According to Switzer & Wynn Perdue (2011), ‘the literature review is a professional conversation framed by a guiding concept, a well-organised presentation of the current state of topic knowledge, designed to highlight past research findings and to pave the way for the current research.’

Creswell (1994) suggests that the literature review should meet three criteria:

1. **to present results of similar studies.**
   
   This point is reinforced by Boote & Beile (2005):
   
   ‘It should not only report the claims made in the existing literature but also examine critically the research methods used to better understand whether the claims are warranted.’

2. **to relate the present study to the ongoing dialogue in the literature.**
   
   This point is reinforced by Switzer & Wynn Perdue (2011):
   
   ‘A thorough examination and comparison of resources ought to be apparent from the researcher’s literature review. It is also important that a dissertation writer’s synthesis contain original concepts, which will ideally offer something new to the discipline’s scholarly debate’.

3. **to provide a framework for comparing the results of a study with other studies.**
   
   Switzer & Wynn Perdue (2011) designed a useful organizer rubric that the template below is based on.

A Rubric for Synthesis: The Source Grid
This grid provides a framework for comparing and contrasting different authors’ views on an issue. It is a way of grouping authors who draw similar conclusions and of noting areas in which authors are in disagreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source citation</th>
<th>Source summary</th>
<th>Theme / Talking point 1</th>
<th>Theme / Talking point 2</th>
<th>Theme / Talking point 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference A</td>
<td>Paper outlines...</td>
<td>Direct quote</td>
<td></td>
<td>Direct quote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference B</td>
<td>Paper reviews...</td>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference C</td>
<td>Paper outlines...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference D</td>
<td>Paper argues...</td>
<td>Direct quote</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paraphrase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To accomplish these criteria Creswell (2002) recommends a five step process:

1. **identifying terms to typically use in your literature search**  
   This step involves the following:  
   - Turn your research topic into a question or series of questions  
   - Make a list of search terms or keywords for searching  
   - Look at synonyms – keep adding to your list of search terms as you go

2. **locating literature**  
   This step involves exploring the following sources:  
   - Library databases  
   - Peer-reviewed papers – scholarly research  
   - Grey literature – conference papers, government publications etc  
   - Inter library loans

3. **reading and checking the relevance of the literature**  
   This step involves examining the literature for the following:  
   - Authority – who are the authors/publishers?  
   - Accuracy – is the information accurate?  
   - Bias – check for hidden agendas  
   - Currency – is the material up to date?  
   - Coverage – are all aspects of the topic covered?

4. **organizing the literature you have selected**  
   Use the Source Grid Rubric (as above) to assist with this step

5. **writing a literature review**  
   Switzer & Wynn Perdue (2011) present its characteristics as follows:  
   - An **introduction** that shares the persistent question(s) the reviewed literature will address and indicates how the reviewed scholarship will be framed  
   - An **organizational frame**, which groups relevant scholarship by topic, chronology, theoretical approach, methodology, etc. and/or a combination of approaches  
   - **Transitions** organic to the discussion that indicate how different studies approach the same issues both within individual paragraphs and between paragraphs (rather than relying too heavily on headers to do all the work)  
   - **Evidence** of how conflicting findings within the literature might be resolved by looking at the methodology, sample size, questions asked (and not asked), etc.  
   - A **conclusion** that clarifies how the literature demonstrates the efficacy of the dissertation study. Does it demonstrate a gap in the literature? Does it identify a conflict that needs resolution? In many cases the specific research questions for the student author’s proposed study will be shared here too.

**References**  