**Evaluating a Literature Review**

**Using the 5 Elements of *Writing at Fontbonne***

T

he first element of writing is **Focus**, which means the concentration or emphasis on a subject or objective. **Focus** may be addressed in the following terms: objectives of assignment, thesis, argument, main point, central theme, conclusions, or recommendations.

What is the **focus** of a literature review and how is it evaluated?

Essentially, there are two types of a literature reviews: a synthesized a literature review and a bibliographic literature review. This handout will focus on a synthesized literature review.

In order to determine whether or not the assignment meets the **focus** or to what degree it meets the **focus**, ascertain if the literature review includes the appropriate number of resources, identifies themes of subtopics within the topic, and synthesizes diverse perspectives on those themes within each body paragraph.

T

he second element of writing is **Development**, in other words, support and/or elaboration of the **focus**. **Development** may include explanation, description, analysis, narration, exploration, source material or data use, or methodology discussion.

How is **development** assessed in a literature review?

A literature review is **developed** through textual support for identified themes or subtopics through synthesis.

To determine the degree of development, evaluate how well themes or subtopics are synthesized. For instance, if the writer offers only two sources to **develop** Theme or Subtopic 1, then the synthesis of that theme or subtopic would benefit from further **development** through the integration of additional sources. Similarly, if the writer only provides one perspective about the theme or subtopic, then the synthesis needs additional **development** in order to provide diverse perspectives.

T

he third element of writing, **Organization**, applies to the coherent order and grouping of material. **Organization** may be addressed in the following terms: overarching structure, paragraph structure, or use of transitions.

How is **organization** employed in a literature review and how is it evaluated?

In a literature review, there exists an **overarching structure** (the review in its entirety, composed of the appropriate number of themes/subtopics) and a **paragraph structure**, both of which can be evaluated. In the overarching structure, the writer will include all required themes or subtopics as indicated by the assignment prompt/instructor guidelines organized in a manner that supports a logic focus, which could be by what is known, what is still to be known; historical trends vs. future inclinations; and so on. Within this structure, the student will provide appropriate **focus** through **paragraph organization**, which should minimally consist of a topic sentence that indicates the theme/subtopic, discussion of that theme/subtopic that synthesizes the perspectives; supporting details/evidence that support the synthesis, transitions linking ideas together, and a concluding sentence.

If a student doesn’t provide an **overarching structure** and a **paragraph structure**, then the **organization** suffers. If a student shifts focus within a paragraph, for instance, moving from the theme/subtopic identified in the topic sentence to a different theme/subtopic, then the **organization** is problematic. If the student fails to connect points through appropriate transitions within the paragraphs, then the **organization** is not as strong as it could be. Keeping the **overarching and paragraph structures** in mind will support your evaluation of the **organization** within the literature review.

T

he fourth element of writing is **Style**, which is the tone conveyed toward material and/or audience. **Style** may be implemented or be evaluated through the following means: word choice, sentence structure, voice, or persona.

How is **style** evaluated in a literature review?

Regarding **style**, it would be appropriate to use academic diction (a mixed or formal **style** devoid of slang, clichés, and usage errors) and 3rd person point of view—not 1st person point of view—in a literature review. Thus, if the point of view shifts, or the diction is problematic due to slang or incorrect word choice, then the **style** suffers. In addition, sentence structure should also be evaluated in order to ascertain if there are clear and varied sentences.

T

he fifth element of writing—**Conventions**—is adherence both to standards of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and to discipline-specific rules of formatting and citation. For example: APA, MLA, AP Style, or other style guides.

Which **conventions** are utilized in a literature review and how are they assessed?

Regarding **conventions** as it relates to grammar & usage, a student should use appropriate **conventions** for both the assignment and the discipline. For instance, it would not be appropriate for a student to write in fragments or use run-ons (grammar) or to adopt nonstandard capitalization (usage) in the assignment. Using discipline-specific terminology would also support **conventions.** Systems of documentation are also a part of **conventions**, so students should understand the rules related to citing in-text citations and other formatting rules—use of and style for headings—for a system of documentation appropriate to the discipline, which, for example, is usually APA for a literature reviews conducted for Education or Psychology courses.

In order to evaluate **conventions,** the instructor may wish to evaluate grammar/usage and system of documentation separately, especially if the student is following appropriate standards in one area but not in the other area. Regarding grammar/usage, those errors that impede clarity or detract from **style** would be more significant than errors that do not hinder clarity or do not detract from style. Regarding employing a correct system of documentation, the most significant area to focus on would be inappropriate use of sources resulting in plagiarism.

***If you have questions or concerns***, please contact Teresa Sweeney, M.F.A., Writing Specialist, Kinkel Center for Academic Resources, via email at [tsweeney@fontbonne.edu](mailto:tsweeney@fontbonne.edu) or phone at 314.719.3608.