



College of Education  
Learning Design and Leadership

*Literature Review Genre and  
Qualifying Examination Preparation*

# Resource Reminders

- EDS Onboarding
- General Field Onboarding
- Live Follow-Up Sessions for each of these videos
- EDS Website
- LDL Doctoral Dissertation Sequence Community

# LDL Doctoral Students: LDL Courses → Exam-Dissertation Sequence

The regular LDL courses do not aim to thoroughly teach students how to write in the literature review genre, but LDL doctoral students should begin to familiarize themselves with the genre early in the program to be better-prepared for the exam-dissertation sequence, where the literature review genre is enforced.



# The Purpose of a Literature Review

A literature review is **not a descriptive essay**, but rather **investigates and synthesizes existing scholarship** in a way that provides context for the field or research study and informs and eventually justifies the research question/s, theoretical framework, and selected research methodology.



# General Field and Special Field Literature Review Purpose

***The Literature reviewed should be evidence-based and reveal:***

- Definitions associated with your field
- Theories associated with your field
- History and Evolution of your field
- Practices found within your field
- Findings from existing research associated with your field
- Debates associated with your field



# Literature Review Genre Attributes

**Explicit**

**Explanatory**

**Evidence-Based**

**Comprehensive**



# General and Special Field Literature Reviews

**What the  
literature reveals**

**Demonstrate what you  
have learned**



# Common Literature Review Challenges

## Challenge

## Solution

Choosing your research study before you start



You can have a tentative research question, which will allow you to identify your general field topic, then let the literature guide you to the next step

Starting your Literature Review before completing the Admin Updates



Complete the Admin Updates/ Individual Updates in order

Stating what you already know or trying to solve a problem or prove a particular viewpoint



Writing should speak in the voice of the literature

Dedicating a paragraph to a single source, like an annotated bibliography



Synthesize multiple sources





# Dissertation and Chapter Structure

# EDS: Overall Dissertation Structure

- Word Document (in Scholar entry)
- Note to Reviewers and Dated Change Notes
- Title Page
- Abstract (placeholder)
- Table of Contents
- Chapter 1: Introduction (placeholder)
- **Chapter 2: Literature Review**
  - **Part 1 General Field**
    - Part 2: Special Field
- Chapter 3: Theory and Methodology (placeholder for chapters 3-5)
- Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion
- Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusions
- References
- Appendix

*Include a note to reviewers and change notes before your Title page and placeholders for other elements*

*The focus of this work is on the General Field*

# EDS: General Field/Special Field Literature Review Structure (Chapter 2 Part 1/2)

Include your tentative research question to provide context for your general/special field prior to your introduction

1. Introduction to your **General/Special Field** Literature Review (include a brief title in the section header)
2. Definitions Associated with XXX (if applicable)
  - How does the literature define your area of investigation?
  - It may make more sense to integrate definitions into the body of your work
3. Theories Associated with XX
  - This refers to all theories associated with your general field
  - Don't choose a few theories, but instead, what does the literature say are the related theories?
4. Multiple Themed sections
  - The section title should not be called Themes – name them something relevant to your topic, based on the literature
  - This should include subsections to keep your work organized (use the Scholar structure tool)
5. Gaps in the Literature
  - What is lacking in the literature as it relates to your tentative key research question? What additional research needs to be done?
6. Conclusion
  - Summary of the literature review and next steps
7. References: Be sure that your references are cited properly

*All should be in the voice of the literature except the Gaps and Conclusion*

# EDS: Literature Review Progress

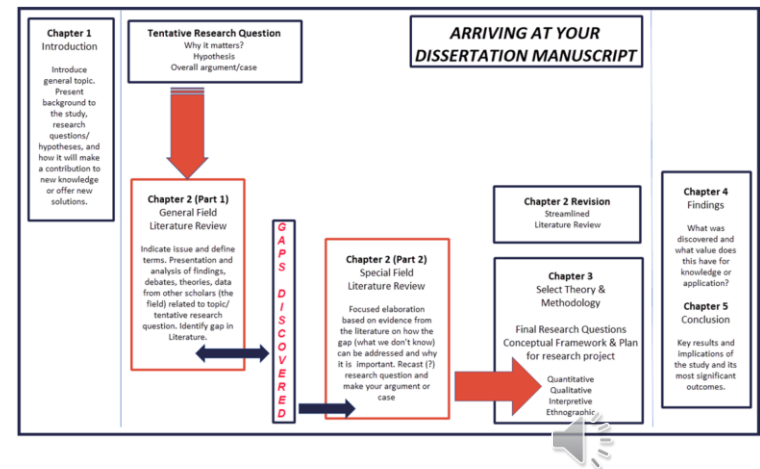
## General & Special qualifying exams →

## Dissertation Literature Review

### Progression

1. Chapter 2 Part 1: General Field LR
2. Chapter 2 Part 2: Special Field LR
3. Chapter 2 Literature Review:  
*Streamlined for research proposal*
4. Chapter 2 Literature Review:  
*Updated for final dissertation*

See full image in the  
[EDS Process PDF](#) on  
our web site




# Getting Started

# Getting Organized

- Use a bibliographical database platform (i.e. Mendeley, Zotero)
- Complete your annotated bibliography even though you don't submit it or use all entries
- Tag your sources as you read them; these will help inform themes, theories, etc.
- Make good notes and include quotes and citations
- Capture both the claim, but also the **evidence** that supports the claim
- Keep the focus on your current work, but tag things if they apply elsewhere
- Looking ahead at the Structure guidance...
  - Group your findings in a coherent and compelling way
  - The emerged theories, themes, and subthemes will become sections and subsections (*use the Scholar structure tool*)
  - If using numbering avoid going beyond two levels. (but you can have more levels without numbers)

# Seeking out Literature

- Identify a **tentative key research question** that your dissertation might address and investigate the related **Field of scholarship**.
- Do not choose your theories or themes in advance
  - The literature will reveal the theories and themes that emerge from the literature you have discovered
  - Do not only seek literature to prove your point or satisfy your own agenda or assumptions
- **Along the way consider the following:**
  - What definitions are associated with my general field/topic?
  - What are the theories associated with my general field/topic?
  - What is the history of my general field? (How) Have things changed over time?
  - What debates are examined in or emerge from the literature?
  - What are the findings associated with my general field/topic?
  - EX: What are the benefits of...?
  - EX: What are the challenges of....?
- Focus on primary sources; avoid secondary sources
- Don't stop at the minimum # of sources; if you feel you are not able to find many sources, contact the education librarian (watch her videos (on our website) first!) 

# LDL Courses vs. Exam-Dissertation Sequence

**Both rely on scholarly sources**

## **Regular Courses: Scholarly Essay**

- 2,000 Words (main body of the work)
- 10 scholarly sources (minimum) 5 new
- Tip: Strive to apply at least one element of the literature review genre and improve with each work

*Word Count excludes experiential/note to reviewers, introduction, gaps in the literature, conclusion, and references*

## **EDS: Literature Review**

- 6,000 to 9,000 Words (main body of the work)
- 20 scholarly sources (minimum)
- Revisions required until it aligns with the LR genre and meets the qualifying examination standards





# LDL Courses vs. Exam-Dissertation Sequence

## Both rely on scholarly sources

### Scholarly Essay

- Includes an experiential section that addresses your personal relationship to the topic and course alignment
- Avoid personal opinions elsewhere
- May address a topic, with a citation at the end. *Abc is true (source, year).*
- Doesn't require as much elaboration

### Literature Review

- Experiential section is placed in a “note to reviewers” pre-section
- Needs to be written in the voice of the literature *Source (year) claims...*
- No personal assessment, bias, opinions, assumptions, conclusions
- Elaborate on the context of studies

# Academic Writing Best Practices

# Academic Writing Expectations: Organization

- Use the Structure tool and headings/subheadings to help your readers
  - This helps readers quickly see which themes emerged from the literature reviewed
- Best practice is to use a chapter-based numbering schema. Figure 2.1, Figure 2.2, etc.
  - Easier to maintain as your manuscript grows and changes
- Follow the Graduate College Format from the beginning
- Check APA style
  - Narrative vs. Parenthetical Citations
  - References



# Academic Writing Expectations

## Word Choices

- Use objective topical sentences that introduce a section or paragraph
- Minimize making generalizations about research or the literature
  - But when necessary, make sure to include the parameter of "**the literature reviewed**" – and immediately follow it up with multiple examples
- Do not use First Person
- Do not use acronyms unless you've received a waiver to use one
- Aim to diversify your verbs or intros, especially within the same paragraph
- Avoid long copy and paste from cited sources unless critical to the work at hand.
  - Aim to synthesize what is in the long lists and ensure they add to the value and purpose of the literature review



# Literature Review Genre Expectations: Content

- The voice of the literature should speak, but avoid overuse of direct quotes
- Group sources by theme, as revealed by the literature
- Elaborate on the context of the study: Why, what, who, how?
- Use evidence-based verbs
- When citing what an author said, be sure to elaborate on the evidence of the claim (what data led to that claim?)
  - Do not elaborate on your judgment of the claim
- It isn't necessary to always say "in a study by..." you can simply say Jones (2020) investigated... or surveyed.... Etc.
- It isn't necessary to say the name of the article or journal



# Literature Review Genre Expectations: Sources and Citations

- Rely on scholarly sources
- Avoid stating your own claims, opinions, knowledge, or assumptions
- Ensure that everything is cited. Avoid your reader asking, “Who said this?”
- Avoid a single source per paragraph (this is not an annotated bibliography) and avoid overuse of a single source in a single or across multiple paragraphs
- Synthesize multiple sources while still letting the literature speak
  - Don’t list multiple sources against one generalization or in support of your own generalization/view. Let the literature speak directly and in dialogue around key issues.
  - Make connections between sources



## Literature Review guidelines

# Academic Phrases: Topical Sentences

## Objective Topical Sentences

- Xxx has been **discussed** in the literature reviewed.
- The literature reviewed **revealed** the relevance of xxx.
- SourceA (year) and SourceB (year) **also examined** XXX.

## Follow-Up

*Be specific after the topical sentence*

- For example, SourceA (year)...
- Specifically, SourceA investigated xxx and found that...
- In particular, SourceA (year) claims...
- Source A (year) examined...

**Generalizations:** *Generalized claims must be supported by multiple sources*

**Diversity:** *Avoid using the same introductory statements too many times*

**Important:** Note that these examples don't include the elaboration that you would typically need 

# Academic Phrases: Evidence-based Verbs

## Use Evidence-Based Verbs

- Claims
- Concluded
- Found
- Posits
- Argues
- Reports
- Said, for direct quotes

*\*Verb tense will vary– is it something that is still true?  
Is it something that “happened”?*

## DO NOT Use

- Highlights
- Mentions
- Noted
- Points Out

*Refer to the Academic Phrasebook link on our [Literature Review guidelines](#) page for many more examples*

**Important:** Preface the claims or support them by elaborating on the context of the study. 



# Academic Phrases: Connections (Yes) Opinions and Speculations (No)

## Use

- Similarly
- In contrast to
- However
- Also
- Furthermore

*Synthesize without adding your judgment*

## DO NOT Use

- Interestingly
- Might be due to
- Notably
- The most common
- It is important



# Checklists

# Ways to Ensure a Quality Submission: Overall

1. **Proofread:** Check for overall writing quality, flow, word choices, grammar, etc.
  - Procure a copy editor
2. Check the length and thoroughness of your work
  - The Main body of the work is where the word count matters
3. Follow the Work Submission and Review process
4. Ensure that your literature review refers to the General/Special Field at the early stages, not “my study” or “my dissertation”. And this is not a “paper”.
5. Do not use First Person
6. Ensure that the purpose of the current work is clear
7. Include objective section and paragraph topical sentences
8. Use the Scholar Structure tool for both headings and subheadings
9. Follow the latest APA style guide
10. Heed advisor and/or peer feedback
  - Wait to submit again until after peer feedback has come in



# Ways to Ensure a Quality Submission: Literature Review Genre

1. Avoid cherry-picking sources to satisfy your agenda or assumptions.
  - Do not pre-select theories and themes; instead allow the literature to reveal them
  - Do not attempt to make a case; instead, synthesize what the literature reveals
2. Be thorough enough to represent the field, theory, or methodology.
  - Ensure sufficient support from scholarly sources
  - While we provide word count minimums, this does not always mean that your work will be sufficient if you just barely surpass the minimum.
3. Avoid generalized topical sentences or too many generalizations overall
  - But if used, ensure proper evidence or justification and cite multiple sources
4. Avoid your voice being too prominent in the Literature Review
  - Make sure it is always clear who is speaking - the literature or the student
  - Avoid making this heavily personal
5. Elaborate on the context of the studies being cited
6. Diversify your sources and synthesize multiple sources
  - Avoid paragraphs dedicated to a single source
  - Avoid this feeling like an annotated bibliography



# Literature Review Genre Examples

# Literature Review Genre Examples

## *Examples*

- **The voice of the literature should speak:** Start sentences with the author to make it clear that the literature is speaking.

Smith (2019) posits that....

- **Cross reference and synthesize multiple sources and let the literature speak directly to issues,**

Jones (2020) in a study about xxx found such and such, however, Rogers (2021) concluded that....after examining yyy. Similarly, Ebert and Siebert (2018) claim ... as a result of investigating zzz.



# Literature Review Genre Examples

## *Examples*

- **Evidence-based**; Elaborate on the claim, in the voice of the literature.

Based on a survey of five hundred first year college students, Smith (2019) argues ....

Specifically, he found that X% of xxx experienced yyy... OR

Smith (2019) examined the role of metacognition in first year college writing courses by surveying five hundred first year college students and found that...



# Practice Exercise

- Identify at least 2 positives and 2 opportunities for improvement in the three sample literature review excerpts. Indicate how they do or do not align with the literature review genre guidelines.
- Revise the three excerpts to comply with the literature review genre requirements.





# EDS Homework (Admin Update)

- Submit a sample literature review (about 500 words with at least 5 scholarly sources) that demonstrates the literature review genre guidelines.
- Complete a self-review of your sample literature review following the literature review genre rubric. Include one excerpt/example per rubric item.



# Before and After Examples

# Example: Definitions *before and after*

## Before: Confusing about who said what.

**Literacies**-When pluralized, it refers to the view that literacy is “multiple” and “multimodal” (Leu et al., 2017). Multiple, can refer to the range of cultural and social situations in which literacy, observed as a meaning making process, occurs (Kalantzis et al., 2016). Street (2016) conceptualized literacy as a social practice, not as a skill, and therefore, as a social practice, a range of different literacies can be observed, “religious literacies, many different occupational literacies, family/domestic literacies, bureaucratic literacies, academic literacies, etc.” (p.339) Multimodal refers to the knowledge of different modes to communicate meaning: written, visual, audio etc. (Gee, 2003; Guzzetti, 2010; Kalantzis et al., 2016; Kress, 2003; New London Group, 1996; Chandler-Olcott & Lewis, 2010). Different modes afford different meaning-making possibilities (Kress, 2010) and it is the theory of multimodality that looks at the ways in which these modes combine in a “meaning-making event” (Kalantzis et al., 2016, p.229). Literacies that are viewed as multimodal refers to an understanding that students need to develop abilities in the varied ways that the resources for making meaning are used to produce a message (Kress, 2003).

## After: More precision regarding claims.

**Literacies**- In their research about XXX, Kalantzis et al., (2016) have found that the contemporary communication environment necessitates students learn more than “alphabetical communication”, that they instead learn literacies, or the many forms of literacy “not only knowledge of formal conventions across a range of modes, but also effective communication in diverse settings and the use of tools of text design that are multimodal, rather than a reliance on the written mode alone” (p.5). Street (2016) conceptualized literacy as a social practice, not as a skill, and therefore, as a social practice, Street noted that the plurality represents the range of different literacies that can be observed, “religious literacies, many different occupational literacies, family/domestic literacies, bureaucratic literacies, academic literacies, etc.” (p.339)

# Example:

## *Mostly well-sourced and inter-related*

Part of what is being referred to in the aforementioned quote is the hypertextuality of reading online. ( ???) Hypertexts are connected by nodes, these nodes can represent an idea or concept and most often present information in a nonlinear fashion (Ferguson & Hebels, 2003). Afflerbach and Cho (2009), after synthesizing the results of think-aloud protocols focusing on internet reading, found several differences in reading online as a result of hypertexts. Firstly, echoing Hartman et al., Afflerbach and Cho point out posit that rather than a single text there is a process they call “realizing and constructing potential texts to read” (p.82) which imply indicate readers using the following strategies among others: “choosing and sequencing the reading order by accessing links based on the criteria of coherence among links and relevance to situational interests” (p.83) and “Predicting utility of a link within internet text when confronted with more than one hypertext link” (p.83).

# Example

## *Mostly well-structured*

If ( ?) students enter a course with low value expectancy due to their previous encounters and experience with writing tasks, then the level of motivation and performance will be lower than those who enter with high value and positive experiences.( ( ???) Although the work by Surastina & Dedi is with English Language Learners, it is supported by Ouahidi's (2020) [elaborate on context of this study] finding that "students who enjoy writing and express self-satisfaction are likely to attain their goal: academic accomplishment."

Thuraisingam et al. (2019) examined how peer reviews can provide important context to assignments and improve critical thinking through increased engagement resulting in higher motivation. In their own words, "student motivation is usually enhanced when the purposes of assessment are explained and linked to learning objectives and outcomes and practitioners involve their students in the assessment process" (p. 233). This work with international students in Malaysia on peer reviews affirmed earlier research about XXX at the University of Michigan by Bunn (2013), which demonstrated the importance of clearly and explicitly identifying outcomes and assessment methods to increase student motivation due to increased task value resulting from this type of disclosure.

Such attempts to reframe writing assignments away from extrinsic requirements and rewards and toward intrinsic improvement is also supported by Ling et al. (2021) who found that "Students who are confident in writing are more likely to focus on mastering writing tasks, find writing satisfying, and see writing as a meaningful task (content beliefs). Those who lack confidence in writing appear to be more likely to avoid writing and do not enjoy it or find it satisfying" (pxx).

# Example:

## *Uneven construction (-), elaboration (+)*

Sung et al (2015), when examining the reading behaviors of fifth graders online through an eye tracking study and retrospective think-alouds, found that the students had difficulties navigating non-linear hypertexts. Notably, He claimed when those students set goals, they were more likely to pay attention to what they read online. Balcytiene (1999) also found that using strategies helped; in particular, activating prior knowledge and monitoring of comprehension, helped students find the information they needed. These strategies Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) found successful readers do with print-based texts in their review of think aloud protocols. This might be due (???) to the claim of Forzani et al., (2020) that reading online tends to be more similar to print-based reading when there are no hyperlinks or other “dynamic features”. Interestingly, (???) Shang (2015), working through a sociocultural perspective, compared scaffolding of print-based texts by teachers with scaffolding using hypertext as reading intervention with non-traditional English as foreign language students. In this study the hypertext intervention did not show improvement on comprehension scores but did positively affect the engagement of the students.

# Example:

## *Uneven Construction*

A constructivist theoretical framework establishes that transmission of knowledge and identity formation depend on two elements: social acceptance and personal integration (Ross, 2004) (assertion backed by citation). Hirtle (1996) explains that the theory is founded by John Dewey who states that the “psychological and social sides of education are organically related, and that education cannot be regarded as a compromise between the two, or a superimposition of one upon the other” (p. 91). In a qualitative study examining special needs students at a Jewish day school, Ross finds that “[j]ust as the students' low self-perceptions were linked to their negative experiences, a more positive perception of self and a growth in self-esteem emerged as the students met with successful learning experiences” (p. 54).

# Example:

## *Uneven Construction*

Both Vandewaetere et al. (2011) and Alwadei (2019) discuss the vast amount of adaptive learning programs created for online educational purposes that have led to a wide range of applications of these programs in the adaptive learning systems field of literature. ( ??? too vague ) However, as Dziuban et al. (2018) argue, the goal of any adaptive learning system when compared to traditional online learning environments is to use the data from each individual student to scaffold the learning material to their particular learning level and provide continual feedback for both the student and instructor. Smith (2016) describes the following as advantages adaptive learning has over passive online learning:



# Example:

## *Author's voice; lack of elaboration*

The value equations discussed thus far have been related specifically to student perceptions of goal and task value, which is further complicated by the many relevant external motivational factors influencing and affecting student attendance and effort regulation. As noted by Thuraisingam et al. (2019), external factors must be accounted for; “When individuals are motivated intrinsically, individuals engage in an activity because they are interested in and enjoy the activity; when extrinsically motivated, individuals engage in activities for instructional reasons or for receiving a reward” (p. 227). Research supports the suggestion that “in order to be successful in school, students should be oriented both toward intrinsic goals (broadening knowledge, mastering the task, developing abilities, etc.) and toward extrinsic ones (e.g., trying to get good grades, performing better than others and obtaining positive judgments from that, pursuing goals related to social responsibility, etc.)” (Montalvo & Torres, 2004, p. 12).

# Example: Overgeneralized Claims

## *Not clear who said what*

Achievement Goal theory is one iteration of social-cognitive theory, which investigates student motivation according to students' desired outcome for the task at hand (Tollefson 2000; Limpo & Alves 2017). This perspective assumes that human behavior is goal directed and that people pursue multiple goals in diverse ways across different domains (Pintrich 2000; Soylu et al. 2017). These goals impact performance indirectly through strategy selection, and therefore influence if and how students approach learning tasks. (??) Kaplan et al. (2009) terms this theory a "(C)ontextual motivation-strategy orientation" (p. 51). According to the literature reviewed (???) the most common approach to Achievement Goals is the trichotomous model which encompasses mastery goals, performance-approach, and performance-avoidance goals.(???)

Kaplan et al. (2009) identified these different orientations as the reasons students pursue their goals and include the desire to increase competency (mastery) or demonstrating ability (performance). Within these categories, there are distinctions between a focus on being successful (approach), or a focus on not failing (avoidance)(???) . This perspective, according to Pintrich (2000) is a combination of reasons students are pursuing the task as well as the standards with which they will measure their success (p. 94).

# Example:

## *Not clearly articulated*

These two theories were the ones most applied to adaptive learning in the literature reviewed. (citation missing) Both of these theories ( ??? ) from the literature reviewed listed a foundation of individualized instruction as a common argument for the application to adaptive learning systems (Vandewaetere & Clarebout, 2011; Xie et al., 2019). Aleven et al. (2017) ( ??? Who said what )\_ describe these aspects are the theoretical underpinnings of adaptive learning systems. With the theories of constructivism and self-regulated learning as theoretical frameworks for adaptive learning systems, the key concepts of adaptive learning systems in higher education can be discussed in their current state in the literature. ( ??? )

# Example:

## *Voice is not always clear*

Borko, et al. in 2010, Desimone in 2009, and eventually Lay et al. in 2020 all argued that online professional development is similar enough to traditional professional development that basic features of effectiveness can be assumed to be valid in both modalities (? Too loose a statement ). These basic features include an ongoing program of learning, a focus on content, active learning, reflection, and collaboration. (???What is this about?) In their review of 73 studies of online teacher professional development from 2009 to 2019, Lay et al, found that both in-person and online modalities have shown comparable results, but online professional development has an advantage in terms of access, cost, and ease of delivery. Despite these advantages, Lay et al. argue against the practice of using the same theories and models underlying effective in-person professional development in the design and development of online opportunities. Design and delivery of online teacherprofessional development they claim should intentionally include the unique learning opportunities and affordances available in the online learning environment (Lay et al., 2020; Ostashewski et al., 2011; Teras & Kartoglu, 2017).(do they all claim same things??? Findings from the research ( which ??? ) highlighted unique opportunities and affordances of online professional development including greater accessibility, networked, on demand social learning, scaffolded inquiry and learning (Ostashweski et al, 2011), deeper communication (Garrison et al, 2000; Howard, 2021) and increased relevance and practicality (Teras & Kartoglu, 2017). ( ???)