

Stage 2:

Find out as much as you can about your topic area

Key Words: Objectivity

What is a literature review?

Now you have decided on a topic, you will need to find out what information and research is already available about it. This stage is sometimes called carrying out a literature review.

Why do we do a literature review?

A good literature review will help you define a good research question. It will help you understand the topic fully.

- You need to make sure that the answers to what you want to know are not already out there.
- If you are not sure exactly what you want to research, looking at the information available will help you identify gaps in knowledge, or questions that remain unanswered.
- Also, it will help make sure your research project is not exactly the same as one that has already been done recently (although being similar is okay).

How do we do a literature review?

The three things to remember when doing a literature review are:

Find it

Judge it

Link it



STAGE 2

Find It



There are a number of ways you can find out more about your topic. The simplest and most obvious ways are:

- Gathering and reading printed reports and documents.
- Conducting a web search.
- Asking others what they think or know about the topic.

If you are doing a search on the internet, have a look at our resource sheets to help you search. **Don't rely on the web alone.** This may seem like the best and easiest information source but there are still more documents available offline than online.



Try:

Libraries: Your local library may help but also think about accessing others, like a reference library or university library (The NYA and NCB libraries are also available to you).

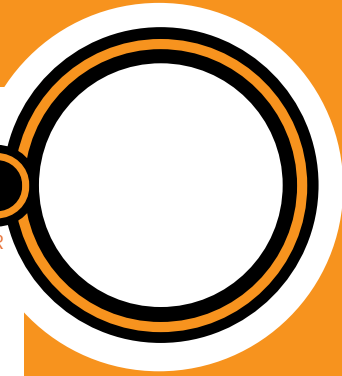
The local council: They may have reports/research that they'll let you have.

Organisations that are relevant to your topic: They will probably have information and research that will be useful.

Don't forget documents like minutes of meetings or policies and strategy documents (The NYA has a good library of these).

Look at the reference list on the documents you find – it might help you locate other interesting and relevant reading.





Judge it

Not everything you find will be of good quality, or useful for your project. Think about:

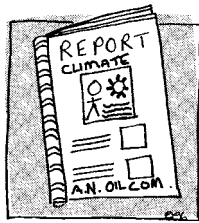
• How old is it?	For example, if the report is about young people and crime in your area, a report that gives the crime statistics from 40 years ago may not be very useful.
• Where is it published?	Is the website, newspaper, journal etc. known to be reliable? Might it be biased (for example, some newspapers have strong political views).
• How well is it written?	A poorly written report, for example one that doesn't seem very clear or easy to read, may not be that useful.
• Who wrote it?	It may be that you know the author, or can find out about them with a little searching. This might reveal that they are very well respected for what they do, or perhaps that they are known for being biased or inaccurate.
• Does the author(s) have an interest in the findings?	It might be possible to detect bias. For example, a report stating that climate change is not happening would seem far less reliable if you knew that the work was funded by a big oil company.
• If it is research, is it well done?	Does the report give you enough information about the research methods? For example, if it is a survey, does it tell you how many people took part?
• Is it relevant to your study?	It's very easy to forget this one! Some reports are so interesting you want to use them. But make sure they are actually on your topic and relevant to your research.
• Does it seem objective?	Does the report make clear links between the evidence it outlines, and the conclusions it draws?
• Is it accurate?	There may be obvious factual errors, or perhaps the numbers and statistics the report uses are wrong.

STAGE 2



There is a resource sheet to help you do this for everything you read. If you have reason to doubt the accuracy, relevance or objectivity of the document you should probably discard it.

Link it



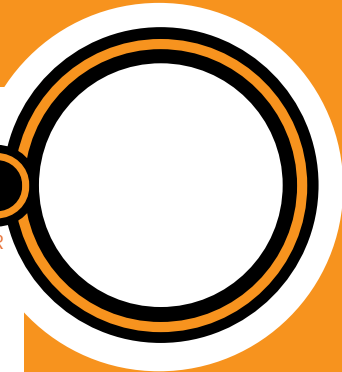
Summarise what the document tells you, the **key bits of information** relevant to your research topic. Keep this summary, together with details of the original source.

Use these summaries to map the literature review. You can group the summaries into themes, or sub-topics.

For example, the reports you find on the topic 'young people and crime' might fall into the following categories, some of which overlap:

To help you define your research question, look for gaps in the available literature (what there is NO information about) or conflict (does one document contradict another?).





Top Tips:

- If you are doing this as a group, try to make sure that you don't all end up reading the same things. Some of you might explore the internet; others can try the local library.
- You may be able to work towards a certificate for this part of your project. Awards like Getting Connected, or ASDAN awards, both accredit "finding and using information".
- Not all information is written down! Don't forget to simply ask people who you think will know about your topic area.