

# Writing Literature Reviews in Nursing

Most nursing papers follow a standard format that includes some or all of the following sections: an introduction, statement of the research question, background and significance of the topic, methods (of finding articles for review), a literature review containing article summaries and critiques, discussion, a study proposal, and a conclusion. Since nursing papers follow APA style, these sections are usually noted by the use of headings. Subheadings may be used to break up information within major headings.

## **Introduction:**

The introduction establishes the relevance and urgency of the topic at hand. It also contains the research question. Sometimes this question is referred to as a PICOT question. This stands for Population/Patient Problem, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Time. You can find many great resources for understanding the levels of evidence involved in research questions and templates for formulating PICOT questions [here](#). Note that the introduction never uses a heading titled "Introduction." Instead, the title of the paper appears at the top of the page and the introduction paragraph begins just below.

## **Background and Significance:**

In this section, the writer gives a historical overview of the research topic. They will explain current evidence-based practice in the field regarding their topic as well as "gold standard" practice. The writer may go into depth about the significance of the topic in light of changes in the field or current patient needs. The background and significance section should be much more in depth than the introduction, and it will contain citations for scholarly sources throughout.

## **Methods:**

This section is brief (usually 1-2 paragraphs). It explains how the writer identified and selected relevant research on their topic. The writer should list all databases searched. Key terms and search phrases should be listed. The writer should explain how search results were narrowed down to the final list of articles used for the literature review.

## **Literature Review:**

The literature review provides a summary of each article/study selected by the writer (see next page for the components of a strong article summary). At the end of each summary, the writer should identify strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the study. A good literature review will have intentional organization. The author might organize articles chronologically, reverse-chronologically, by study design, or by theme. Transitions are used to move from one summary to the next.

## **Discussion:**

The discussion synthesizes the findings of all studies summarized in the literature review. Common themes and disparities among studies are noted and examined in depth. The writer also identifies any gaps in research revealed by the literature review.

## **Study Proposal:**

The writer will propose a study based on the findings of the literature review and any gaps in research identified in the discussion.

## **Conclusion:**

The writer will discuss the significance of their findings and/or study proposal as well as ideas for future research.

# Components of an Article/Study Summary

The literature review section of a paper will include several article summaries. These article summaries should include information on the following: study design and purpose, theoretical foundations, level of evidence, sample, ethics/informed consent, data collection, data analysis, results, significance, and strengths/weaknesses of the study. Below are more detailed explanations of these components. These components should be discussed in the order below, but paragraph breaks may vary based on the preference of the writer. Color changes below serve as recommendations for paragraph breaks (red=paragraph one; green=paragraph two; blue=paragraph three).

## **Study Design and Purpose:**

The writer should identify the study design (i.e. was it longitudinal? Qualitative? Quantitative? Etc.). The writer should clearly state the study's purpose and research question. If a setting is provided for the study it should be mentioned here.

## **Theoretical Foundations:**

The writer will state any theories that grounded the study.

## **Level of Evidence:**

Identify the level of evidence based on the accepted hierarchy of evidence in the field.

## **Sample:**

The writer should explain how the sample was selected. Any inclusion or exclusion criteria should be listed. The demographics of the final sample will then be stated.

## **Ethics/Informed Consent:**

The writer will state whether the sample gave informed consent and if any internal or external review boards ensured the ethicality of the study.

## **Data Collection:**

The writer will list all variables measured. Then, methods of measurement or data collection will be explained. It is important to be as detailed as possible about variables and methods of collection.

## **Data Analysis:**

The writer will list all tools used in the process of data analysis. A detailed explanation of data analysis will be provided.

## **Results/Significance:**

The writer will summarize the study's findings and explain whether or not they were statistically significant.

## **Evaluation:**

The writer will list strengths and weaknesses identified by the researchers of the study; they will then identify any additional strengths or weaknesses of the study not listed by the researchers. Any other limitations of the study should be mentioned here.



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