

Guidelines for Preparing a Portfolio Review Paper

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Review papers should approximate the style, coverage, and scholarship of well-written published reviews such as those that appear in *Psychological Bulletin* and other established professional outlets. The CGU Psychology Department procedures for evaluating portfolio items also approximate review procedures of journals: The first reader normally evaluates the original submission and a single revision, if one is required. A draft is passed on to the second reader after the first reader has approved it, or if the first reader judges that the second reader should see it before revisions are made. Second readers normally evaluate no more than two versions of a paper.

Given these limited review opportunities, it is important that first drafts, as well as revisions, be carefully prepared. Any manuscript submitted for evaluation should, at a minimum, be clearly and concisely written, use proper grammar, punctuation and spelling, and be free of typographical errors. It should also use the format described in the latest *APA Publication Manual*. Proofreading your paper by reading it out loud to yourself is a good way to check for errors and awkward sentence structures. Another strategy for improving a manuscript before it is submitted to a faculty reader is to ask a fellow student to read and provide critical comments on the organization, content, and style of your paper, and then to revise it making use of that feedback.

There are at least four essential steps in preparing a professionally adequate review paper: 1) defining the problem and the boundaries of the literature considered, 2) conducting the literature review, i.e., locating and reading the appropriate references, 3) processing the relevant material to determine what central themes or conclusions emerge, and 4) constructing a manuscript that coherently develops the themes. The process is more iterative than linear. For example, discoveries of new literature lead you to redefine the problem; an emerging theme may lead to clearer definitions of the problem and to sharper presentations of the arguments. A review paper should not aim to cover too much--either in terms of the number of references examined or the scope of the problem. It is very difficult to prepare a coherent manuscript from a broad and diverse literature.

A good review paper reflects the developed convictions of the author about a body of literature. It is not merely a summary of empirical studies or even an "objective" report of the evidence. A manuscript that proceeds in a linear fashion, sequentially presenting theories and research in a way that reveals no coherent theme or central message, is not acceptable. Such a manuscript may provide evidence of defining a problem and reading the literature (steps 1 and 2), but it is deficient in processing information and in forging new ideas (steps 3 and 4).

Here are some guidelines that elaborate upon the steps outlined above:

1) Begin with a one- or two-page concept paper that outlines the problem as you see it at the outset. Say why the problem is important, and how you think you might organize the material. Do some checking to be sure that there is some literature on the topic, but not so much that it cannot be reviewed in a reasonable amount of time. Be especially careful not to define the problem too broadly. Share the concept paper with your advisor or first reader. Ask for his/her approval and suggestions.

2) From the references you locate and read, determine a set of worthwhile observations or conclusions

you can make about that literature. Tentatively select one or two themes that you think are worth developing. Then re-scrutinize the literature to see if the themes still seem appropriate; modify them if necessary. Organize the paper in such a way that empirical research is cited to support points you make. Be selective in what you cite, but do not omit important references because they are inconsistent with your argument.

3) Hone and shape your ideas by writing. Work to communicate clearly and coherently the theme(s) you have developed. Let your own conclusions and inferences drive the writing. Do not, incidentally, merely cite another writer's conclusions or evaluations; formulate and express your own. It is advisable to state your themes early in the paper, so the reader can reason along with you. If you merely lay out the evidence and then state your conclusions, the reader's task is more difficult. Specifically avoid runs of paragraphs that summarize study after study, or theory after theory. *Organize and present literature so as to document the points (themes, conclusions) that you have drawn.* If the theories are to be presented, show how each bears directly on the focal problem; do not provide a series of general theoretical overviews.

4) *A coherent review paper is more likely to result if you work steadily on the project once you begin.* Set reasonable bounds on the scope of the paper, and on the time and effort devoted to it. For example, it should be possible to complete the first draft of a paper in four to eight weeks of concentrated work. Do not aim to provide the last word on the topic--you will not. Aim instead to provide some insights on the subject matter. Limit your paper to 25 pages, double spaced; less is often appropriate. It is hard to sustain a coherent argument about a limited body of literature in a more extended manuscript.

Before you begin this process, consult recent issues of *Psychological Bulletin* for articles that illustrate the kind of review described above. Locate one or two suitable models and keep them available for reference. Before beginning to write, read the attached article, "Writing a review paper for *Psychological Bulletin*" by Daryl Bem. This article presents many additional helpful guidelines and tips.

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