

## QUESTION #16

### **How Do I Know When My Literature Review Is Finished? Couldn't It Go on Forever?**

**S**o you've reached the end of your review—or at least you think you have—and you really want to know when your review of literature is done. Here are some signs along the way (and, we are assuming that your research question is answerable and your hypothesis is testable).

You're done when . . .

1. All the references in the bibliography of newly discovered journal articles, chapters, and other primary and secondary sources have already been explored. This means that you have come full circle and what you are now looking at (be it a new or earlier reference) has already been consulted or referred to along the way.
2. Same thing with ideas. You have (more or less) exhausted the collection of sources about your research question and hypothesis, and although there's always something new to learn, for this exercise, you have come as far as you can.
3. Most important, you and your adviser and colleagues (and whoever else is acting as your mentor) are satisfied that you have comprehensively addressed the important issues of the theory underlying the question you are asking as well as the methods. This is a somewhat subjective criterion but very important nonetheless.

You're not done if . . .

1. You continue to find new (general) themes for the basic idea and important references and sources that you have never seen.
2. Your research question is suggested by authors in many other completed reports, chapters, and journal articles, and you should assume that someone else has addressed these suggestions. Look harder.

3. Most important, you just can't seem to finish the review of the literature or come up with additional ideas and such. Probably, your question is too ambitious (it may just be too grand in scope), and your hypothesis might not even be testable.

*More questions? See #14, #17, and #18.*