Module 8, Video 1: Synthesizing Literature Prior to Writing a Review

In this chapter, Galvan returns to his formula where he lays out a set of guidelines, and I think that it's a very helpful format.

This chapter prepares you to engage in a process that's just starting, as you turn your thesis statement into a prospectus. And as you're reading, notice how many of the guidelines invite you to plan. This is excellent advice, because careful attention to this phase—which really is before you start to write a lot of actual text—means that the writing phase will simply be more efficient. What's more, by doing this analysis now, you'll find that your mind gravitates to your work even when you're not doing it. Particularly if you chose a topic that you find really interesting, then at odd moments, I wager that you will realize that, gosh, I'm thinking about my literature review and I'm enjoying that! At least I hope that happens.

This presentation is sort of medium-length. Instead of spending a lot of time listening to me yammer on, I'd rather that you focus your attention by applying the principles in this chapter to an even deeper analysis of another one of the model literature reviews. But my remarks will include pointers to other helpful resources, in particular, the Purdue OWL. I'll be sending you to the OWL, and the specific links are on the list of all links for the course, and that page is linked in this Module; you may want to go ahead and open the required ones for Module 8.

At the end of this module, I am going to demonstrate how using a template in Microsoft Word can facilitate the process of synthesizing before actually writing. This is part of the reason that I specify this software for your assignments, along with Word's powerful review features, which I will introduce in Module 12. As before, I'll put this demonstration in a separate video file.

One important take-away from this module is the difference between an APA manuscript's format—which is the way that references are cited, the way that the various levels of headings are rendered, all those important but somewhat mechanical and superficial things—and the more subtle and difficult-to-learn matter of style.

Style is, essentially, the result of careful word choice, thoughtful arrangement of ideas, and a deep understanding of the philosophy of science that is inherent to psychological research. When you apply the skills you've honed in this course to the daunting task of writing a literature review as part of an advanced course, your instructor will expect you to have a good handle on both. It's been my experience, however, that you can minimize the time spent perfecting the formatting stuff if you rely on tools—Zotero and Word, mainly—and that can free you up for the more intellectually challenging matter of learning how to write in APA style.

Finally, and as I already said, much of the advice in this chapter concerns steps you're about to take

Guideline 1: Purpose and Voice

I will refer you immediately to the Purdue OWL's section on APA Stylistics: Basics. There's a link on the links page, though it's pretty easy to find. Go right now and read it. Then, if you have not done so already, read Galvan's Guideline 1.

The good people at Purdue made a distinction a bit more explicitly than Galvan did, on the matter of *passive versus active voice.* This is a common area of confusion and one where writers who are new to APA style often get tripped up. That's because passive voice can seem to be more formal and academic. It's not. And it is largely prohibited within APA style. To help you keep the distinction clear, in addition to reading what's at the APA page, the Purdue OWL has a more generic treatment of the subject. You can get it at the page of links.

In addition, though, I will remind you of something that I gleaned from the Price textbook that I always emphasize in this course, what I refer to as his "3 C's:" Clear, Concise, Concrete. APA style has all three. Okay, I'd suggest that you pause and read up to Guideline 3.

Guideline 3: Create an outline.

I am going to skip this for now because it's so important to understanding how the APA-format document template works. But the upshot is this: If you use the template as intended, not only will it help you keep your thoughts organized, but it will also minimize the hassle of applying the correct headings and sub-headings. So more on that in the next video! But so we can follow Galvan's line of thought, continue reading on and we'll catch up again at Guideline 6.

Guideline 6: Look for gaps or areas needing more research.

You have probably already noticed that this is a common feature to peer-reviewed literature reviews. Identifying these gaps is difficult and often requires a high level of expertise. I'm not saying that it impossible, but it is likely to be one of the last things that you accomplish as you are working on your own project. However, it is by no means 'cheating' to cite such observations from experts—just be sure you cite it as such. Okay, carefully read Guidelines 7 and 8 now.

Guidelines 7 and 8: Describe theories, and discuss how individual studies advance them.

Galvan reminds us of how this topic was prominent to his first chapter (and our first module). I think that the benefits to you as an author are several, but this is also challenging to do, so be gentle with yourelf as you learn. The benefits, I think, are, one, that in expressing theories in your own, original words, you will find out how well you understand them. If you can't do this, then you probably need to keep reading, or perhaps seek out some sources that explain relevant theories from different perspectives. But assuming you've done this, and you've got a good

explanation of a theory, then you can tailor it to your review's purpose, emphasizing the aspects that are most relevant to your overall project.

Having done that, then, as per Guideline 8, you can draw relationships between your take on a theory and your understanding of the articles you are presenting and synthesizing. Okay, now read Guideline 9 and I've a bit to say about it.

Guideline 9: Periodically summarize throughout and at the end.

There is a bit of a paradox at work here. On one hand, APA style invites us to be concise. True. But well-written literature reviews make strategic use of this technique, presenting brief, internal summaries that serve to remind readers of the important points already made, particularly in a lengthier review. And as you have noticed (and will see in the assignment with this Module) this is a near-universal feature at or near the end of the entire document. That leads to the next Guidelines, which I think are very well presented on their own so I will invite you to read now, to the end of the chapter, where I shall indeed have a few things to say about Guideline 12.

Guideline 12: Flesh out your outline.

To me, this has important implications both for the process of writing and for the final project itself. A hallmark of a "good" literature review is that it has a sort of "Momma Bear" quality to it, as per the Goldilocks story: not too much detail (Poppa Bear) and not too little (Baby Bear). Instead, you know: just right. But knowing what is "just right" is very difficult for most writers who are new to APA style. My advice? Simple. Give more. When in doubt, leave it *in*, and then give it to other readers: peer reviewers, instructors, Writing-Center tutors, random strangers, just about anybody. In general, though, it is MUCH easier for a friendly reader to suggest leaving something out than it is for them to wonder what you were thinking—or that is, to find your work confusing because you committed relatively few of your thoughts to the page.

Assignment

This assignment has two major parts. As I mentioned earlier, the first is more in-depth analysis of one of the literature reviews in the back of the textbook. The second is a chance to play around with an APA-format document template.