

ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES FOR THE LITERATURE /ARTICLE REVIEW

What is a literature review?

A literature review may be published as an independent report or as part of a larger report. The purpose of both is to provide information on current publications about a particular topic. Literature reviews are highly condensed and heavily documented. In this project, your literature review will become part of your recommendation report.

A literature review is a report which describes the “literature” (that is, the important source material) on a particular topic. A literature review also helps you synthesize literature on your topic because in the process of writing a literature review, the writer learns to (1) identify various important issues/questions raised in the literature, and (2) sort and categorize experts’ views according to the issues/questions identified in the literature.

The primary **purpose** of the report is to provide your target audience with an overview of what the experts are saying about the problem under investigation. Your report will update your target audience on the recent research in the field.

Completion of this assignment will build your skills in the following areas: critical reading, evaluation, analysis, synthesis, report organization, use and integration of sources, and APA documentation. Developing these skills will demonstrate great progress toward achieving our course goals.

Who is the intended audience?

A literature review is often written for another researcher who is interested in gaining a general understanding of the important literature on a particular topic. In W231, the lit review becomes a section in the recommendation report, which is directed to the target audience.

How do we synthesize sources?

Literature reviews synthesize large amounts of information and present it in a coherent, organized fashion. Synthesis comes from the Greek word *suntithenai* -- to put together, and occurs when two or more things are combined to create something new -- whether it is a new idea, a new fabric, a new sound, or a new piece of writing. Thus, for this assignment you will be combining material from several texts to create a new text – your literature review.

Using a **grid** of common points among the articles is critical to helping you synthesize the material. This will ensure that your lit review is organized by subtopic, not by source. This means the various authors' names will appear and reappear throughout the literature review. Therefore, each paragraph of the literature review will mention several different authors.

In drafting the review of the literature, some students make the mistake of structuring it like an annotated bibliography without the citations. They list the sources one after another but don't make connections between them or show how the authors' views compare or contrast. Those connections should weave the elements of the lit review together, but the connections can't be made if the sources are simply listed. *Creating and using the grid will almost guarantee*

that you won't make this mistake!

Which sources do I use for my individual section?

In your individual section of the literature review, you must use information from all relevant articles your team collected, not just the ones you personally find.

How do teams gather information?

As explained in the library research material and annotated bibliography guidelines, each team member should locate several authoritative, reliable, recently published articles from credible business or trade journals which address the team's research question. Again, do NOT research separate aspects of the topic individually. Consult your team members as you conduct your research to make sure your team searches several appropriate databases and selects at least 10 relevant articles.

You have to decide what pieces of information from which articles to include in your literature review. To fulfill the purpose of the research project, you will probably be most interested in the causes and effects of the problem and the strategies the authors suggest, or which other organizations have used, to address the problem. Evaluate the articles your team collects, and narrow the collection to the best 10 or so articles. Understand that each team member is responsible for reading ALL the team's articles and integrating information into his or her section of the literature review from all relevant articles (not just the ones he or she found.)

How do we decide which articles to use?

Carefully evaluate the information presented in each of your articles by asking the same questions that a skeptical reader would ask:

- Is it accurate?
- Is it complete?
- Is it up-to-date?
- Is it unbiased?
- Is it supported by evidence my readers will find compelling?
- Does it conflict with other evidence?
- Is it clearly relevant to my readers' situation?

Once your team has gathered and read all the articles you plan to use, you need to

- read and re-read your articles.
- identify and categorize the common themes, the key questions/issues addressed in your articles*
- sort the literature using these categories. The best way to do this is to construct a **grid of common points** as you were asked to do in Project 2. This grid lists every issue you have identified and then briefly describes how each of your sources respond to this issue. (Ask me to show you a sample.)

How do we divide the work?

Your team should collaborate on the introduction and conclusion, making sure the focus is on the literature. Each team member should accept responsibility for drafting one or two sections of the literature review, depending on how many sections you need to create. To draft a section, work from one row of the grid, incorporating and contextualizing the material in that row. The section may be one paragraph in length or it may be as long as a page or two, depending on the amount of material gathered related to the particular subtopic or issue.

As you start drafting based on your grid, keep in mind that you cannot merely list the sources and summarize their contents. You must illustrate how the sources agree; how the sources disagree; and how the sources overlap by providing ample connections to lead readers to see the relationships you see. Use each row of the grid to create one section of your review to ensure that you are organizing your report by key points, not by source. **Prior to submitting the team's literature review, each student will submit his/her own section(s) for 10% of the course grade.** Most students find this assignment to be the most challenging of the semester, so make sure you allow yourself time to draft, to get peer review, and to meet with me or the University Writing Center as needed. After you get your section(s) back, you will revise and present it to your team to be compiled into the team's literature review.

As I write, how do I maintain the focus on the literature?

You must remain objective and unbiased as you review the literature. Remember, your purpose is only to report on what has been written recently about your topic. You should not discuss the issues involved or take a position. The readers of the literature review do not wish to learn what *you* think; they want to learn what the *authors* think. Therefore, you must be careful not to go beyond describing the authors' views. Don't say which views are "right" or "better"; instead, show how they are related. In addition, do not discuss whether specific strategies mentioned in the literature would work for your particular organization or company – that comes later!

A good lit review sticks to its purpose by "addressing the literature." Addressing the literature means that as you write you make it clear that subject of the paper is the **literature**. You should identify the topic of each section or paragraph with **topic statements** like *The authors of recent literature on _____ are most interested in* or *While the literature suggests that employee turnover is not easily solved, several strategies are mentioned which* Since the literature itself is the subject of your paper, you must be careful to introduce and identify sources consistently.

Establish your focus on the literature, beginning with the introduction, and maintain it through to the conclusion. Use transitional words and phrases, which show the connection between the sources; e.g., *While Dunn (1997) found that employee turnover is reduced by increasing benefits, Reese (1998) contends salary is the key motivator to staying with a particular employer. and Recent studies (Black, 1996; Higgenbotham, 1995; Stockman, 1997) indicate an increasing level of concern with employee turnover among businesses paying minimum-wage. For example, in a survey conducted....* Using effective transitions will help you sustain the focus on the literature. End each section with a **closing sentence** that wraps up the section and/or serves as a transition to the next section: what can be concluded about the literature on that specific subtopic?

Team's Compiled Literature Review

After individual students have revised their literature review sections after they are graded, you will work as a team to further revise and combine the sections into a coherent review. This review becomes a major section in your team's recommendation report. I will evaluate your team's literature compiled lit review and provide feedback to guide further revision before it comes in as part of the recommendation report at the end of the semester.

Introduction: First, you will add a brief introduction to the literature review: Since your lit review introduction will be the introduction to one part of a larger report, it is unnecessary to give the background information or state the problem here. In just a sentence or two, simply introduce the **purpose and scope** of the literature review, including the **key issues** the review will address.

Body: Using relevant headings, the body should be composed of sections. If these sections were done effectively by individual team members, they take up each issue one at a time and discuss how the authors of the articles respond to that issue.

Don't forget to introduce and close each section with a sentence **focused on the literature** (topic sentence and concluding sentence.)

Length of body: about 3 pages or more, single-spaced. (Length of each section will vary, but each typically contains several paragraphs.)

Conclusion: Summarize what the literature says about your topic.

Approximate length: about $\frac{1}{4}$ page.

Total length of team's literature review: About 4 single-spaced pages or more (not counting the references page.) Documented in APA style, with section headings for major sections as well as subtopics. **Important:** the assigned length of team documents does not vary based on team size!

When submitting your lit review, please include a copy of all articles you've cited. On the articles, highlight material you paraphrased, quoted, or referred to in your literature review.