

University of Pennsylvania

The DSW Preliminary Examination

For the DSW preliminary examination, students will prepare a 10-page literature review on their dissertation question or topic, accompanied by an outline of the dissertation proposal. The literature review and dissertation proposal outline will be submitted to the student's dissertation Chair by the end of October of the second year of coursework. The literature review may be submitted as part of the student's dissertation proposal, in which case the outline of the proposal need not be submitted.

The Literature Review

A literature review does much more than to describe and summarize. It describes, summarizes and synthesizes relevant scholarly articles, books and other sources related to the dissertation question or topic. The purpose of the literature review is to offer a critical analysis of the literature that integrates research, theory and other forms of practice knowledge to produce a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework contextualizes, explains and justifies the research or practice question that you are trying to answer.

Depending on the nature of the project, the literature review:

- compares and contrasts different perspectives;
- exposes conflicting or competing views, interprets such conflicts and offers suggestions for resolution;
- identifies and interprets gaps in the literature;
- locates your study in the existing literature;
- builds an argument for why the topic is important and worthy of study; and
- provides a coherent and well organized synthesis that becomes your conceptual framework.

Ultimately you are using the literature to develop a conceptual framework, which involves defining key concepts, justifying the relationship between variables or concepts, and presenting existing research and theory in a new light. This is what raises the dissertation from purely descriptive to the production of new ways of understanding or new knowledge.

The following components should be included in your literature review:

1) Introduction:

- a) Define or identify your research question or topic.
- b) Point out trends or patterns you found in what has been published about the topic. You might also discuss conflicts in theory, methodology, evidence or conclusions you found in the literature on the topic.
- c) Explain how you will analyze and compare the literature and how you will organize or sequence your review. If relevant, explain why certain literature is not included.

2) Body:

- a) Briefly summarize individual studies or articles; remember that typically the amount of detail and length you devote to each summary denotes the relative significance of the literature you are summarizing.
- b) Use transitions and summary sentences throughout your review to tie literature together and help the reader follow the comparisons and analyses you are making.

3) Conclusion:

- a) Conclude with a discussion of limits or gaps in the literature you reviewed that makes an argument for why your dissertation would make a contribution to the social work knowledge base.

The literature review should follow APA format.

The Proposal Outline

The dissertation proposal outline should include the following components, in outline form:

- I. Introduction
 - a. Statement of the Problem
 - b. Purpose of the Study
 - c. Research Question(s)
 - d. Significance of the Study
 - e. Theoretical Framework of Perspective
- II. Literature Review
 - a. Areas of literature and research covered
- III. Methodology
 - a. Format (traditional book-style or two article-length papers)
 - b. Research Method (empirical—quantitative, qualitative or mixed method; theoretical/conceptual; historical, development or adaptation of a treatment intervention or manual; curriculum development; or program evaluation)
 - c. IRB (if applicable)
 - d. Sampling and data collection (if applicable)
 - e. Data analysis method
- IV. Timeline