

EDTE GPAG Review of the Literature Rubric

All of the options for the culminating experience leading to the Master's degree in the Department of Teacher Education require candidates to write a review of the literature. The graduate faculty understands the word "literature" in its traditional sense to include empirical studies that have been peer reviewed and published in scholarly journals or other volumes and conceptual or theoretical essays or articles or books. However, candidates are also encouraged to review other types of literature that may help them understand their topic more deeply. For example, legal or historical or fictional texts may bring ideas and/or evidence to bear on the topic; in some instances oral texts (interviews or oral histories, etc.) or electronic texts not part of the traditional canon may be useful in the review.

The graduate faculty sees a review of the literature as more than a summary or a chronological discussion of "what others have said" about the topic. Lists of unrelated topics with summaries or descriptions do not constitute a review of the literature. In general, the review of literature ought to emerge from deep and careful reading of serious and thoughtful texts about the topic and should present the candidate's perspective on the topic grounded in the scholarship.

The graduate faculty apply the requirements spelled out in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) to student-written literature reviews. According to the introduction to this manual, "[t]he style requirements... are intended to facilitate clear communication. The requirements are explicit, but alternatives to prescribed forms are permissible if they ensure clearer communication. In all cases, the use of rules should be balanced with good judgment" (APA Manual, 2003, p. 31). The introduction also includes the caveat that APA requirements are not static; they change to accommodate changes in the academic world.

Whether students can legitimately write a review of the literature in the first person has received considerable attention during faculty discussions. On one hand, some faculty make the argument that writing in the first person encourages students to express their opinions or narrate their experiences or communicate their beliefs and biases—all acceptable in personal writing but not in academic writing. Writing in the third person puts a distance between the writer and the content that promotes objectivity and makes the text more credible.

On the other hand, some faculty make the argument that writing in the third person liberates the writer from the burden of making clear his or her own position with respect to the content and raises questions about full disclosure. The third person writer can hide behind passive constructions and anthropomorphism and present a message that seems more credible only because it avoids making the writer linguistically responsible by assuming the slot of subject in the syntax of the text. This argument has gained purchase especially among faculty who value narrative research and ethnography.

It is important to note that the APA Manual does not require writers to write in the third person. Indeed, in keeping with its intention to promote clear communication, the Manual includes the following caution:

Inappropriately or illogically attributing action in an effort to be objective can be misleading. Examples of undesirable attribution include use of the third person, anthropomorphism, and use of the editorial *we*. (APA, 2003, p. 37)

With reference to the third person, the following example is included in the Manual: “Writing ‘The experimenters instructed the participants’ when ‘the experimenters’ refers to yourself is ambiguous and may give the impression that you did not take part in your own study. Instead, use a personal pronoun: ‘We instructed the participants.’ (APA, 2003, p. 37-38).

To provide a measure of academic freedom for faculty in an area that is clearly contested, neither the first nor the third person point of view is required according to GPAG’s review of the literature rubric. Students are expected to seek the advice of their faculty advisor and to write the review according to this advice. When the review of the literature is submitted for departmental approval, the point of view of the writing will not become a factor in the approval decision.

Note that a literature review should involve a survey of the literature. For example, the University of California, Santa Cruz, published the following language on its website to describe its notion of a review of the literature, language which resonates with the graduate faculty in EDTE: “Not to be confused with a book review, a **literature review** surveys scholarly articles, books and other sources (e.g., dissertations, conference proceedings) relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory, providing a description, summary, and critical evaluation of each work. The purpose is to offer an overview of significant literature published on a topic.”

But the literature review within our program must go beyond a survey. The graduate faculty have discussed and reached agreement with regard to the perspective offered by California State University, Monterey Bay, on its website: “The literature review is your way of joining the professional conversation, by analyzing the conversation that has already been taking place in the professional literature. In the literature review, you report what others are saying related to your work, and identify any theory or framework that guides your project [sic].”

We require our students to write a review of the literature for three main purposes. The first purpose is rhetorical. Our candidates publish their literature reviews for a wide audience in our library or on our websites. In this manner the insights and perspectives of our candidates become influential in the world outside of the institution. The second purpose is participatory. Like CSU Monterey Bay, we want our candidates to join the professional conversation and enter the scholarly discourse relevant to their area of expertise as full participants with something to say that others may find important. The

third purpose is candidate learning. We want our candidates to be able to read, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate scholarly literature, to design and implement methods for producing knowledge and promoting learning, and to write in a genre-appropriate manner.

To these ends the graduate faculty have agreed that a review of the literature appropriate for successful completion of a culminating experience in the Department of Teacher Education will be evaluated based on the following five elements:

- Coverage
- Synthesis
- Methodology
- Significance
- Rhetorical effectiveness

“Coverage” of a topic connects with the idea of the review as a survey of the literature and encompasses four characteristics: currency, relevance, breadth, and authority. Currency is achieved when the candidate has accessed and interpreted the most up-to-date literature available on a topic. It is impossible to state how many sources must have a publication date within the past five years, say, or to provide a simple formula for determining currency. Also, the fact that a publication is current is no guarantee that it includes worthwhile information. Relevance is achieved when the candidate knows and can state why and how a particular source is directly connected to the topic; sources which may be interesting in themselves may not be relevant and should not be included in the survey. Breadth is achieved when the candidate has searched the literature across disciplines or has looked into a variety of aspects of the topic—aspects that are clearly and directly relevant to the topic. Authority is achieved when the candidate has consulted literature written by the important figures speaking or writing on the topic.

“Synthesis” within a topic means that the candidate has developed an original perspective on the topic based on the literature. The graduate faculty has explicitly contrasted the notion of synthesis with the idea of summary and has taken the position that a review of the literature goes well beyond summarizing. While the literature review is no place for unfounded opinions or biases, it is the place for reasoned and evidence-based argument, for taking a stance that acknowledges the strengths and limitations of available evidence, for careful judgments that are grounded in the views and evidence reported by other scholars. The candidate must apply summaries of the work of others as a way to report what others have said, but the candidate is responsible for comparing and contrasting, taking issue or agreeing with what others have said, commenting on the strength of the evidence. Consonant with the participatory purpose of the review of the literature, the graduate faculty expects candidates to enter the scholarly discussion as a full participant.

“Methodology” as an element of the literature review means that our candidates have paid attention to the methods other scholars have used to study or to discuss the topic. When the review includes discussions of empirical studies, the candidate comments on the methods researchers have commonly used to produce and analyze the evidence. The

candidate also comments on the strengths and limitations of these methods. If appropriate, the candidate may discuss insights into how the methods others have employed might be modified or combined to produce even more and better information.

“Significance” as an element of a literature review means that the candidate discusses the relative level of importance of the work that has already been done and can identify lines of research and/or groups of people who have done important work related to the topic. Significance is also achieved when the candidate comments on the practical implications of the work that has been done or on the implications for future research

“Rhetorical effectiveness” means that the candidate has produced an academic text that is unified, organized, coherent, ordered, complete, and conventional. The review of the literature must have an introduction with a clear statement of the thesis or controlling idea. When a reader finishes the introduction, the reader ought to have a solid idea of the case the review will make, the organization of the material, and the direction of thought. The review must have a system of headings that provides a reader with clear signals to the structure and coherence of the ideas embodied in the text such that the reader can skim the review and discern the main ideas. The review must have transitional statements and related elements as well as periodic summaries for the aid of the reader. The review must be made up of complete, unified paragraphs, which are made up of grammatically and syntactically correct sentences with accurate and conventional spelling. The review must be thoroughly documented so that a reader can trace the thoughts and words of others back to the source with no possibility of confusion between the words and ideas of the sources and the words and ideas of the candidate. The graduate faculty has agreed that candidates will abide by the conventions of the APA manual in their writing.