

HCOM 300 Individual Research Paper (Literature Review) Assignment Description

Overview

Write a paper in which you review literature related to a communication research problem statement/question. The paper should be 6-9 pages in length. This assignment entails summarizing existing literature and developing an argument that justifies completing new research on the problem question you have selected. This paper is worth 20% of your grade. Let the paper take the following form:

- Introduction (1-2 paragraphs): Justify the selection of this topic. (Why is it important?) Provide any necessary context/background, and state the problem (can be phrased as a question). Please underline your one-sentence (or single question) problem statement. At the end, explicitly preview the remaining points of the paper.

You have the option of turning in your 1-2 paragraph introduction section in class on March 28th if you would like to receive ungraded feedback on it.

- Review of Literature (4.5-7.5 pages): This is the main portion of your paper. Summarize research literature for your topic, conveying how the studies you include relate to (and differ from) one another. To do so, you will need to break your topic into clear subtopics. Make sure that your review of literature is *not* merely a description of studies that are listed separately one after another. Instead, each paragraph (or, in some cases, a group of related paragraphs) should represent a subtopic and include studies within that subtopic. You might include, for instance, subtopics about (a) theories used to examine your concept, (b) ways past research has defined your concept, (c) methodologies used to study this concept, and (d) major findings (likely grouped into several distinct paragraphs based on similarities).
- Future Research Priorities (1-3 paragraphs): Assess relevant material that remains unknown about the topic (demonstrating a gap in knowledge that invites the new research suggested by the problem question). Indicate what research should be completed; identify the specific reasons new research is invited. You may have already referred to weaknesses or gaps when reviewing the literature; in that case, this is your chance to summarize and elaborate on those deficiencies and suggest areas for future research to address them.
- Conclusion (1 paragraph): Summarize your paper. You may also include final thoughts on your topic. (Do not introduce new material here though.)

Format and Details

- Your paper should be typed and double-spaced with one-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. Please use correct APA format throughout. You should cite sources frequently (but use direct quotes sparingly). Use a formal, academic tone. (Do not include personal opinions/experiences.)
- In addition to 6-9 pages of text, please type and include a title page, outline (after the title page), and reference page. Please also turn in a copy of the first page (not just the abstract) of each journal article you cite; these pages should be in the order of your reference list (alphabetical) and should be included after the reference page of your paper. Please staple or clip all of these items together and write your name on the back of the last page rather than on the title page. Failing to comply with any of the instructions in this assignment description (e.g., not turning in all of these items by the due date or not clipping them together) will result in a point deduction. Please don't cause yourself to lose easy points!
- Your outline may be as simple or detailed as you would like. (If it is not helpful to you to write from an outline, you are welcome to create it after you write the paper.)

- You should cite a minimum of six journal articles. You are welcome to use other types of sources (e.g., books), but these need to be in addition to the six journal articles.
- Your paper is due, as a hard-copy, at the start of class on April 18th. Late papers might not be accepted at all; if they are accepted, they will carry a penalty. Again, please be sure to turn in all required materials, as points will be deducted for any missing elements (e.g., outline, reference page) and these cannot be turned in late. You will also be required to submit your paper to the *Turn It In* system on Titanium before turning in the hard-copy. (More details and instructions to follow.)

Recommended Steps

Writing a literature review is sometimes viewed as a daunting task, but this process can be made much more manageable by breaking it into steps. After you have selected a topic, I recommend that you follow the steps below.

1. Locate and print (or photocopy) your sources. We will discuss library research during Week 5 including tips on locating sources. (Hint: A great way to find additional sources is to check out what was cited in the articles you already have and then locate relevant articles using our library's search engine.)
2. Read each of your sources and take detailed notes. For instance, as you read each source, you will want to note the following: What theories (if any) were discussed in relationship to this particular study? What methodology was used? How were the concepts defined? What were the major findings? What were the strengths and weaknesses of the study?
3. Compare notes across your sources and group similar topics to develop subtopics. For example, in conducting a search of sources about social support within couples in which one person is chronically ill, I might develop the following subtopics to structure the body of my literature review:
 - a. Ways of defining social support
 - b. Positive health outcomes linked to social support in the illness context
 - c. Negative health outcomes linked to social support in the illness context
 - d. Possible reasons for these varying outcomes (e.g., illness type, support type)

Each of these subtopics would be one or several paragraphs and include citations from relevant studies. (These are just examples; there are many different subcategories that could work well.)

Note: There are a number of methods that can be used to take notes and group similar topics together. Many of you probably used the "note card method" in elementary, middle, or high school (in which you write each of your notes, along with a citation, on a separate note card and later group similar note cards together). The idea behind this method is a good one, though you may wish to carry it out in a different way (for example, by first constructing your notes in one document and then cutting them up – either literally or electronically via cut and paste – to group similar ideas together).

4. Write an outline, including main topic sentences for each subtopic. (Note: Main topic sentences are not required for the outline you turn into me, but they should be included within your final paper. It can be very helpful to plan these out before you write your paper.)
5. Write your paper very well, leaving plenty of time for editing.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions. If you need help, be sure to seek it early to ensure enough time for me to assist you.