

Writing Assignments in Graduate School

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Goals for Today

Identify

- Identify common academic writing genres

Discuss

- Discuss common structures, requirements, and expectations of writing tasks such as *seminar/course paper, synthesis, critique, literature review, annotated bibliography, and case studies*

Identify

- Identify strategies, approaches, and best practices for academic writing

Before You Begin

- Know what is expected from the writing task
 - Read the prompt for guidelines, specific questions to answer (if any), and outcomes expected
 - Look at **verbs** in the essay prompt
 - Find out key terms or concepts you might be expected to know
- Look for models in your discipline
 - Published journal articles, completed dissertations or theses, published books



Before You Begin

- Map or list what you know about the topic
 - Form a hypothesis or a working thesis/argument
- Figure out what you don't know about it
 - Identify gaps in your knowledge
 - **ASK CRITICAL QUESTIONS**



Analyzing topics

- Process words = instructional words
- Looking at process words can give you an idea of the approach or method you need to take to answer the prompt.
- Different process words have different meanings and require different approaches:
 - **Examine:** in-depth analysis; implications & explanations
 - **Discuss:** give arguments for/against
 - **Analyze:** break down into smaller parts & examine credibility/validity
 - **Argue:** supporting either for/against & supporting with facts and examples
 - **Evaluate:** examine & “measure” proposition; validity & credibility

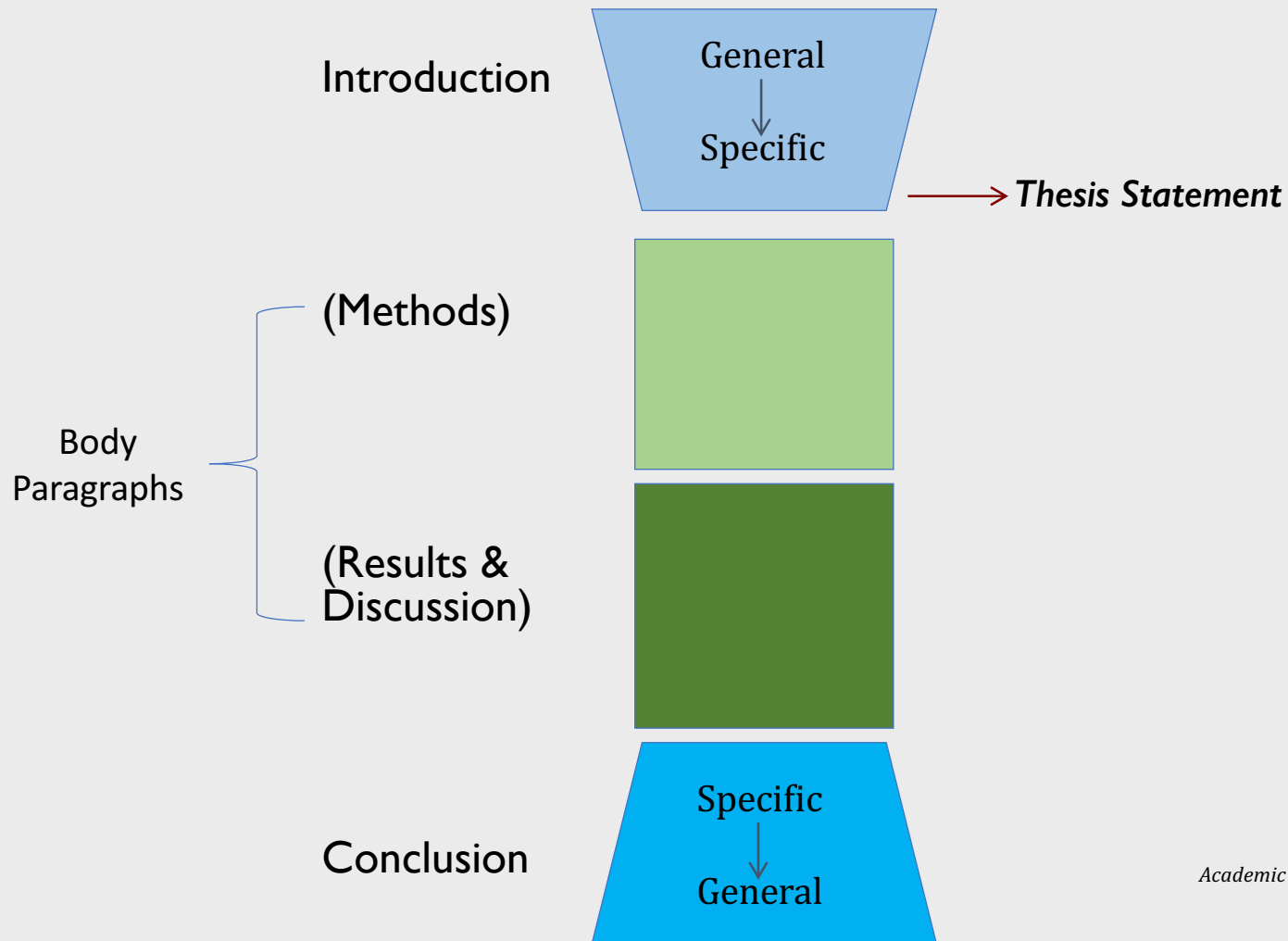


Process Words

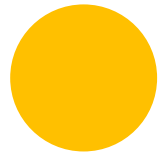
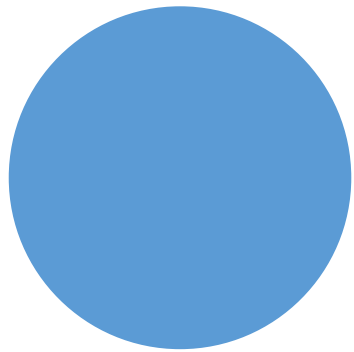
- They can help you figure out if you're writing an *informative* text or an *argumentative text*.
 - *Informative* process words: describe, explain, illustrate, report, trace, discuss, demonstrate
 - *Argumentative* process words: analyze, argue, propose, examine, evaluate, critique

Knowing this will help you determine your **thesis statement** (main idea or main argument of text).

Shape of an Academic Paper



Adapted from Swales & Feak,
Academic Writing for Graduate Students



Seminar or Course Paper



What is a Seminar or Course Paper?

- Seminar papers are culminating writing projects that typically demonstrate the writer's position about a topic or a set of related topics (or texts or concepts) related to your course.
- They typically take the form of a **research paper**, which presents an original argument that demonstrates the writer's understanding of course concepts, their implications, and/or applications.
 - Argumentative vs. Analytical research paper
- Can also be called: research paper, argument paper, analytical paper.

Types of Research Paper

Argumentative

- Attempts to convince or persuade the reader by using statements to establish a **claim** and then supports it with research **evidence** and uses sound **reasoning**.
- The focus in this essay is *your* argument or claim (explicit position or **claim**)
- **Counterarguments** show your awareness of existing debate.

Analytical

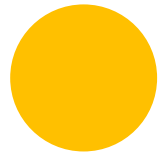
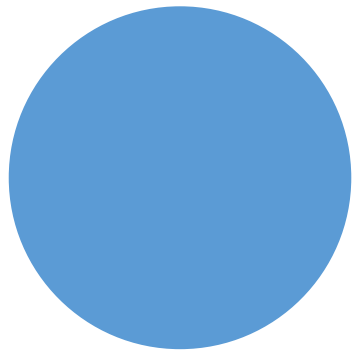
- A written, close-up examination of a topic in order to interpret strengths and weaknesses. It requires breaking down component parts and think about those parts **methodically** to understand the whole in some way.
- There are different kinds of analyses: *rhetorical, process, data, & causal*

How to structure the Seminar or Course Paper

- Structures vary but tend to follow general guidelines:
 - **Introduction.** Give background and context. Define any terms that might be unfamiliar to your reader, or if you are using a term in a specific way, clarify it in the introduction. Provide your main argument, how you will prove it, and why your argument matters
 - **Body Paragraphs.** Provide sub-arguments or sub-assertions. Provide sufficient and convincing evidence by employing rhetorical strategies (logos, pathos, ethos)
 - **Conclusion.** Discuss why your argument matters in the larger scheme or field of topic. Tell the reader why this should matter to them and what further questions to be explored emerge from the writer's analysis

How to approach the Seminar Paper

- Seminar papers should select a focal point (a problematic, confusing, unique, prominent, or paradoxical aspect of texts, topics, or concepts) to narrow and focus your discussion.
- Based on this focal point, what questions does it raise?
- What theoretical or critical conversations are you joining by focusing your seminar paper on this point? How will these theories help you answer your question(s)? What's missing or unsatisfactory about what other scholars or critics have said about this point or question?
- What specific claim or argument will you offer to answer the central question of the paper?
- What sources and/or evidence will allow you to convincingly and ethically support your claims?



Synthesis Paper



What is a synthesis?

- A synthesis (paper) is a document wherein the writer makes a central or unique argument about a topic using several sources of information.
 - Showing relationships between sources by explicitly stating them.
- Two kinds:
 - **Explanatory synthesis**: helps the reader understand a topic
 - **Argument synthesis**: presents an argument about a topic and supported by relevant facts drawn from sources.
 - Moves beyond a summary—not just reporting—but re-shuffling of information so that it informs your reader about how you will prove your argument
- Because a synthesis is based on two or more sources, you will need to **be selective** when choosing information.
 - Evaluate your sources carefully (applies for all of your papers).

Types of Synthesis Papers

Theory Application

- Typically involves describing a real-world example (your experience or the experience of others) that demonstrates, proves, challenges or complicates an established theory or concept.
- Typically requires the writer to show how a theory or concept works to demonstrate their understanding of the theory's implications.

Reaction or Reading Response

- Synthesizes learned concepts with personal experience or knowledge previously learned by the writer.
- Discusses where the writer agrees or disagrees with the assigned reading, points out weaknesses of the concepts in the readings, or offers another perspective or way of understanding the concept.

Article Synthesis

- Briefly summarizes multiple published articles to discuss where they agree, disagree, overlap, or complement ideas about a central topic.
- The writer's responsibility is to demonstrate how these different articles create knowledge about the topic they share.

How to approach Synthesis Papers?

1

You must understand what those sources say; in other words, you must be able to summarize these sources.

- Provide at least partial summaries of sources in your synthesis essays.
 - Paraphrase accurately and use reporting verbs to distinguish between your ideas and the source's.
-

2

Go beyond summary to make judgments based on your critical reading of your sources.

- Draw some conclusions about the quality and validity of your sources
 - Know how much you agree or disagree with the points made in your sources and the reasons for your agreement or disagreement.
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3

Go beyond the critique of individual sources to determine the relationship among them.

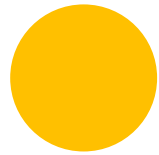
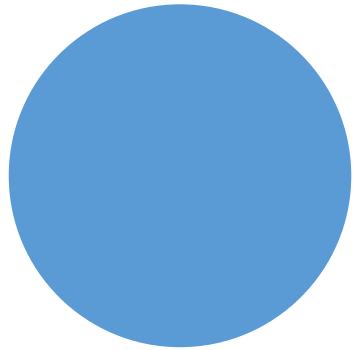
- Is the information in source B, for example, an extended illustration of the generalizations in source A?
 - Put the sources "in conversation" with each other.
-

How to structure the Synthesis Paper

- Structures vary but tend to follow general guidelines:
 - **Introduction.** Gives background and context of the articles/texts that need to be synthesized. Contains *your thesis* that tells the reader the focus of your synthesis.
 - **Body Paragraphs.** Typically organized thematically or by category (shared or opposing perspectives; similarities or differences; or by source).
 - **Conclusion.** Tells the reader why the similarities or differences, shared or opposing perspectives matter to our understanding of the focus or topic at hand.

Sample Synthesis Paragraph

Research indicates that there are a number of approaches to assessing canine aggression. One study (Reisner, Shofer & Nance, 2007) of dog aggression towards children used retrospective review of aggressive incidents reported to a veterinary clinic, and included a systematic categorization of the types and circumstances of the incidents. A study specifically focusing on comparing variation in aggression across several different breeds employed a standardized survey measure of general aggressive behaviors, which is based on owner report of canine aggression (Duffy, Hsu & Serpel, 2008). Another study reported the use of a standardized assessment of very specific aggressive behavior (food guarding), using an assessment method that can be used by either owners or professionals (Mohan-Gibbons, Weiss & Slater, 2012). *All the methods yielded valid results as noted by each study, but the standardized measures appeared to be more efficient and easier to use with non-professionals.*



Critique



What is a Critique?

- A **critique** is a writing task that provides a writer's evaluation or assessment of a subject.
- A critique establishes a **criteria for evaluation**, provides a **summary or description of the subject** to show the reader how well you understand it, and gives a **balanced discussion of the strengths and weaknesses** of the subject.
- Different disciplines are likely to emphasize critiques differently.
- Can also be called: evaluation paper, review essay, book or article review

How to approach Critiques

- Structures vary.
 - Simplest critique structure: summary + evaluation.
- Use **fair and reasonable** evaluative language.
 - Hedging
 - Boosting
- Tone varies based on intended audience, publication/journal, purpose of the critique.
 - *What's the overall goal of the critique? To identify problems? To provide recommendations? To assess strengths and weaknesses only? To assess how persuasively something is stated or presented?*
 - *What kind of evidence was used? Is it credible? Convincing? Appropriate?*
 - *What conclusions are made by the subject? Are they plausible? Are they biased?*

How to structure Critiques

- Structures vary, but the simplest critique structure splits the text between summary and evaluation.
- **Summary Section.** Provides **relevant** contextual or background information to the subject that is being critiqued or evaluated.
- **Evaluation Section.** Categorizes the critiques/evaluations thematically, by categories, or by some other organizing principle. It also uses **evaluative language** that shows value, judgment, and/or assessment.

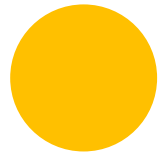
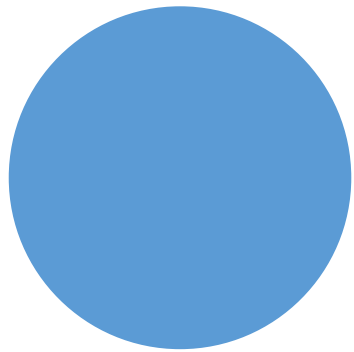
Two Options for Structuring the Critique

By Source

- A. Introduction w/ thesis
- B. Summary of Article A
 - A. View on Criterion 1
 - B. View on Criterion 2
- C. Summary of Article B
 - A. View on Criterion 1
 - B. View on Criterion 2
- D. Discussion and Conclusion

By Criteria

- A. Introduction w/thesis
- B. Criterion 1
 - A. View of Article A
 - B. View of Article B
- C. Criterion 2
 - A. View of Article A
 - B. View of Article B
- D. Discussion and Conclusion



Literature Review



What is a Literature Review?

- A **literature review (or lit review)** discusses published information (typically other studies, previous research, etc.) in a particular subject area or can be about a particular subject area in a given time period. **Summary and synthesis.**
- Literature reviews:
 - **tell** your reader the theories on which your study is based
 - **combine** summary and synthesis. They don't simply describe previous research, they also give new interpretation or new contextualization of previous information.
 - **trace** the intellectual progression in the field, which includes major debates about the subject.
 - **place your study in the context of other work that has already been done.**
 - **evaluate** sources and advise the reader on which ones are the most pertinent or relevant.*

Successful Literature Reviews are

1) Guided by research question(s)

***2) Guided by your chosen
(or given) scope***

How to structure the Literature Review

- A **literature review** can be structured differently, depending on the requirements and purpose of the lit review. Some general guidelines:
 - **Introduction.** Define or identify general topic, area of concern, issue—Give context. Point out overall trends, gaps in literature, or new perspective. Define terms.
 - **Thesis:** The thesis statement of a lit review should contain your overarching focus & main supporting points.
 - **Body.** Group studies and other types of literature based on common denominators such as approaches used, conclusions made, purpose or objective.
 - Space dedicated to studies = significance.
 - Summarize, Analyze, Synthesize, and Evaluate (if appropriate).
 - **Conclusion.** Summarize major contributions, evaluate current state of the field, provide insight into the relationship between central topic of the lit review and larger area of study.

The Integrative Literature Review

(most common form of review in the social sciences)

- **Reviews, critiques, and synthesizes** representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated.
- Includes all studies that address related or identical hypotheses or research problems.
- A well-done integrative review meets the same standards as primary research in regard to clarity, rigor, and replication.

Other Types of Literature Review

Theoretical Review

- Examines the corpus of theory that has accumulated in regard to an issue, concept, theory, phenomena.

Argumentative Review

- Examines literature selectively in order to support or refute an argument, deeply imbedded assumption, or philosophical problem already established in the literature.

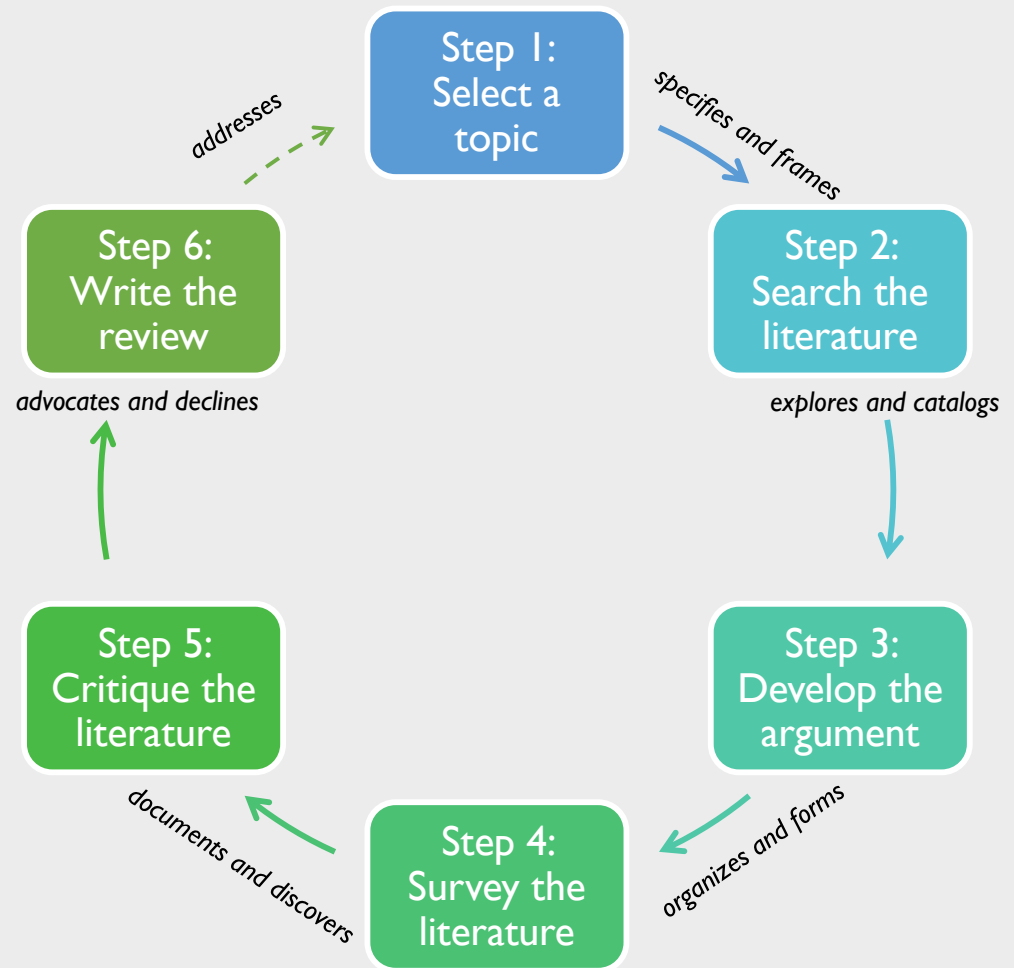
Historical Review

- Focuses on **examining research throughout a period of time**, often starting with the first time an issue, concept, theory, phenomena emerged in the literature, then tracing its evolution within the scholarship of a discipline.

Methodological Review

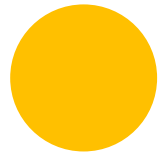
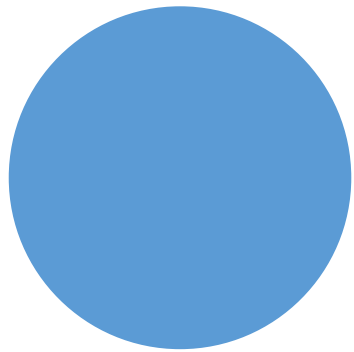
- A review does not always focus on what someone said [findings], but **how** they came about saying what they say [method of analysis].

How approach the Literature Review



The Literature Review Model from Machi & McEvoy,
The Literature Review: Six Steps to Success, 2nd edition.

Questions?



Annotated Bibliography



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What is an Annotated Bibliography

- An **bibliography** is a list of sources a researcher has used to learn more about a topic and investigate a research question. Often called “References” or “Works Cited,” a bibliography is a record of the researcher’s engagement with other sources.
- An **annotation** is a summary and evaluation. An **annotated bibliography**, then, combines these two writing tasks.
- Annotated bibliographies are used to learn more about a topic and to help other researchers learn more about sources engaged in your research topic.
- The length of each entry may vary, but generally, the researcher will summarize, analyze, and reflect on the source selected.

How to approach Annotated Bibliographies

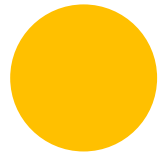
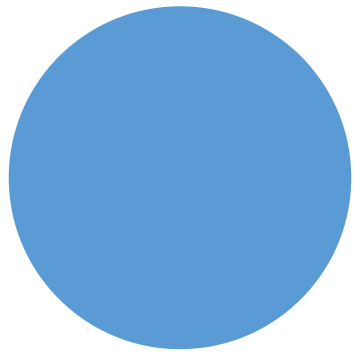
- **Take care to document your sources.** It is important that you develop a system for recording, annotating, and compiling your notes about your sources.
- **Summarize and paraphrase accurately and ethically.** Take time to read your sources thoroughly so that you can summarize and paraphrase accurately. Summarize the *main arguments, main evidence, and main conclusions* of the work.
- **Evaluate and assess your sources.** After summarizing, make sure you evaluate it. *Is it helpful? Is it correct? How does it compare with other sources you've read about the topic?*
- **Reflect how it applies to your research.** Annotated bibliographies are also practical documents to help the researcher think through how a source could help answer the research question or help advance an argument.

Sample Annotated Bibliography Entry

Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and dimed: On (not) getting by in America*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company.

In this book of nonfiction based on the journalist's experiential research, Ehrenreich attempts to ascertain whether it is currently possible for an individual to live on a minimum-wage in America. Taking jobs as a waitress, a maid in a cleaning service, and a Walmart sales employee, the author summarizes and reflects on her work, her relationships with fellow workers, and her financial struggles in each situation.

An experienced journalist, Ehrenreich is aware of the limitations of her experiment and the ethical implications of her experiential research tactics and reflects on these issues in the text. The author is forthcoming about her methods and supplements her experiences with scholarly research on her places of employment, the economy, and the rising cost of living in America. **Ehrenreich's project is timely, descriptive, and well-researched. Ehrenreich's book is useful in showing how experiences of poverty or financial hardship might influence response to charitable giving in my study.**



Case Study Analysis



What is a Case Study Analysis?

- A **case study** is an in-depth examination and analysis of the development of an event, person, or organization over a period of time. It will typically be used to identify problems, challenges, and actions taken, and general learning takeaways.
- Different courses use case studies in many different ways, so *always* check your assignment prompts and guidelines.
- Examples include action research reports and investigations of special business scenarios.

Four Types of Case Situations

PROBLEMS

a specific action or result has occurred and there's no explicit explanation for the action or result

DECISIONS

a decision has to be made and the case must be analyzed to determine what the best decision is by establishing a criteria for measurement

EVALUATIONS

a subject [person, group, organization] must be assessed to see how well or not it fits the set criteria

RULES

typically involves an application of calculations to determine valuation or performance; could be quantitatively driven

How to approach the Case Study?

Define

- Define your task and your situation.

Formulate

- Formulate good and appropriate questions to help you gather facts.

Form

- Form hypotheses that could possibly answer your questions.

Find

- Find proof for your hypotheses and recommend actions based on your evidence.

Offer

- Offer alternatives that the subject could take.

***Graduate-
level writing
is ...***

Motivated by critical, thoughtful, and specific questions.

Offers [potential or probable] answers that are framed as arguments

Supported by sound, credible, appropriate, and scholarly evidence

Clear about why the topic, RQ, and/or argument matters to the reader

Edited, proofread, and formatted according to discipline conventions

For Further Reading



- [APA Style Blog](#)
- Azusa Pacific University Writing Center. (2015, February 4). “[Literature review.](#)”
- Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G., & Williams, J.M. (2008). *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Baker, J.R., Brizee, A., & Velázquez, A. (2011). [Genre and the research paper.](#)
- Ellet, W. (2007). *The Case Study Handbook: How to Read, Discuss, and Write Persuasively About Cases*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Online Writing Lab at Purdue. “[Annotated bibliographies.](#)”
- Research Guides for Communication & Journalism. <http://libguides.usc.edu/CJ>
- Swales, J.M. & Feak, C.B. (2012). *Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. 3rd ed. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- UNSW Sydney. “[Writing the case study.](#)”
- USC Library Lessons. “[Evaluating your sources.](#)”
- USC Library Research Guide. [Organizing Your Social Sciences Research Paper.](#)

Graduate Writing Services at Annenberg

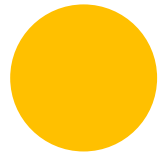
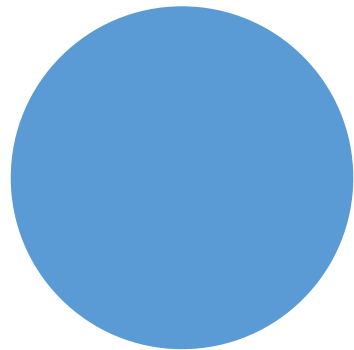
- Graduate students in Communication, CMGT, Global Communication, Public Diplomacy, Digital Social Media, and Communication Data Science can meet with the *Graduate Writing Coach*
- Writing assistance includes:
 - *in-person & online meetings for individuals & groups*
 - *webinars & workshops*
 - *resources, handouts, & other materials*
- Appointments:
<http://cmgtwriting.uscannenberg.org>
- Got q's? Email fgacho@usc.edu



The Graduate Writing Coach can assist with:

- Writing academic and academic-business hybrid texts
- Understanding writing tasks and brainstorming
- Developing arguments and research questions
- Writing strong paragraphs
- Effective paraphrasing, active and critical reading
- Academic voice and style





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