CSU Channel Islands
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY

NURSING PROGRAM

NRS 540 Culminating Experience
Student Handbook

Fall 2021

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Culminating Experience Process

Background

The Culminating Experience (CE) is the CSU Channel Islands (CSU CI) Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program's capstone event. The CE provides you with the opportunity to demonstrate that you have achieved the program student learning outcomes. By demonstrating achievement of the program student learning outcomes, you also show that you have achieved the competencies within your concentration, either Family Nurse Practitioner or Nurse Educator. Over time, graduate programs have measured student achievement in various ways including oral and/or written comprehensive exams, thesis or applied research projects. All graduate programs are required to have a culminating experience to measure student achievement of expected program learning outcomes.

Student Learning Outcomes

1) Working as a member of a collaborative team, organize and deliver nursing care to individuals, families, groups, or populations to promote health and prevent disease using knowledge from the sciences, humanities, and nursing.

2) Defend the use of a specific organizational or systems framework to address the complex economic, policy, environmental, and social forces affecting the healthcare or educational system.

3) Apply effective communication strategies using written, oral, and electronic methods in a variety of settings with individuals, families, groups, and/or populations.

4) Design a clinical or educational intervention to improve outcomes using a leadership model and considering the tenets of ethical decision-making.

5) Utilize evidence-based practice and quality improvement principles in designing, managing, and evaluating nursing interventions and programs.

6) Operationalize cultural competency and advocacy knowledge, skills and attitudes when working with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Description of the Culminating Experience

Course work in the MSN program is designed to give you the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully complete the culminating experience. There are three components to the culminating experience. You will demonstrate achievement of student learning outcomes by writing a final paper, giving an oral presentation of the final paper, and completing your electronic portfolio in Typhon. The written paper demonstrates integration of advance nursing concepts in a written document such as an analysis paper, an evidence-based practice project, a clinical protocol, or an educational plan. The final paper demonstrates achievement of advanced practice nurse competencies. The final paper is a way for you to also demonstrate application of research to practice. You will be required to study your selected topic in a systematic and comprehensive fashion to generate the evidence for your proposed interventions and your evaluation plan. This manual is designed to provide you with guidance regarding the culminating experience and expectations for performance.

The culminating experience is designed to integrate knowledge and skills you have acquired from coursework into a final paper, oral presentation, and portfolio that together demonstrate mastery of MSN competencies. The culminating experience draws upon knowledge generated from the course work, and reflects the growth in knowledge and skills required of advanced practice nurses. Each student must address the same specific requirements for the Culminating Experience (outlined below) but there is opportunity for you to choose the form and focus of the paper. The Culminating Experience contains both formative and summative evaluation components, which are demonstrated in the final paper, oral presentation, and the portfolio contents.

Formative Evaluation

Beginning with the first semester, in your core nursing courses you will complete course assignments that require mastery of various competencies as described in the *Essentials of Master's Education for Advanced Practice Nursing* (AACN, 2011) and *Core Competencies for Nurse Practitioners* (NONPF, 2017). Course assignments are designed by the instructor to allow you to demonstrate achievement of course learning outcomes. Course learning outcomes are aligned with student learning outcomes for the MSN program. Thus, as you complete course assignments you are beginning to demonstrate achievement of student learning outcomes. Course assignments may be completed individually or in groups depending on how the course is organized. Once completed, course assignments will be the basis for your reflective statements about your experience(s) that are uploaded to your portfolio. As you move through the nursing course work, you need to reflect on the relationship between the student learning outcomes, advanced practice nurse competencies, the content learned in each course, and your topic for the culminating experience. This process allows you to integrate content and competencies from individual courses into your final paper, oral presentation, and portfolio. For example, you will integrate the following competencies and/or content into your culminating experience:

- Theoretical Basis:
  a. What theories are commonly used in the nursing?
  b. How can you use theory in your current or future work settings?
  c. What theoretical framework supports your proposed intervention?
- Research, Evidence-based Practice, and Quality Improvement:
  d. How is research integrated with theory to influence practice?
  e. How will you identify practice discrepancies in your work setting?
  f. What are the criteria used for evaluating the credibility of the evidence?
  g. What evidence supports your proposed intervention?
- Health Systems Management:
  h. What organizational systems need to be considered to assure successful implementation of your proposed intervention?
  i. What impact will your proposed intervention have on safety and/or

quality of care?

j. What are the political, legal or ethical factors are influencing the care setting or patient population you are working with?

k. What quality improvement strategies would be appropriate for you to implement in your care setting to improve patient outcomes?

l. What are the organizational or programmatic barriers that could hinder successful implementation of your intervention, plan or protocol?

m. What financial considerations need to be made to assure successful implementation of your proposed intervention?

- Policy:

n. What are the overarching policy issues involved in this topic?

o. How has political process or political pressure been implicated in causing/maintaining/solving this problem?

Nursing courses throughout the curriculum incorporate concepts that will be key to you being able to write a final paper that demonstrates achievement of program learning outcomes. Not every course assignment will be directly applicable to your culminating experience topic. Since the nursing curriculum integrates some concepts across courses you will be expected to incorporate those concepts into your culminating experience.

Integrated concepts include: 1) patient-centered care and cultural appropriateness; 2) health promotion and disease prevention; 3) advanced practice nurse competencies; and 4) health disparities and social equity. Course assignments are designed so that you will address at least one of each of these core concepts in each of the course assignments you complete. Additionally, beginning in your first semester you are expected to provide a summary of how you are integrating core advanced practice nurse competencies into your nursing practice in your portfolio.

At the beginning of your first semester in the MSN program, you will participate in a 2-hour workshop to get you started in building your portfolio. You will continue to receive guidance about the portfolio in each of your graduate courses. There are assignments in each course that you will upload to your portfolio and that demonstrate that you have achieved the course learning outcomes. During your last semester in the graduate program, you will enroll in a 3-unit course, NURS540 Culminating Experience. This is course is designed to give you one-on-one support from your first and second reader as you complete the final written paper.

Summative Evaluation

You will enroll in a 3-unit course NURS540 Culminating Experience. The course focuses on writing the final paper and developing your oral presentation. The final paper will need to meet the following requirements:

1. Meets graduate-level writing proficiency standards for the department.

2. Demonstrates integration and application of expected program learning outcomes as described above.

3. Includes the core graduate nursing competencies of patient-centered care and

cultural appropriateness, evidence-based practice, health promotion and disease prevention, advanced practice nurse competencies, health disparities and social equity.

4. Involves an in-depth examination of the topic, with a minimum of 20 scholarly citations and a critique of at least 10 peer-reviewed scholarly works.

Successful completion of the culminating experience includes:

1. A written paper of 20-25 pages (**maximum = 30 pages**);

2. An oral presentation of your paper;

3. Reflective statements in your portfolio about how you achieved the expected program learning outcomes.

The three components of the culminating experience will be included in the final review process by your first and second readers.

Sample Formats for the Culminating Experience Paper

The Culminating Experience project options have been designed as broadly as possible so that you have maximum flexibility in choosing a topic and format that works best for you. You may choose from:

1. **An analysis paper:** *This paper requires you to take a strong position and defend it via use of the existing literature.* Position papers may be used to support programmatic changes or to advocate for policy change. *If you are developing an educational program or evidence-based project such as teaching clinicians or implementing a new protocol this is not the format you should select.* This paper requires you to do an in-depth analysis of an issue and recommend a programmatic or policy change to resolve it. An example of this might be how to best address the mental health issues of homeless individuals. Prior to deciding if this is the correct format for your culminating experience paper, review the following websites:

   Simon Fraser University Sample Analytical Essay

   University of Arkansas Formal Analysis Paper Examples

   Grand Valley State University Nursing – Analysis, Synthesis, and Response Papers

2. **An evidence-based practice project:** This format will also include a literature review about the project that is being proposed, and a detailed methods section about focused on implementation and evaluation of the project. An evidence-based project format should be used if you are proposing changes to existing protocols, policies, or workflows. For example, if you topic is focused on improving follow-up of patients with multiple chronic diseases in a primary care practice, this is the format you should use. Prior to selecting this format for your culminating experience paper, review the information on the following websites:

   University of North Alabama

   Nursing Professional Development Evidence-based Practice

[Nursing Inquiry Toolkit from Johns Hopkins](#)

3. **A clinical protocol:** Assuring that quality, patient-centered care is provided is dependent on the development of evidence-based clinical protocols. This format requires you to complete a literature review and a detailed clinical protocol including assessment and evaluation criteria. Only FNP students can use this option for their culminating experience paper. Please review the resources below if you're interested in this option for your culminating experience paper:

   [BRN Explanation of Standardized Procedures](#)

   [UC Davis Standardized Procedures for the Nurse Practitioner](#)

4. **Development of an educational program**. This type of paper will provide a literature review about the general topic as well as a review of existing educational programs that address the topic. A rationale for why a new educational program is needed is required. The paper will also include details regarding implementation and evaluation of the educational program. If your issue considers lack of knowledge about certain health related topic in a population (parents, individuals with a specific chronic disease, etc.) or among healthcare providers, then this is the format you should select for your paper. If the evidence you've indicates that the current education on the issue is not sufficient, then this is the format you should use since you will be proposing a new intervention to assure that participants have sufficient knowledge on the topic to improve outcomes. There are multiple examples of health promotion and health education programs that you can refer to in the literature before you decide on using this format for your paper. You can also use this format if you're proposing an intervention such increasing telehealth services or developing mobile health services for an at-risk population. If you decided to do more than an educational plan, please review the information on the [The Community Guide](#) website to access resources you will need to successfully complete the paper. In the required component section of this handbook, program planning requirements are included in the educational program outline in parentheses.

5.

The guidelines for each of these formats for the culminating experience are included later in this document.

The Role of the First and Second Reader

You will select your first reader for your culminating experience during the semester before the semester you intend to graduate. Selection of your first reader is based on the focus of your culminating experience. You should select a first reader who is a content expert in the focus area of your culminating experience. As part of the selection process, you will meet with the faculty member you would like to be your first reader. You will determine the best format for your culminating experience from those listed above in collaboration with your first reader. You will follow the same process to select your second reader. At the beginning of the semester in which you are enrolled in NRS540, you must meet with your first reader to develop a plan for completion of the final paper. The first and second readers will review all written work as you

write your final paper including outlines, drafts of the paper, abstracts, etc. You will need approval of the final written paper and portfolio from both of the first and second reader. You will not be eligible to graduate if you do not get final approval from both your first and second reader.

The Portfolio Component

Upon completion of all graduate course work, your portfolio will contain elements that demonstrate how you have achieved the expected program learning outcomes.

Additionally, the portfolio can be used to demonstrate to employers that you have gained the competencies required of advanced practice nurses or serve as evidence that you are prepared for doctoral work. The portfolio takes the place of a written comprehensive exam. The final portfolio will contain:

1. Welcome Page
2. Professional Development
    a. Career Goals/Professional Philosophy
    b. Lifelong Learning (including CEUs, academic course work, etc)
    c. Credentials
    d. Certifications
    e. Résumé
3. Advanced Practice Nursing Competencies
    a. Scientific Background
    b. Leadership
        i. Organizational
        ii. Systems
    c. Quality Improvement/Safety
    d. Evidence-based Practice
    e. Informatics
    f. Collaboration
    g. Population Health
        i. Clinical prevention
        ii. Health promotion

You will enter information into the portfolio as you move through your coursework, with the final products to upload to the portfolio being the Culminating Experience paper

Selecting a Topic and Format

You have the freedom to choose a topic that is interesting to you. The only requirement is that it be related to nursing. The biggest challenge will be to identify a project that is narrow

enough to complete within the timeframe, but broad enough to keep you interested in it. You will spend many hours on your final paper, so choose the topic wisely.

First you will what to start with a general idea of what your topic will be. Most often, you will start with a broad topic area. The table below demonstrates how a broad topic can be narrowed to a specific project idea.

Broad Topic	Specific project ideas
Diabetes	1. Evidence-based practice project to increase exercise in school-aged children 2. Educational plan for elders who were recently diagnosed with diabetes to prevent neurological and circulatory disorders 3. Clinical protocol for the management of patients who have consistent HgA1C levels that are elevated
Health disparities	1. An analysis paper that identifies political, social and economic barriers to health and wellness in a specific community

You should start identifying your topic by jotting down 4-5 broad topic areas that you find interesting using the template below. Once you have identified broad topic areas, start listing possible project ideas.

Broad Topic	Specific project ideas

Evaluating Your Project Ideas

Before you start working on your culminating experience you should evaluate your specific project ideas using the following guidelines:

1. Passion/Enthusiasm for the project
    a. How strongly do you feel about this project?
    b. Are you excited about the project?
    c. How interested are you in knowing more about this topic area?
    d. Is this a topic you may be working with for years to come?
2. Relevance of the idea

a. Is the topic of high significance to nursing?

b. Does the project encompass the core graduate nursing competencies of patient-centered care and cultural appropriateness, evidence-based practice, health promotion and disease prevention, advanced practice nurse competencies, health disparities and social equity?

c. Will the skills you learn doing this project help you in your nursing practice?

d. Will conducting this project help you apply the knowledge and skills you learned in your coursework?

3. Practicality of the idea

a. Can you do this project in a reasonable amount of time (4-5 months)?

b. Can you do this project with limited or no financial resources?

c. Is the project concrete and narrow enough to accomplish?

Note on practicality: By the time you start on your project, you could only have 4 months to complete it. Keep in mind what your other commitments are and choose a project that will not be too stressful or does not extend your time in school. Of course, you may choose to take longer to do the culminating experience or to complete it after you have completed all the other graduate nursing courses.

Rate each of your project ideas on these three criteria, giving a score of 0 to 10 to each criterion, whereby 0 = very low and 10 = very high on the criterion.

Idea #	Passion/Enthusiasm	Relevance	Practicality
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Building the Case for the Specific Project Idea

The format you choose for our culminating experience will determine the language used to build the case for the importance of the project. For example, if you are developing a program plan or an educational program, you will have goal statement. If you are doing an analysis plan, you will have a hypotheses or research questions. This one-sentence statement is critical to developing a clear and concise proposal. Everything else will flow

from this sentence

Choose the two ideas that you rated the highest in the last exercise, and turn these into a one-sentence statement that fully describes the purpose of the project. The statement describes what you want to do in a concrete fashion. Using some of the project ideas in the example above, a one-sentence statement that describes the project could include:

- Evidence-based practice project to increase exercise in school-aged children.

The proposed evidence-based practice project will increase physical activity among 3rd and 4th grade students by providing a structured after school regimen.

- Educational plan for elders who were recently diagnosed with diabetes to prevent neurological and circulatory disorders

The proposed education plan will provide elders who were recently diagnosed with diabetes with a peer-based program to increase adherence to diet and exercise recommendations.

- Clinical protocol for the management of patients who have consistent HgA1C levels that are elevated.*

Effective management of patients with consistently high HgA1C levels through the use of a clinical protocol decreases the likelihood of adverse sequelae from diabetes.

Try to create at least two statements for each project ideas you rated highest (for a total of 4 statements). Now review these research questions in terms of enthusiasm, relevance, and practicality. Can you select the focus area for your culminating experience yet? If not, repeat the process as many times as it takes to come up with an idea that meets the criteria.

Selecting a Format

Now that you have a topic idea, you need to choose a format for the project. This section provides more detail about the formats to aid you in selecting one that best fit your project idea. Some culminating experience formats are more appropriate for groups of students and other are more appropriate for individuals. When selecting a format for your culminating experience you will need to consider if you would like to work on the project with another student(s). If you would prefer to work on your own be sure to select a format identified for completion by an individual student not a group.

Evidence-based Practice Project (Individual student only)

1) Introduction
   a) Background
   b) Significance
   c) Problem Statement
   d) Study Purpose and Objectives
   e) PICOT question

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* Note this option is only available to FNP students.

2) Literature Review

        (a) The literature review must include a minimum of 5 peer-reviewed scholarly works for each of the areas – conceptual/theoretical, clinical, and research. This is an integrated review of a minimum of 15 peer-reviewed scholarly works.

  b) Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

  c) Research Literature and Evidence

  d) Clinical Literature and Evidence

  e) Summary

3) Implementation Plan

  a) Intervention

    i) Components of Intervention

    ii) Feasibility

    iii) Usefulness

  b) Targeted clients

  c) Implementation team members

  d) Proposed timeline

  e) Proposed budget

4) Evaluation

  a) Outcome indicators

  b) Data collection plan

  c) Evaluation timeline

5) Conclusions , Implications and Recommendations

6) Supporting Documents

  a) Cause and Effect Diagram, Driver Diagram, Flowchart or Failure Modes Effect Analysis

  b) PDSA Worksheet

  c) QI Project Workplan

Analysis Paper (Individual student only)
In this paper, the author argues a minimum of two sides of an issue. There may be more points of view around a particular issue and you may choose to present more than two sides.

1) Cover page

  a) Title

  b) Person(s) submitting

    c) Date submitted

    d) Institutions represented

2) Table of contents

3) Abstract (maximum of 250 words, double spaced)

    a) Summarizes body of the proposal

    b) No new concepts introduced

    c) A brief statement includes:

        i) The problem,

        ii) It's significance/importance,

        iii) Goals and objectives,

        iv) Expected results/impact,

        v) Methods to achieve results,

4) Project (maximum of 20 pages)

    a) Analysis entails the breaking apart of a thing to identify its constituent parts and components

    b) Introduction: Define the concept of interest

        i) Critical attributes, Set of conditions both necessary and sufficient to define the issue and its boundaries

        ii) Clear, explicit statement of the problem and target population

        iii) Background of the specific problem

        iv) Makes no unsupported assumptions

        v) Supported by statistical evidence/expert opinion

        vi) Is brief and interesting to read

    c) Review of literature: Review of the body of knowledge

            a. A minimum of 10 scholarly works that support each side of the argument are required.

        ii) Will involve the discovery of the attributes of the concept

            (1) This will involve the collection of data in some manner

            (2) This also involves a focus on analysis in a written form

            (3) Is conducted to generate a picture of what is known and not known about a particular situation

        iii) Refers to relevant to sources that are important in providing in-depth knowledge

            (1) Uses reliable and valid sources of information

            (2) To provide evidence for concept analysis

               (3) Presents key existing studies/interventions

               (4) Gain a broad background or understanding of the information that is available related to a problem

    d) Problem addressed

    e) Exhibits understanding of the conceptual basis for the issue under analysis

    f) Analysis of the issue

        i) Thesis Statement

        ii) Delineation of specific problems related to the issue.

    g) Methods and procedures

        i) Identifies specific population

        ii) Categorizes detailed concerns related to the issue

        iii) Provides a discussion of recommended intervention(s) to address specified concerns. Discuss all options

        iv) Defines important terms and, if necessary, operationalizes terms

    h) Qualifications of key personnel

    i) Summary

        i) Includes:

        ii) Training

    j) Education

    k) Area of expertise

        i) Review of issue and recommended intervention(s)

        ii) Suggestion for evaluation of intervention

5) Appendices (as appropriate)

Clinical Protocol (Standardized Procedure) (Individual FNP student only)

1) BRN scope of practice for CNS/NP

2) General policy component for SPs (how are they made)

    a) Development and review

    b) Scope and setting of practice

    c) Qualifications and Evaluations

    d) Authorized NPs

3) Policy

    a) Functions

    b) Circumstances

4) Protocols (steps of medical care for given patient situations)- write 5 protocols to be included in your SPs

   a) Definitions

   b) Data base (Nursing Practice)

      i) Subjective

      ii) Objective

   c) Diagnosis

      i) Physical exam

      ii) Pertinent lab/X-ray results

   d) Plan

      i) Treatment

         (1) Recognition of emergencies

         (2) Further lab or x-ray studies

         (3) Physical therapy?

         (4) Diet/Exercise

         (5) Evidence based medical treatment plan

         (6) References (at least 5 scholarly references within the last 5 years)

      ii) Patient conditions requiring consultation (with physician or specialist)

      iii) Medication furnishing/formulary

      iv) Education- patient/family

      v) Follow-up

   e) Record keeping

      i) Charting

      ii) HIPAA

5) Standardized procedures for dispensing of medications by NPs

   a) Policy

   b) Protocol

      i) Data base

      ii) Action

      iii) Record keeping

      iv) Consultation

   c) Requirements for NPs

   d) Approval page

6) Requirements
    a) Nurse practitioner education program/specialty
    b) Advanced level training
    c) Experience
    d) National Certification in area of specialty
    e) Method of initial and continuing evaluation of competence
7) Development and approval of the Standardized Procedure
    a) Method: (Title 16, CCR Section 1474 (a))
    b) Review schedule
    c) Signatures of authorized personnel approving the SPs and dates
        i) Nursing
        ii) Medicine
        iii) Administration
8) NPs authorized to perform procedures/protocols

Educational Plan (Individual student only)
1) Title page
2) Abstract (250 words, double spaced)
3) Introduction
4) Body
    a) Issue – Includes the identification of the educational problem, the environment in which the issue occurs, pertinent stakeholders, and scholarly literature that supports not only the issue but avenues to resolve the issue. A minimum 10 peer-reviewed scholarly works need to be reviewed and analyzed. (For a program plan, include a community/population assessment and a review of the literature that supports your proposed intervention).
    b) Educational Theory - Supports the educational intervention AND the types of learner (i.e. age and ethnicity) that will receive the educational tool. Examples of educational theorists that may be considered are Knowles, Mezirow, Freire, or Rosenstock and The Health Belief Model. (For a program plan, use a program planning model rather than an educational model. Examples of models are PRECEDE-PROCEED, Logic Model or MAPP.)
    c) Teaching Strategies – Includes learning objectives and outcomes that address different learning styles (i.e. visual, kinesthetic), how the student's chosen teaching strategies align with the organizational mission, and how transfer of knowledge or dissemination of information will occur. You should consider not only traditional modes of delivery but also the use of social media or online learning options. (For a program plan, develop process and

outcome measures and an implementation timeline that identifies who, what, when and how each step of the program or intervention implementation will occur).

d) <u>Formal Evaluation Tools (long and short term)</u> – Includes the type of evaluation tool (questionnaire, Likert scale, etc), when the evaluation tools will be administered, and how the evaluation tool will be administered. The evaluation tools should include components about the overall presentation, as well as the feasibility of using the educational tool. The long-term evaluation tool should determine if the educational tool was implemented. Samples of evaluation tools can be submitted as appendices. (For program planning, develop an evaluation plan that includes both formative and summative assessments)

5) Conclusion

6) Reference page

7) Appendices if necessary

Developing Your Final Paper

When you have decided on the topic and format of your final paper, you will want to meet with your first reader to go over your plan. It may be helpful to have an outline of your final paper ready to focus the discussion. It is best to do this in the semester prior to the semester in which you intend to graduate. Once you have reached agreement regarding the final paper with your first reader, contact your second reader so that you can discuss your plan. In collaboration with your first reader develop a plan for completion of your final paper.

This should include timelines for completion of key portions of the paper and developing a method of communication that meets both your needs. You will want to share this information with your second reader. Next, you will want to begin work on the final

paper. You can start working on your final paper during your last 2 semesters of the graduate program. Do not wait until the last moment to get started or you risk not completing the final paper within the last semester of your nursing course work and extending your time in the nursing program.

Do I Need Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval?

It is your responsibility to determine if your project needs IRB approval or not. To determine if your project needs IRB approval https://www.csuci.edu/irb/ If after reading this information you still have questions regarding whether your project needs IRB approval or not, contact your first reader.

Searching for Information and Interpreting Research Articles

Through your nursing course work you will develop the skills necessary to conduct a comprehensive literature review. All formats of the culminating experience require you to review and critique at least 10 peer-reviewed scholarly works. The most commonly used databases used in nursing are PubMed, Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health

Literature (CINAHL), Web of Science, and PsychInfo. You will be oriented to each of these databases at various points in the graduate program.

An important aspect of success in writing a comprehensive review of the literature is being able to critique the research by determining its significance to the discipline and assessing reliability and validity of the study and study methods. Most student benefit from building a table that aids in summarizing each of the studies reviewed. It may be beneficial for you to develop a table similar to the one below to help you organize the studies you're reading.

Taking Notes from Research Sources:

Complete citation in APA style: (save yourself work at the end by carefully recording citations as you read)
Purpose and type of research (Quantitative or qualitative; experimental or descriptive; longitudinal or cross-sectional, etc): (record the kind of information you will need for your literature review)
Methodology: (number and type of subjects, control groups, measures/variables, procedures)
Findings: (record statistically significant findings or general themes)
Comments (limitations, relationship to your topic, notes to yourself)

When it is time to write your literature review, having single page summaries helps to organize the material rather than reviewing full articles and reports.

Writing the Literature Review

The literature review that is required in the final paper is much more detailed than those in most published research articles. The goal of the literature review is to review and critique the most current research to support your project. You are required to review and critique a minimum of 10 peer-reviewed scholarly works (books, journal articles, etc.) in your literature review. However, your topic area may require that you review more than 10 to provide the reader with an understanding of the state of the knowledge. Most of the topics of papers in graduate school will be subjects with hundreds of potential sources, including books, articles, chapters, monographs, government reports, and other sources of information to inform the paper. Literature reviews are rarely exhaustive of the entire literature unless that literature is sufficiently small. There are two types of literature reviews. You will select the type of review that is most appropriate to your project and format. Your first reader will provide guidance regarding the most appropriate type of literature review for your paper.

In general, a literature review goes from the general to specific. Your first paragraphs should provide the reader with background information, why the topic is important, and what the reader can expect from the literature review. By giving the reader a sense of what to expect, the reader will be able to understand your intentions for the literature review. If you do not provide the reader a clear description of the focus of the literature review, then you have not been clear

enough in your intentions.

It is best to use a topical approach in your literature review rather than a chronological approach (one study described in detail, then another study, and so on), unless you have a good reason for presenting the literature chronologically. Your literature review should be divided by topics with separate headings. Topic heading will help you organize your paper. As you review your draft, make sure that the content under each topic heading is only about that topic, and that the last sentence provides a bridge to the next section of the literature review.

Sometimes tables or graphs are an effective way to compare and contrast the research. For example, a table of the effectiveness of asthma prevention programs may list the demographic characteristics of the sample, a brief description of the intervention, and the outcomes. Alternatively, figures that illustrate the theoretical relationships among the variables can be helpful.

You will need to summarize your literature review. You will end the literature review section with a brief conclusion that summarizes the key findings, and provides a transition to the methods, intervention or clinical protocol section of your paper. You will need to describe the gaps in knowledge and common themes. Also, you will need to describe what the gaps and themes you identified mean for nursing practice. You would also note any limitations you experienced in your review; for example, you might have been unable to access some potentially important articles because they were not available electronically, the research you found did not address your topic directly, or the samples were not representative of the population at large.

Descriptive Literature Reviews

Descriptive literature reviews merely summarize the findings of the existing literature, sometimes in chronological order, particularly if you wish to show some trends over time or grouped together under headings that are based on major themes. Papers for undergraduate classes or graduate courses early in your career will typically follow this format. A descriptive review of the literature is the foundation for the integrative literature review.

Integrative Literature Reviews

An integrative literature review compares and contrasts, identifies strengths and weaknesses, or highlights gaps or major themes in the body of literature. Sometimes an integrative literature review stems from meta-analyses of several existing empirical studies. The meta-analysis is considered the highest form of evidence in many schemes of evidence-based practice. An integrative review synthesizes the whole body of research on some topic and generates conclusions based on this evidence. Generally, the conclusions include some statement about how confident we can be about the evidence on this topic. All sources used in your integrative literature review must be no more than 5 years old unless they are considered seminal work. To determine if a work is considered seminal, you note that some articles are referenced in the bibliographies from articles you are reading. If you see that a particular study is cited in numerous articles, it is probably considered seminal to the topic or field. You can include seminal work in your literature review.