What is a literature review?

A literature review is collecting information, knowledge and insight on a given topic by finding articles based on field studies, newspapers, research or other sources, and compile it. It can take many different forms, e.g.:

* A rather plain summary of ‘what has happened in the field’, e.g. the last 5 years
* An analysis of contradictions of a certain debate, or how a topic has been debated in media versus in scientific literature
* A critical analysis of the sources of knowledge related to a certain field, e.g. how much literature is produced by the industry versus by organisations, NGO’s, government institutions or universities.

Which type of questions can be answered by a literature review study?

Questions, which are about understanding state of the art within a certain field, can be asked. This also includes the debate going on in certain environments or channels of information. It can also be a background study for conducting a practical trial or field work, to identify approach or focus.

Practical info: How much time will a study take, and how will it be organised?

This depends completely on the topic, which type of literature will be in focus, and over how many years. It also depends on the approach: a plain summary is normally less time consuming than a more analytical approach. In few cases, literature can be difficult to obtain and it will require time just to wait for paper-copies of articles to reach, or to find documents with the help from foreign libraries, e.g on topics like homoeopathy.