A literature review is used to evaluate the current scholarship on a particular research topic and prepare the reader to enter the academic conversation about the topic. The literature review helps the researcher identify trends, developments, and gaps in current studies.

A Literature Review Must...

- Support a clear and concise thesis, which responds to this question: What is the purpose of your literature review and why is it significant/important from a social work perspective?
- Organize paragraphs around topics and ideas rather than by article.

Research:
Examine what published scholars have to say about the topic. Find a variety of sources for a comprehensive understanding.
Make sure to include more than one perspective. If everyone is in agreement, the topic is less controversial and analysis less necessary.
Limit time spent on research. When you have a good overall understanding of the current theories, perspectives, and issues related to your topic, STOP.

Developing a research question:
After reading the assignment guidelines, choose a preliminary topic of interest that drives and inspires you as a social worker. Develop a research question that will help you revise key words for your literature search.

Revising the research question:
During your research, you may pinpoint specific interventions or populations on which to focus. Revise your original research question to use more detailed and specific terms.

Developing a thesis
Reflect on the revised research question:
- What are best practices for social workers to address acculturative stress among Asian American college students?

Research Tips:
Use appropriate databases. The Libguides have excellent resources including two videos and a list of social work – relevant databases. (http://libguides.usc.edu/socialwork/databases)
Choose a variety of search terms, as phrasing and terminology may change over time. As you refine your search, you may find that “acculturation” is used more frequently than “cultural adaptation.”

Example of a research question:
Topic of Interest: Intervention used to treat stress in college students.
Research Question: “What intervention should social workers use to address stress in undergraduate students?”

Example of a revised research question:
“What are best practices for social workers to address acculturative stress among Asian American college students?”

Example of a thesis
By responding to the research question, you can create the first draft of your thesis for the paper:
Using CBT to promote health-seeking behaviors among Asian American college students allows social workers to address acculturative stress
Literature Review Quick Guide

Read the literature with a pen in hand:
Taking plentiful notes as you read will provide you with a better grasp of the topic and make your task much easier once you start writing your paper.

Highlight:
- The argument/thesis statements for each source.
- Main points of each article (hint: look at the section headings and topic sentences.)

The Study Comparison Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identify gaps in knowledge, similarities, and differences among your sources:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Identify the ways in which articles agree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) If sources disagree, consider why.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Do not ignore dissenting opinions. Instead, identify the potential reasons for the differing opinions and assess their validity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Consider a counterargument, or a set of ideas that logically explains why the literature you oppose may be incorrect by using your reasoning and that of other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples of questions to consider:
- If one article focuses only on female Asian American undergraduate students while another focuses only on males, to what extent can you compare the two?
- Why might one source say Asian American students experience high levels of acculturative stress in college and another say they do not?
- What if a study focused only on second-generation students and not first-generation? Or if the study only used students from a university with a highly supportive Asian

This “study comparison” chart can help you organize information for side-by-side analysis!
The chart should be completed for each article or source.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Inquiry</th>
<th>Research question:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Where did the research take place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Who was the target population?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeframe</td>
<td>Over what length of time was the research conducted?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervention</td>
<td>What intervention was used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>What theory informed the format and purpose of the study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>What methodology was used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>What research design was used?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>What were the results of the study?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>What do the authors have to say about the study and results?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>What do the authors conclude? Suggestions for future research?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of author’s research? Are there instances or frameworks the author neglects to mention? Any inconsistencies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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msw.learningsupport@usc.edu
Organize your Paragraphs by Topic

- Your **topic sentence** should state the purpose of each paragraph and why it is important.
- Instead of organizing information/evidence by source or article, **organize the literature review by topics**, which may include methodologies, theories, and themes.
- Each paragraph should explore **only one main topic**.
- **In exploring a topic, provide evidence from sources** in supporting sentence, which should be paraphrased and cited.
- **Analysis of evidence** should always be in your own words, uncited, and should show your understanding of how evidence from one source relates to evidence from another and to the topic of the paragraph.
- End each paragraph with a **concluding sentence** which helps you draw connections between the evidence, analysis, and topic sentence by responding to the question:

In the sample paragraph below, research from different sources related to a single topic has been utilized to explore one topic relevant to the research question: measuring acculturative stress.

**Sample Literature Review Paragraph**

Social workers can utilize a more complex picture of why some Asian American college students thrive and others do not by reviewing recent literature in which researchers measure both enculturation and acculturation within that population. In the past, enculturation, or adherence to one’s culture of origin, was seen as one pole of a dichotomy; acculturation, or adherence to a second culture, was at the other pole (Miller, Yang, Hui, Choi & Lim, 2011). This bipolar model precluded any overlap of acculturation and enculturation, presenting them as opposing extremes on a single scale. More recently, a bilinear model measuring acculturation independently from enculturation has shown that an increase in identification with one culture does not always result in a lower identification with another (Ruzek, Nguyen, Herzog & David, 2011). The bilinear model suggests students may develop values and behaviors biculturally, rather than experiencing a single, linear progression from enculturation to acculturation, and therefore allows for more difference among individuals. The bilinear model also introduces the idea that a student who adopts values and behaviors typically attributed to one culture will not necessarily relinquish identification with the second culture. In fact, according to Kim and Omizo, Asian American students who become proficient in the dominant Western culture while maintaining their existing cultural values experience less acculturation-related stress than those who do not (as cited in Panelo, 2010). Therefore, a review of the literature shows that the ability to measure acculturation and enculturation separately will allow the social worker to more accurately assess why the student is struggling. The development of this bilinear framework, in which accul-