying Resources - Information is available in a number of formats. It is important for you to understand the significance of various formats so that you know what will best suit your information requirements.

- Books
- Reference Materials
- Journals
- Conference Papers
- Dissertations
- Internet
- Indexes/Abstracts Printed
- Electronic Databases
- Government publications
- Theses