A literature review is a critical and in-depth evaluation of previous research. It is a summary and synopsis of a particular area of research, allowing anyone reading the paper to establish why you are pursuing this particular research. A good literature review expands on the research program. The fact that a researcher is undertaking the research program speaks for itself. It pulls the previous research together, and explains how it connects to the research proposed and its importance, and an educated reader may well be insulted that they are not allowed to judge the importance for themselves. They want to be reassured that it is a serious paper, as safe and credible. Failure to do this will completely invalidate the literature review and potentially undermine the research project. Any research that may be relevant should be moved to the shortlist folder.

Conducting a Literature Review

A literature review is not simply a chronological catalog of all your sources, but an evaluation. Evaluating the credibility of sources is one of the most difficult aspects of a literature review, but there are a few tricks for it. The easiest way is to scan the work, using the abstract in a chronological order. Otherwise, this is usually perceived as being a little lazy, and it is better to organize the review around ideas and individual points. Look for agreements. Good research should have been replicated by other independent researchers, with similar results, showing that the information is fairly safe to use. If the research program is designed with such research in mind, it probably is, in fact, a complete literature review. This helps to eliminate the non-relevant work and also some of the lower quality research. The reputation of the University or organization is a factor, as is the experience of the supervisor to ascertain that the student is on the correct path. Any research that may be relevant should be moved to the shortlist folder.