ReadyAssignment

**Synthesis Essay/Literature Review:**

Proposal, 500 words, Essay, 1000 words **minimum**

**Overview:** For this paper, you will research a specific, current issue, topic, or controversy in your field. You will seek out the most important and significant research and writing on this topic, and your final essay will be a written synthesis of your findings. This is a three-part assignment: the first part is a proposal (250 words), where you propose your research topic; the second is the poster presentation, where you create a poster and a 1-2 minute elevator speech to educate your classmates on your topic; and the third is the final essay (1000 words), which is a standard essay that gives an overview of each of your 6 sources and synthesizes them into a Lit Review of the most important research and writing on your chosen topic.

**Proposal:** Before most research is conducted, the researchers must submit a proposal that describes the work they are going to do. In their proposal, they not only explain the work they plan to do in detail, but they attempt to convince their reader that their research is worthwhile.

After you do some preliminary research on your topic and develop a clear research question, you will submit a proposal. In this short essay, you will explain your topic and your research question to me in detail and roughly outline the directions you will take in your research and in your paper, convincing me that this is an interesting, important research project.

Your proposal must contain a clear research question, evidence that you are somewhat familiar with the topic/discussion within your field and that you have done some preliminary research. Include citations if necessary. Submit on Blackboard before conferences. Your conference is your opportunity to talk in detail with me about your topic.

**Poster Presentation:** By May, you will be an expert on your chosen topic. What you are writing about is important to you and to your discipline—your research matters. One of the most satisfying stages of the research process is when you get to share it with your peers, educating them on the subject. This also presents a unique challenge: you must be prepared to address the questions and comments your work will get.

 For this assignment, you will create a poster that clearly and succinctly represents your findings so that someone outside of your discipline can understand it. During our last two weeks of classes, everyone will display their poster (8½ x 11 size, in color) on our classroom’s walls and, in small groups, give a 2 minute “elevator speech” to several of your classmates. I have suggestions and some sample posters for inspiration.

**Essay:** *The structure of your Lit Review should be organized logically based on your findings. Every Lit Review looks different—specifically the synthesis section. Below is a “broad strokes” format.*

**Intro (1-3 para.):** introduces research question, gives necessary background to the topic so that reader can follow your paper. Assume reader is an educated person outside of your discipline. Explain why your question is interesting and important.

**Body of paper (4-8 para.):** Give a brief overview and rhetorical analysis of each article you are discussing in this paper, focusing on how each addresses your research question. You may give one paragraph to each source, if you like, but you don’t have to. You could, for example, discuss 2 very similar articles in one paragraph, or spend 2 paragraphs discussing one complex article.

Include at least one direct quote from each source in the body of your paper, including an in-text citation.

**Synthesis (1-3 para.):** This is the most important part of the Lit Review and is what makes this paper different from a traditional argument paper. In this section, you will discuss all the sources you’ve read for this paper as a group. Compare and contrast your sources and their approach to your research question. You want to look for relationships between sources—in class we will look for these relationships in our index card activity.

There are a few different ways to structure this section. A common way is to divide your sources into groups based on their content, and to discuss them one group at a time. For example:

“Authors A, B, and C all argue that cats are better than dogs, but their reasons are different. Author A focuses on how quiet they are; Author B focuses on how easy they are to care for, and Author C doesn’t have a clear reason why; the author just seems to personally like them more. Authors D and E argue that dogs are better than cats, and they both agree that this is because of dogs’ friendly personalities. Author F argues that they are both great, but this seems to be a rare opinion in the literature. Most authors take a very firm stance in favor of dogs OR cats, and not both.”

**Conclusion (1 para):** Restate your research question and give a brief and direct summary of the major findings of your paper. Here would be a good place to make suggestions for recommended future research on this topic.

**Tips:**

* In Project 1, and in your News Chats, I have asked you to research *active discussions in your discipline*. Through this process, I hope that you have developed an awareness of some of the major issues that are being discussed among professionals in your field right now. If you have an interest in any of these issues, I suggest that you use that as a jumping-off place for this final project.
* **Research Question:** It’s important that you have more than just a topic—it will benefit your research to have a focused research question. Try not to stick with the first idea you have. Begin with exploratory, self-guided research (Wikipedia, Google). It is important to *allow yourself freedom to take new directions* in your research based on your personal interests. Your research question is not a thesis statement; it is an open-ended question that you do not know the answer to. For example: “why is the Zika virus such an alarming problem?” “Why is representation important in filmmaking?” Allow your research question to evolve, and narrow, as you do your research.
* **Focused Research:** Try to identify the most *significant* writing and research done on the topic of your research question. We will go over in class what makes an article *credible*—don’t choose articles that lack credibility or that are way out of left field.
* The purpose of this literature review is to familiarize your reader with all the most significant research done on your research question. For this paper, your reader is an educated person outside of your discipline.
* **Conferences:** I’ve cancelled classes the week after proposals are due. I will meet with each student. At your conference, we will discuss your proposal and research topic. This is your opportunity to ask specific questions about your topic and to seek help on your research process.

This assignment, “Literature Review,” is the original work of Psyche Z. Ready, created and revised between 2016 and 2018 in the context of ongoing conversations with colleagues in the George Mason University Composition Program. The assignment is licensed [CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which means that it may be reused, adapted, or remixed by others as long as any document that incorporates content taken from the assignment includes or links to the following: a statement giving credit for the borrowed content, a link to the license, and an acknowledgment of any changes made to the content.