

## Literature Review Guidelines

The purpose of a Literature Review is to summarize what you have learned from an immersion in the published literature related to the topic of your degree project in science education. **The written Literature Review is an organized narrative that conveys to the evaluators of your degree project the relevance of your particular project to the field of science education.** Before you start on your literature review, it's important to have a focus area already identified for your degree project.

Your literature review should adhere to the following format: Introduction, Review of the Literature, Conclusion, and Reference Section. Each of these components is more fully explained below.

**Introduction:** The introduction orients the reader to the issue being studied and is composed of two parts. First, you need to provide a *statement of the problem*. This statement gives the reasons why this topic is important. You might indicate the prevalence of the problem, its relevance or cost, the absence of knowledge surrounding the issue, conflicting ideas about the issue, etc. Provide evidence indicating the importance of this topic to science education. Second, you should state the *purpose of your proposed project*. This is a brief clarification statement which describes how your project will address the problem you have identified. The recommended length for the introduction is half a page to a page.

**Review of the Literature:** This section should present an argument which justifies your choice of topic and the way you have chosen to address it. Begin the review with the most general aspects of your topic and gradually narrow it down to point to the need for your proposed topic. Provide a general context for your proposed project. The review should highlight literature that leads directly to your own project. Generally, 8 – 10 *relevant* sources (i.e. journal articles, books) will be sufficient for the purpose of this literature review. Typically it is better if the sources have been published within the last 10 years.

Critically evaluate the current state of the field relative to your topic to provide specific reasons why your proposed project will make a contribution. You want to show that there are ‘knowledge gaps’ or deficiencies in the existing body of literature. This may involve building on/extending what has previously been done or demonstrating how new knowledge will fill a gap in the field either theoretically or practically. Next, based on your identification of deficiencies in the literature, show why your proposed project is an appropriate way to address this knowledge gap. Describe what needs to be done differently to improve on the existing body of knowledge to provide the specific basis for the importance of your proposed project. The recommended length for the review of the literature is 3 – 4 pages.

*Note: The UNL Libraries website has numerous databases which are available online to students. It is recommended to begin your literature search by accessing those databases. In addition, there are support services available to students via chat or phone. For more information, please visit the UNL Libraries website at <http://libraries.unl.edu/>.*

**Conclusion:** This section should provide a succinct explanation of the importance of your proposed project based on the literature reviewed and should explicitly state how your project will fill a particular need area in your topic of choice. The recommended length for the conclusion is half a page.

**Reference Section:** The reference section is a list of the literature you cited in your review. Make sure to follow the requirements of the technical style (e.g. APA or MLA) you are using for the literature review. A helpful online resource for technical writing is the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>.