

Literature Review Paper¹

Because you are a psychology major, and will have to write many papers, it is important that you become familiar with the American Psychological Association (APA) writing style. While there are a number of different types of research papers, you will write a ***literature review*** paper. For those of you who are psychology majors or who plan to go on to graduate school in psychology or counseling, writing a literature review is a skill that you must begin to master in order to succeed.

The general idea of the literature review is to select and research a topic, evaluate and synthesize the information into a coherent APA style paper complete with title page, abstract, introduction, body, conclusion, and reference page. Although literature reviews normally require anywhere from 12 to 30 pages (or more), you will write a short literature review (7 to 10 pages) because the course focus is on mastering APA style and format and not on an inclusive review of the topic. You will perhaps get many opportunities to write longer full-length papers in your future courses!

Strong Academic Writing:

Strong academic writing does not come easily for most people. Instead, it is learned over time as writers practice, over and over, writing for academic audiences. The guidelines below provide the foundation from which you will develop and strengthen your writing skills.

¹ Adapted from Linda Farina and used by permission

Five Effective Habits of Strong Academic Writers:

1. Begin your work early. You will need ample time to think, write, and revise, even for short papers.
2. Plan to write and revise multiple drafts of your papers. With each revision, your argument will become clearer, your organization stronger, and your language more effective
3. Get as many readers as possible. Recruit friends, family members, and classmates to read and comment on your work. Make sure to tell them what you are concerned about, and ask them to comment specifically on those issues.
4. Save proofreading for the very, very end of your revision process. There is no point correcting sentences that you may eliminate when you revise. Once your argument is clear, and your organization is strong, then you can focus on your word choice, spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
5. Never trust software to do what your brain can do better. A computer's spelling check will not catch the difference between "there and their and they're", "would and wood", and so on. Automated grammar checks can also lead you astray. When you proofread, use a good dictionary, a reliable thesaurus, and if you need it, a grammar reference book.

Strong Academic Writing in Psychology MUST Make an Argument

The most important aspect of writing in psychology is that it makes an argument. Making an argument means making a persuasive case built on evidence. For example, when writing your papers, you may note, "Children who watch an adult engage in aggressive behavior later display or model that behavior." IF you ONLY wrote that, then you would have made a claim, but claims are not what you are after. You want an

argument. How would you change the aforementioned claim to an argument? It is simple: You need to provide a citation from the peer-reviewed literature to support (provide some evidence) the claim. For example, you would write, “Children who watch an adult engage in aggressive behavior later display or model that behavior” (Bandura, Ross & Ross, 1961). By providing the citation of the research that supports the claim, you have provided the necessary evidence to effectively change the claim to an argument. Your literature review paper should provide an argument, supported by evidence, and citations for that evidence.

Strong Academic Writing is Well-Organized

Literature review papers should have a title page, abstract, introduction, body, and conclusion. One of the best ways to convince a reader of your position is to guide the reader through your argument in a logical progression of ideas that clearly supports your conclusion. While the best organization for any paper has to be determined by the paper’s content, much organized academic writing shares the following features:

The Introduction to the paper is clear and focused, and moves quickly to the main point. It includes a “road map” of the paper, telling the reader what to expect in the paper, and where to expect it.

The body of the paper follows the roadmap provided in the introduction. The paragraphs in the body of the paper follow the basic principles of paragraphing: each paragraph focuses on one main idea; each paragraph has a topic sentence expressing the main idea; and each paragraph is linked to the previous paragraph by effective transitions. The paragraphs in the body of the paper are grouped according to an organizing principle. For example, you may group all the research that supports your research question, and then group all the research that disputes your research question. For another paper, it may be better to order your research chronologically. It

is often necessary to try out several organizing principles before you find the one that best suits the argument you are attempting to make.

The conclusion of your paper summarizes the main points in the argument. It poses new questions for further research as well as limitations of that which has been reviewed. Not all papers will require all of the components listed here, but carefully thought should be given to the components that best fit the paper you are writing.

Strong Academic Writing Speaks to its Audience

Understanding your audience is key to any successful communication. Each kind of audience demands something different from your writing style because there is a significant difference, for example, in the way you should present information to your classmates, who are learning along with you, and the way you should present information to your professor.

Strong Academic Writing is Readable

Even the best-researched paper, or the paper with impeccable organization, can fail to persuade the reader if the writing is not readable. In part, readability refers to the nuts and bolts of language: word choice, spelling, grammar, and punctuation. A paper that is full of spelling or grammatical errors is likely to frustrate the reader. A frustrated reader is unlikely to be persuaded by what you have to say. It is imperative that your academic writing be polished, edited, and proof-read.

Strong Academic Writing is Revised, Revised, Revised, and Revised

No matter how excellent a writer you consider yourself, it is unlikely that you will produce an organized, persuasive argument the first time you sit down to write your paper. The strongest academic writing is revised writing. Revision DOES NOT mean simply fixing spelling and grammatical errors. “Re-vision” (to vision again) means,

literally, “to see again.” When you revise your paper, try to look at them with fresh eyes. Look for ways that you can improve your argument, your organization, your paragraphs, etc. Adequate revision usually results in a final paper that is markedly different from your first or second draft because you will have likely moved paragraphs, omitted and added information, reworded your introduction, etc. Yes, revising is a lot of work, but your paper will benefit from it. It will also make it likely that your literature review will receive a better grade.

Have fun!

General Steps in Writing a Literature Review

Step 1: Select a Topic (due 9/15/18)

You can select any topic in the field of psychology broadly defined that interests you. As a matter of fact, selecting a topic that personally interests you will likely make writing a literature review a more enjoyable and less frustrating experience. One efficient way to begin finding a topic is to peruse the course required text. Usually, the topic of a literature review begins as a broad interest and then must be narrowed. For example, if “depression” is the topic of interest, it would have to be narrowed to fit the length of the paper. Because the required paper length is only 7 to 10 pages, the topic of “depression” is too broad: There is simply too much information on depression to fit into a short paper. Therefore, the general topic of “depression” has to be narrowed. For example, you can focus on a particular aspect of depression, a particular treatment for depression, compare two treatments for depression, compare and contrast the differences in depressive symptoms between men and women, describe depression in a specific population, etc. Because, again, the paper is of such short length, even further narrowing may be necessary. Selecting and narrowing a topic for your literature review takes careful thought and consideration. Do not rush through this initial step of the literature review paper process.

Please check out the following resources:

Massey University. (2010). *Writing a literature review*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKL2pdRmwc4>

University of Toronto. (2012). *The literature review: A few tips on conducting it*. Retrieved from <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/specific-types-of-writing/literature-review>

Step 2: Conduct a Search of the Literature in the Professional Databases (due 9/22/18)

Every field of study has a professional knowledge base; that is, a body of information that reflects what a particular field accepts as valid information. Psychology, like any other field of study, also has a professional knowledge base. Researchers conduct research and publish their findings in professional journals. The information in these journals comprises a large part of the professional “literature” in the field of psychology. Much of the research published in professional journals are “peer reviewed,” which means that other researchers/professionals in the field agree that the information is well-supported by agreed upon methodologies.

Everyone in the course is assumed to have a username and password to access the library. After choosing a general topic (or perhaps you have already delineated your topic), access the library databases and conduct a literature search to, if necessary, further delineate your topic and locate 4 journal articles specific to your chosen topic. ALL sources for your literature review paper should be peer-reviewed, primary sources from the professional databases. Please do not use internet sources of unknown origin as the information provided may not be valid. Wikipedia is NOT a professional database.

This step of the literature paper process is best done slowly, with careful consideration for each journal article selection. For example, choose journal articles that aren't "above your head." Journal articles are written across the entire spectrum of investigation, from the micro to the macro levels of analysis; therefore, read the abstracts or first paragraphs to evaluate whether or not it is an article that may be too technical or require a background of a specifically trained professional.

Step 3: Read, Critically Evaluate and Summarize the Journal Articles (due 9/29/18, 10/6/18, 10/13/18 & 10/20/18)

All journal articles should be read carefully (probably more than once). You should aim to gain a general sense of the information as well as points of agreement and disagreement across the articles. Perhaps on the second or third reading, summarize the articles. An article summary should not be a rewording of the entire article, but rather a judicious note taking process of the main points you want to discuss in your paper. It is imperative that you keep track of what information came from which article in order to avoid unintentional plagiarism or attributing the information to the wrong source. Often it is helpful to number each article and summary in a congruent manner. All articles should be summarized in your own words. Direct quotations should be kept to a minimum, if used at all.

Step 4: Establish a Specific Purpose for Your Paper

After reading and summarizing the journal articles think about a MAIN PURPOSE for your paper. What is the main idea/purpose/problem that you want to focus on when writing your paper?

Step 5: Synthesize the Literature:

The literature review paper MUST NOT read like a serial summary of your selected articles. That is, you should not present your article summaries one after another and

call it a literature review paper. Your literature review should SYNTHESIZE the information in ALL the articles; that is, integrate the information across the articles. For example, compare and contrast a view, organize the information chronologically, or otherwise INTEGRATE the information. It may be helpful, at this point in the process, to develop an outline for the paper by combining all of the article summaries.

Step 6: Write a Rough First Draft (due 11/17/18)

The literature review paper has the following sections: title page, abstract, body, conclusion, and reference page. Consult APA resources.

Title page: This is the first page of the paper. Please consult APA resources for correct style/format. **(due 11/10/18)**

Abstract: The abstract, a concise overview of the paper, should stand alone on page 2. Please consult APA resources for correct style/format. **(due 11/10/18)**

The Introduction: The introduction is the first paragraph of the body of the paper and should begin on page 3. The introduction is clear and focused, and moves quickly to the main point of the paper. It should read like a “road map” of the paper, informing the reader what to expect in the paper, and where to expect it. Please consult APA resources, especially IN-TEXT CITATION format. **(due 11/3/18)**

The body: The body of the paper should unfold according to its introduction “roadmap.” The paragraphs in the body of the paper follow the basic principles of paragraphing: each paragraph focuses on one main idea. Each paragraph has a topic sentence expressing the main idea and each paragraph is linked to the previous paragraph by effective transitions. The paragraphs in the body of the paper are grouped according to an organizing principle. For example, you may group all the research that supports your research question, and then group all the research that disputes your research question. For another paper, it may be better to order your

research chronologically. It is often necessary to try out several organizing principles before you find the one that best suits your paper. Please consult APA resources, especially IN-TEXT CITATION format.

The Conclusion/Discussion: The conclusion summarizes the main points of the paper. The conclusion should aim to pose new questions for further research as well as limitations of that which has been reviewed. Please consult APA resources.

The reference page: The reference page is the last page of the paper. Please consult APA resources. **(due 10/29/18)**

Here is what your References should look

like: http://ww2.usj.edu/PDF/CAE/apareferencepage_6th_ed.pdf

RESOURCES:

Sample Paper: https://owl.english.purdue.edu/media/pdf/20090212013008_560.pdf

APA Style PowerPoint

Presentation: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/17/>

APA Style Workshop: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/664/01/>

APA In-text Citation Tutorial: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/02/>

APA Reference Page Basic Rules: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/02/>

More on Reference Pages: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/6/>