

About this Assessment

Theses and dissertations reflect the analytic and writing abilities developed in a graduate program. The literature review, in particular, should describe the relevance of the problem or hypothesis of a given research project, establish the project in the context of the field, and demonstrate the student's knowledge of the literature in the field. Preparing students to analyze and synthesize research in a field of specialization is crucial to success in a given field. A substantive and thorough literature review is a pre-condition for doing substantive and thorough research. A thesis or dissertation literature review indicates a candidate's ability to locate and evaluate scholarly information and to synthesize research in his or her field.

Concerning **faculty** evaluation of theses and dissertations, the role of the examiner is to judge whether the student has mastered appropriate skills. The goal of a rubric is to enable faculty to use more objective standards for one of the outcomes of graduate training—the thesis or dissertation literature review—and use those standards in a *formative* way to improve graduate education and training, make it more transparent to students, and help them achieve to higher levels. **Remember**, the literature review is not an indication of the quality of the thesis or dissertation as a whole, nor is it indicative of the quality of the research.

How to Use this Rubric

A rubric allows multiple evaluators to more objectively assess a product. This rubric should allow an assessor to evaluate different formats of theses or dissertations: the traditional, five-chapter format, as well as the compilation of research articles format. A thesis or dissertation in any format should demonstrate that the author thoroughly understands the literature in his or her area of specialty.

To use the rubric, for each row category (1–4), choose the statements that BEST describe what the student has written. Please do not select statements across the expectation spectrum columns. Please circle, highlight, OR use font color so your choices are clearly delineated.

Sources:

- Boote DN, Beile P. Scholars before researchers: On the centrality of the dissertation literature review in research preparation. *Educational Researcher* 2005;34:3–15.
- Creswell JW. *Research design: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; 2002.
- Dawson S, Miller M. Providing effective feedback with rubrics. Oral presentation at the Veterinary Educators Collaborative Conference, Ames, IA, June 2014.
- Gerrard J. *Health sciences literature review made easy: The matrix method*. 3rd ed. Jones and Bartlett Learning; 2011.
- Hart C. *Doing a literature review: Releasing the social science research imagination*. London: Sage Publications; 1999.
- Lovitts BE. *Making the implicit explicit: Creating performance expectations for the dissertation*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing; 2007.
- Pautasso M. Ten simple rules for writing a literature review. *PLoS Computational Biology* 2013;9:e1003149.

Literature Review Scoring Rubric

Comparative and Experimental Medicine, University of Tennessee

For each row (components 1–4), choose the category that BEST describes what the student has written. Please do not select statements across the expectation spectrum columns. You may circle, highlight, OR use **font color**, as long as your choices are clearly delineated.

Student Name: _____

Degree Sought: _____

Component	Below expectations	Meets expectations -----	Exceeds expectations	
1. Establishing the problem/hypothesis (10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows a fundamental lack of understanding of the problem • Does not state rationale for the project • Does not explain project's contribution to the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines problem/hypothesis • States only obvious rationale for the project • Explains project's basic contribution to the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines problem/hypothesis with some depth • States rationale for the project • Provides explanation of project beyond basic contribution to the field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defines and elucidates the problem/hypothesis • Develops compelling rationale for the project • Persuasively explains project's multifactorial contribution to the field
2. Relevance and context (30%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not explain project's relevance • Does not place the project into context of the literature • Does not set the context for the problem/hypothesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows limited understanding of project's relevance • Displays some perspective of project's context • Sets a basic context for the problem/hypothesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows capable understanding of project's relevance • Makes some associations of the literature with project's context • Places the problem/hypothesis in context beyond basic level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows exceptional understanding of project's relevance • Skillfully aligns the literature with project's context • Sets in-depth context for the problem/hypothesis
3. Knowledge of the field/sources (30%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks a basic knowledge of the field • Selected sources irrelevant to project • Does not discriminate among seminal sources • Misinterprets sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates a basic knowledge of the field • Selected sources relevant to project • Limited discrimination among seminal sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates proficient knowledge of the field • Thorough selection of sources pertinent to project • Shows some discrimination among seminal sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates exceptional depth of knowledge of the field • Comprehensive use of most recent and seminal sources • Clearly discriminates among seminal sources
4. Writing (30%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing is confusing • Structure is disorganized • Many grammatical, punctuation, and/or spelling errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate writing quality • Organized but tends to discuss papers in succession • Several grammatical, punctuation, and/or spelling errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is well written and coherently organized • Few grammatical, punctuation, and/or spelling errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplary writing quality • Components are connected in a seamless way • No grammatical, punctuation, and/or errors