

**University of Ottawa  
School of Political Studies**

**INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN POLITICS  
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**Writing a Literature Review**

A literature review is a critical component of social science research. It is therefore an important element of your Issue Paper research. A literature review (or lit. review) is your account of what has been published on a topic by others. The study of African Politics is informed by numerous literatures, and you are free to draw on sources outside of comparative politics to inform your own literature review. In addition to published academic sources from anthropology, sociology, history, economics, etc, you can also consult policy documents from African governments as well as bi- and multi-lateral donors working in Africa, as well as the reports of non-governmental agencies. You can also look at documentary films, biographical novels, and the published works of journalists both in books and blogs.

For the literature review component of your Issue Paper, **you must consult a minimum of eight academic sources and five non-academic sources**. Academic sources include scholarly books, journal articles, book chapters, working papers and the reports of academic think-tanks and institutes. Non-academic sources include policy documents and the other sources listed above.

The purpose of the literature review is to show me that you have consulted the relevant literature pertinent to your Issue while demonstrating the strengths and weaknesses of the literature(s) you've chosen. Thus, **the topic (or research question) of your Issue Paper will determine which literature you consult**. Your literature review is more than a search for particular information on a given topic. All the literature you consult must be read, evaluated, and analysed. In particular, it must **be organised around and directly related to the topic of your Issue Paper**.

It is important to appreciate that any literature review is a piece of discursive prose; **it is not a list that describes or summarises one document after another**. Instead, you should aim to synthesise the literature you have consulted in an organised way that presents themes and identifies trends appropriate to your Issue. This means that you will need to critically analyse each document (as you are doing in your Reaction Papers) to ensure that **your literature review is relevant, appropriate, and useful to your Issue Paper topic**. I have provided the literature review from my forthcoming book on the course website as a sample for you to consult if you wish.