

What tense should I use in my Literature Review?

Use the present simple to:

1. Introduce the literature

In the literature there are several examples of new strategies to perform these tests, which all entail setting new parameters [Peters 2001, Grace 2014, Gatto 2018].

2. Discuss previously published laws, theorems, definitions, proofs, methods etc. which are considered to be established knowledge today

The theorem states that the highest degree of separation is achieved when ...

The method involves using short DNA sequences called primers to select the portion of the genome to be amplified.

Use the present perfect to:

1. Introduce the literature (research conducted in the past until today)

Many different approaches have been proposed to solve this issue.

2. Refer to ongoing situations, i.e. when authors are still investigating a particular field, even if a past specific date has been mentioned

Since 2016 there have been many attempts to establish an index [5, 6, 10], but until now no one has solved the issue of

As yet, a solution to Y has not been found, although two attempts have been made [Peters 2001, Grace 2014].

So far researchers have only found innovative ways to solve X, but not Y [5, 6, 10].

Note the use of **adverbials** typically used with the present perfect – they indicate something that began in the past and continues into the present.

3. Talk about research that was carried out at some indefinite time in the past, or when the date is not important

It has been shown that there is an inverse relation between the level of bureaucracy in a country and its GDP.

Other research [Green, 2018] has proved that bureaucracy can have a negative impact on incentivizing companies to adopt environmental measures.

Use the past simple when:

1. The year of publication is stated within the main sentence (i.e. not just in brackets)

In 2012, Peters proved that X=Y...

2. You mention specific research (e.g. you talk about initial approaches and methods that have subsequently probably been abandoned)

Smith and Jones [11, 12] developed a new system of comparison.

3. You state the exact date when something was written, proved etc.

This problem was first analyzed in 2014 [Peters].

Examples :

Lindley [10] **investigated** the use of the genitive in French and English and his results **agree** with other authors' findings in this area [12, 13, 18]. He **proved** that ...

Smith and Jones [11, 12] **developed** a new system of comparison. In their system two languages **are compared** from the point of view of ... They **found** that ...

Evans [5] **studied** the differences between Italian and English. He **provides** an index of.. He **highlighted** that ...

Past simple: the first verb introduces what the author did in the past (*examine, analyse, design, outline*).

Present simple: (1) Lindley's findings still agree today; (2+3) use the present simple to describe how a system, method, etc. functions especially if they are still used today

Past simple: The third verb indicates what the author managed to do in the past (*find, obtain, prove, demonstrate, highlight*)

What is the clearest way to refer to other authors ? Should I focus on the authors or their ideas ?

STYLE 1: Direct citation

Smith (1999) found that acetate consumption of *E. coli* growing on glucose...

(easiest style to use; easy to read; focus on researcher; used when you want to compare two authors)

STYLE 2: Direct citation

A study of acetate consumption of *E. coli* growing on glucose is presented by Smith (1999)...

(focus on the result rather than the author; typical style but passive voice = longer, heavier sentence)

STYLE 3: Indirect citation

One study focused on acetate consumption of *E. coli* growing on glucose and found that... (Smith, 1999).

(full focus on study and result, not author; indirect reference to author; citation at the end of the sentence for easy reading)