COGS163 Final Review Paper: Structure & Writing

Your whole article should revolve around your subject area. The most important aspect of a successful paper is a well defined topic or subject area. Most students focus on an area which is too broad and not well defined. It is worth your time to research the general area first and then come up with your area of interest. No two subject area are exactly alike, so no two review papers will be structured exactly alike; however, there is a general format that review articles should follow:

1. Abstract. A brief summary of your thesis, the major studies investigated, and conclusions drawn. Your abstract and references should be emailed to me on the last day of class.

2. Introduction. This section should introduce the topic and your subject area, and should discuss why this topic is significant. It should clearly define exactly what this review paper will discuss, outline the order in which you will discuss it, and give the reader any background information needed to understand the coming sections. You should consider your classmates in COGS163 as your general readers.

3. Body: The body of your article depends on your topic. For example, if your topic discusses and evaluates three different methodologies, you might divide the body of the article into three sections, each discussing one of the methods. In these sections, be sure to describe and evaluate the studies in detail, comparing them and discussing their implications.

4. Discussion and Conclusions: You should conclude your review by restating your subject area and the purpose of the article, then discussing the conclusions you have drawn. You should also discuss the implications of the area and where you think research in this field should go from here.

5. References: Literature reviews published in professional journals usually cite 50 to 100 studies. For this review paper 7 – 10 recent (after 2000) references. Please follow professional journal citation format (no website references!!!).

6. Length: Your review paper should be between 10-20 pages long (double spaced). Most reviews, however, need to be longer to address all the material that needs to be discussed. Writing a good review is not about quantity, though – it's about quality. Weed out the unimportant and make your writing and logic tight. In evaluating studies, describe them briefly, then discuss the relevant areas (e.g., research assumptions, theories tested, hypotheses stated, methodology, variables examined, results, interpretations, speculations, etc.) All studies have strengths and weaknesses. Identify them and discuss how they are relevant to your thesis. Be sure to compare the study with others that you have discussed.

Questions to Ask Yourself about Your Review

As you are writing your review, keep the following questions in mind. When you have finished, go through and make sure you answer each of these questions for yourself:

1. Do I present a specific problem, or research question related to my study area? (Make sure you're not just summarizing a field of study!)

2. Your audience is fellow COGS163 students. Will my peers find my literature review relevant and useful? What is the scope of my review? What types of publications did I use (journals, books, popular media, government documents, or person communication)?

4. What am I reviewing? Is my issue addressing theory, methodology, policy, quantitative research, or qualitative research? A combination? Make sure this is clear in your review!

5. Has my search for studies been broad enough to contain all the relevant studies?

6. Has my search been narrow enough to exclude irrelevant studies?

7. Have I included enough sources? (Usually, anything less than a dozen sources is far too few for a literature review.)

8. Is the literature I've chosen actually relevant to my subject area? Does every study I've chosen to include shed some light on the problem my article is addressing?

9. Have I critically analyzed the studies or do I just summarize the articles?

10. Have I discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the studies?

11. Have I cited and discussed studies that contradict my perspective?

12. Is my review more than just a descriptive summary? Is it organized into useful, informative sections that present different ideas revolving around my thesis?