



Literature Reviews and Research Proposals

General Suggestions

- Focus on a specific topic. The more specific you can be the better your topic generally is. It can help to have a peer read through your introduction to see where your topic could be clearer and more defined.
 - Ex: Green advancements in architecture as a topic is very general. A more specific topic could be on an individual company's advancements over a time frame or a specific piece of technology.
- Consider what you want to know more about in the field of your topic as well as how your topic applies to the field.
- Double check your assignment guide. With papers that have a lot of different parts, it can be easy to miss something.
- Try creating an outline, no matter how detailed or basic, to help you get from point A to point B in your paper.
- Remember that this paper is your own work. Try paraphrasing or summarizing quotes. This often helps you and your readers better understand what is being discussed.

Grammar

- Sentence fragments/incomplete sentences: These are “incomplete thoughts” that happen when a sentence is missing the part of its structure, such as a noun or verb. This is often because a comma was needed and a period was put instead.
 - Incomplete: “As seen in the aforementioned data, having a computer accessible to students in the Writing Center is necessary to be, since most papers are now composed in word processors.”
 - Complete: “As seen in the aforementioned data, having a computer accessible to students in the Writing Center is necessary for the facility to be truly student friendly, since most papers are now composed in word processors.”
- Wordiness: This happens when a lot more words are used than are really necessary. Are there any words that can be eliminated? Is there any redundant information?
 - *Wordy*: “Numerous investigations have been carried out to evaluate the interaction between children and smart technology with respect to how it affects them during their more impressionable years.”



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- *Concise*: “Numerous investigations have evaluated the interaction between children and smart technology and how it affects them.”
- Punctuation and quotation marks:
 - Punctuation inside quotation marks (periods, commas)
 - **Ex**: Joe Miner says, “Come to Missouri S&T.”
 - Punctuation outside quotation marks (parentheses, semi-colon, colon)
 - **Ex**: Joe Miner tells us that S&T is a “great place to go to college”; Joanna Miner agrees.
 - Special cases—Question marks and exclamation points:
 - If your quote contains a question/exclamation: *They said “I love cats!”*
 - If the quote goes along with your own phrase, but the quote itself does not contain a question/exclamation: *What did they mean by “I like your shirt”?*

Revision

1. Go through sentence-by-sentence to make points clearer.
2. Ask about feedback from other sources.
3. Talk through your ideas with a peer, including a writing consultant.
4. Sometimes professors grade differently on different stages of an assignment; even if an earlier draft did well, keep on revising and improving your piece.
5. Work with a writing consultant to develop an “action-plan” for revision.



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Research Proposals

A research proposal is a document that convinces others that the research you plan to conduct is useful, necessary, and feasible. It explains why you want to do research, why others should care about the research you plan to do, and how exactly you plan to conduct your research.

Defining Elements of a Research Proposal

- Precursor to primary research
- Justifies prospective primary research by using existing research from multiple sources
- Emphasizes need for research/gap in existing research (focus on a very specific topic)
- Discusses the research methodology
- Clearly states proposed topic and questions author hopes to address
- Includes a problem statement
- Explains relevance and why the audience should care

Introduction

- Check your assignment and rubric to make sure that you've met all of the requirements. It can be easy to forget to state the problem statement/research question, methods, or purpose.
- **Pay attention to your audience.** Prioritize clarity and your reader to reduce the potential for misunderstandings and ensure that the importance of your research is understood. Consider who will be impacted by your research and how it will affect them.
 - **Example phrasing:** 'consumers can use this information,' 'the impact this will have shall affect researchers in almost any science-related field'
- Highlight your purpose: Try phrases for emphasis like "bring attention to," "address," "give insight to," "bring to light," and "look into."
- Avoiding cliches can help you keep a unique tone: A cliché is a phrase that is used frequently enough to be predictable. They can often be easy to use but not very helpful for your paper.

For example: "With more and more X today, Y."

 - *Instead of:* "With more and more advancements in technology, we need to explore the impact of these advancements on today's youth."



- *Try:* “With the rise in developments in technology, we need to explore the impact of these advancements on today’s youth.”

Problem Statement/Purpose of the Study

- Make sure that you write a purpose that leads into a literature review.
- Demonstrate to the audience why this is an urgent problem for them rather than relying on general statements of urgency.

Connection to the Field

- Keep the criteria of each section in mind—make sure that you have the required number of sources.
- Decide if you want longer or more focused paragraphs: This can usually be decided by your topic sentence. A more vague topic sentence will create a more vague paragraph, and same goes for a focused topic sentence.
 - For example, “There have been multiple studies that looked at how technology has advanced over the past four years alone.” This sentence will create a more broad topic to be discussed in the paragraph.
- As stated before, check your transitions! Use more than just additive transitions, like “In another study....”.
 - Some other options: similarly, conversely, although, nevertheless, furthermore, for instance
- Try to demonstrate how your work will follow the studies you are mentioning. What more will your research add?
- If you incorporate quotations into sentences, make sure that they are properly formatted. There are three rules for quoting in APA Style:
 - If the quote is under 40 words: use a basic sentence along with the quote.
 - If the quote is 40 words or more: format it on its own, a half inch away from the border.
- **For example:**
 - *Instead of:* Many researchers believe that technology is advancing “Technology is being developed rapidly at an alarming rate” (McElroy).
 - *Try:* Many researchers believe that “Technology is being developed rapidly at an alarming rate” (McElroy, 2023, p. 44).¹

¹ Note that this is in 7th edition APA formatting; your assignment should adhere to the assignment guidelines for citation. This information was adapted from <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/citations/quotations>



- Also note that using too many quotes can make it seem that you do not have anything to add to the topic, so try to keep them to a reasonable number (probably under $\frac{1}{3}$ of your total words).

Research Design

- A research design section is meant to describe exactly how you plan to conduct your research; it should demonstrate that your process is valid and as unbiased as possible. Think critically about the information you plan to include and be very specific.
- Writing about databases:
 - Focus on why you selected or excluded certain databases and search engines. What were your reasons?
- Writing about sources:
 - Provide sufficient criteria for inclusion/exclusion based on more than one or two aspects.
 - Criteria can include: publishing date, relevancy, objectivity/bias, reliability, credibility (author/publisher), document type (legal, journal, review, corporate document, ect.)

Significance/Impact

- How will this information impact your intended audience? How should they feel? Explicitly address them.
Example phrases: “Kids, parents, technology companies, and psychologists,” “Consumers can use this information,” “This will affect researchers in almost any science-related field”

Strategies for a Research Proposal

1. Make sure that you know what you are researching and the questions you are posing before you write.
2. Try to avoid repetitiveness by varying your sentence structure and how you start each sentence. For example, avoid beginning sentences with “The author does/says _____” (or similar wording) multiple times in an area, as this can cause the audience to get bored or feel like the writing is choppy/abrupt.
3. Know the difference between an introduction and problem statement:



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- a. Introduction is introducing the current situation
 - b. Problem statement is the specific problem you are addressing
4. Make sure that you know/establish all of your own ideas. Don't include too many, and flesh out the ones you use.
 5. Avoid using an overly argumentative tone. Reading aloud will usually catch any persuasive language.
 6. Make sure that you identify valid gaps in the research; these will help you explain why the study you are proposing is relevant, necessary, or beneficial. To help identify them, list out the criteria of the research or study in question and see where it could be expanded on.
 7. Make sure that this paper is your own. Quotes can be incredibly helpful, but you don't want your entire paper to become a patchwork of what others said. If you find yourself using quotes every few sentences, try paraphrasing or summarizing some of them.
 8. Remember to use transitions: The whole paper is an assortment of authors and researchers discussing one general topic, provided by the prompt. While it is important to keep the main idea in mind, the smaller subtopics and evidence are going to be what actually get you to the main idea. Transitions are ways to connect these paragraphs, ideas, or sections (such as your introduction or methods) to each other and to the main idea. Is there a way to make the connection between the ideas more obvious?
 - a. There are a couple transition phrases that might be useful.
 - i. Contrasting two ideas: "Contrastingly," "However," "On the other hand"
 - ii. Linking two similar ideas: "Similarly," "*Author* builds on this idea..."
 9. Read out-loud to a peer (including Writing Center consultants!) to identify sentences that may need work.
 - a. For particularly tricky sentences, try looking away from your paper and verbally explaining your thoughts to a peer; they can point out where words, phrases, or ideas that can be fully fleshed out.



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Literature Reviews

A literature review is a piece of writing which summarizes & synthesizes the scholarly research on a particular topic or topics in order to come to a conclusion. These documents are scholarly research using secondary sources instead of primary sources.

Defining Elements of a Literature Review

- Focuses on overlying themes rather than strict summaries of individual studies.
 - Not an annotated bibliography.
 - Also not a research paper; give enough weight to each article but not too much.
- Contains multiple scholarly sources
- Won't generally contain primary research
- Contains an abstract, introduction, synthesis of sources, and discussion/conclusion

Strategies for a Literature Review

1. Double check your assignment guide. With papers that have a lot of different parts, it can be easy to miss something.
2. Focus on an exact topic. The more specific you can be the better your topic generally is. It can help to have a peer read through your introduction to see where your topic could be clearer and more defined.
3. Remember that this paper is your own work. Try paraphrasing or summarizing quotes. This often helps you and your readers better understand what is being discussed.
4. Transition sentences are difficult but necessary. Transitions in a literature review help your reader follow your train of thought and guide them through your topics. When used effectively, they will also help your paper with flow and tone.
5. Explain why this project is worthwhile to someone. Try to identify who benefits from having this information and how they benefit from it.
6. Make sure that your paper is clearly structured and has a logical thought progression throughout so that the reader can follow along easily. An outline will help!



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7. Separate your key points from the synthesis section and reserve them for the Discussion/Conclusion.
8. Discussion/conclusion includes the specific limitations of writer's study and its impact. Includes a summary of evidence and findings in the discussion/conclusion.
9. Be specific when writing the limitations for the previous studies, your paper's conclusions, and describing the impact of your paper on the scholarly audience.
 - a. *From the professor: "The biggest places where people struggled [in the discussion/conclusion sections] were in writing specific limitations for their own paper's conclusions and making sure to describe the impact of their paper on the scholarly audience. The more specific you could be for both, the better those sections tended to be. Some people made their summaries too long or too specific, so make sure that you're not doing synthesis in your Discussion section either."*
10. Make sure that the abstract is concise and balanced. It should cover all aspects of a project in a brief description; think of it as a movie trailer with all of the spoilers included. For example, don't forget to include the methods and summarize the actual results/conclusions here as well.
 - a. *From the professor: "The biggest problems tended to be concision and balance, where people either made parts of the section too long or too short. Some people forgot to include methods or didn't summarize their actual results/conclusions."*
11. For a syntheses:
 - a. Understand what a synthesis is; if you are confused, ask for help from your professor or schedule an appointment at the Writing Center.
 - b. List the main topics of each article or source, identify the common topics, and discuss the ways each source addresses those topics. Be specific!
 - c. Develop a "matrix" that will help you organize articles by subtopic
 - d. *From the professor: "Make sure to separate your arguments from the synthesis section and reserve them for the Discussion/Conclusion, since that section should just be focused on synthesizing the research."*