

**Comprehensive Examinations in Western’s Clinical Psychology Ph.D. Program:  
 Policies and Procedures, and Suggestions for Students  
 2017-18**

This document provides an overview of the process and policies that pertain to the Ph.D. Comprehensive Examinations in the Clinical Psychology Graduate Program. A number of different topics are covered, ranging from the different functions that the comprehensive paper can serve, to tips and suggestions for researching and writing your paper.

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## 1) SUMMARY OF TASKS AND DEADLINES: PH.D. CLINICAL COMPREHENSIVE PAPER

TASKS	DEADLINES	
	Students	Committee/ Peers
i) <b>Format and process overview</b>		
Students receive copy of policies and procedures document		Sept 17/17
Meeting with students to review requirements and process		Sept /17
ii) <b>Selection of advisory committee</b>	Oct 13/17	
iii) <b>Outline</b>	Nov 17/17	
iv) <b>First draft</b>		
Student submission	Feb 15/18	
Advisory Committee feedback		Mar 2/18
v) <b>Peer evaluation</b>		
Student exchange of papers	Mar 30/18	
Peer feedback		Apr 6/18
vi) <b>Final written paper</b>		
Student submission	Apr 20/18	
Evaluation feedback		May 11/18
vii) <b>Revised written paper (if required)</b>		
Student submission	Jun 8/18	
Evaluation feedback		Jun 22/18
viii) <b>Oral examinations (if required)</b>		
Student oral	TBD	
Evaluation feedback		TBD

TBD – dates of an oral examination are to be determined as needed.

## 2) FUNCTIONS OF THE PH.D. CLINICAL COMPREHENSIVE PAPER

### 2A) The primary evaluative function of the comprehensive paper

The Ph.D. comprehensive paper in the Clinical Program is designed as an evaluation of your scientific conceptual, analytical, integrative, and communication skills. In other words, we are looking to see if you can:

- take a topic or issue of clinical psychology relevance, and then
- identify the critical components or elements
- apply the knowledge base from relevant areas of research and theory (to the extent applicable),
- and, finally integrate and present this material in a comprehensive, succinct and coherent written document.

The *end result* of this Ph.D. comprehensive process is a paper that should provide an original and substantive scientific contribution to our understanding of the topic you have selected. The examining committee will be evaluating your paper on this basis.

Note that this evaluation of your understanding and application of the scientific method (description, explanation, prediction, control) is also central to clinical work:

- e.g., can you identify critical components in a clinical setting, then apply, integrate, evaluate, and extend this knowledge base
- in addition to being one of the first major evaluations you will face as a Ph.D. student (the others being your proposal meeting and dissertation defense), the comprehensive paper can accomplish several other goals for you, as described below

### 2B) Additional functions of the comps paper

The Ph.D. Comprehensive paper can accomplish several other goals for you, namely providing:

- i) a “sampling” of the topic you may wish to consider for your Ph.D. dissertation.
- ii) a strong base for a subsequent theoretical publication in the topic domain covered by your comprehensives paper.
- iii) an opportunity to consider, in detail, a potential area of research for your Ph.D. dissertation.
  - Many comps papers form a theoretical-empirical backdrop for the dissertation research.
  - During the comprehensives process you obtain a thorough understanding of the existing research and theory in the area that may subsequently become your dissertation project.
  - The comps paper can lead to research questions that form your Ph.D. dissertation work.
  - You can view the comps process as providing a “sampler” of what you may wish to consider for your Ph.D. dissertation.
  - In this regard, you are multi-tasking, which can be a real time-saver as you progress through the Ph.D. program.
  - *You should be aware, however, that it is not a requirement that your dissertation be in the same area as your comprehensive paper.*
  - Some students have done comps in quite a different area than dissertation work.
- iv) Completion of a comps paper provides an opportunity for you to begin the process of getting a major theory paper published while in graduate school.
  - The comps are completed at the start of the Ph.D. program; thus, there is sufficient time to get a comps-based paper “in press” or published by time you are looking for a position.

- A number of clinical students have done this, with papers being published in a variety of journals
- The version that went to press was often quite a bit different from the comps paper submitted. For examination, however, the original comps paper provides an excellent starting point.

### 3) COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION REGULATIONS

Regulations concerning the Clinical Psychology Program Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination (in keeping with those adopted by the Department of Psychology, September 2016) are as follows:

#### 3A) Requirement

All students enrolled in the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program must successfully complete a Ph.D. comprehensive examination.

#### 3B) Content

The Clinical Psychology Ph.D. comprehensive examination will be in the form of a major paper written by a student in their clinical area of research interest. It is expected that this paper will (1) make a *substantive and original contribution to knowledge* in the content area covered in the paper. (2) That the overall quality of the paper should, at the minimum, be at the level that the paper *would be seriously considered for publication*; that is, a “*revise and re-submit*”, as opposed to an outright rejection. Your advisory and evaluation committee members have extensive experience in reviewing journal articles. As such, if they felt your paper would receive a “*reject*” recommendation from a journal, they would evaluate your paper as a “*fail*”. A paper that meets one, but not both, of the requirements state above necessary to be graded as a “*pass*”, would receive a grade of “*conditional pass*”.

Typical journals that might publish review articles include: Psychological Bulletin, Psychological Review or Clinical Psychology Review; or, other similar journals that may be focused on a given population (e.g., Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology).

**Psychological Bulletin** publishes evaluative and integrative reviews and interpretations of substantive and methodological issues. Substantive contributions are defined as: “Integrative reviews that summarize a literature and set forth major developments within a particular research area or provide a bridge between related specialized fields within psychology or between psychology and related fields”.

**Psychological Review** publishes articles that make important theoretical contributions. This journal gives preference to papers that “advance theory rather than review it, and to statements that are specifically theoretical rather than programmatic”. This journal will also consider papers that “point out critical flaws in existing theory or demonstrate the superiority of one theory over another”.

**Clinical Psychology Review** publishes substantive reviews of topics germane to clinical psychology. Its purpose is to help clinical psychologists keep up-to-date on relevant issues outside of their immediate areas of expertise by publishing scholarly but readable reviews.

In preparing the comprehensive paper, the student should ensure that the above criteria are met, with the completed paper providing an original and substantive contribution in the domain of interest and all aspects of the paper are at the level that would meet the standard to receive a “*revise-resubmit*” recommendation from a journal.

Consistent with the goal of writing a paper equivalent to articles published in journals such as Psychological Bulletin, Psychological Review or Clinical Psychology Review, students' papers should be a maximum of 50 pages including appendices, excluding references, tables and figures.

Papers may address the following issues:

- Theoretical approaches to the content domain (historical and contemporary).
- Identification of major theoretical issues in the content domain.
- Strengths and limitations of various research methods used in the content domain.
- Assessment/measurement issues (both research and clinical applications).
- Relevance to clinical practice.
- Ethical issues - clinical and research.
- Future directions in theory, research, and clinical practice.

As the major criterion for evaluating the paper will be the extent to which it provides an original and substantive contribution to our theoretical understanding of the domain of interest, the issues listed above should be addressed only when they facilitate this goal. It further means that some of the above issues may not appropriate in a given paper, if they detract from this goal.

### **3C) Feedback and evaluation**

The criterion for evaluating the paper will be (1) the extent to which it provides an original and substantive contribution to our understanding of the domain of interest, and (2) the overall quality of the paper is, at minimum, at the level that the paper *would be seriously considered for publication*; that is, a "revise and re-submit". Students receive feedback on a draft, which provides an opportunity for improving the paper before the final submission. In addition, students may have an oral examination on the content area covered by the paper. The purpose of the oral examination is to give the committee members an opportunity to seek clarification of points and issues contained in the paper.

#### ***i) Ph.D. comprehensive examination advisory committee.***

Two faculty members (the student's dissertation advisor, a second reader) serve as the advisory committee for each student. The second reader is typically expected to be a faculty member with expertise in the content area that the student's comprehensive examination paper focuses on. The second reader does not have to be faculty member within the Psychology Department at Western. Faculty must hold an appointment with the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies at Western. The second reader may be a faculty member at a university other than Western. External faculty should be able to meet the criteria needed for appointment to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies; however, an actual appointment is not required. The advisory committee: (a) approves the student's outline, (b) provides feedback on a draft of the paper, (c) evaluates the final paper, and (d) participates in oral examination(s), if required.

#### ***ii) Ph.D. comprehensive examination committee.***

The clinical area Ph.D. comprehensive examination committee is responsible for evaluating both the written and oral (if required) components of the comprehensive examination. Each student is evaluated by the following three faculty members: two of whom must be from the clinical area, one of whom will be the second reader from the student's advisory committee. The student's advisor is not a member of the evaluation committee. The examination committee: (a) evaluates the final paper, and (b) any revised papers and/or oral examination(s), if required.

### **3D) Conditions for completion**

The comprehensive committee will determine whether a student has obtained a PASS, CONDITIONAL PASS, or FAILURE, on the written examination (i.e., major paper). A student will pass if at least two committee members have assigned “Passes”, with the third assigning, at minimum, a “Conditional Pass”. A student will Fail, if at least two committee members have assigned a Fail. Anything else will be considered a Conditional Pass. A student who fails the written examination will be withdrawn from the Ph.D. program.

Students who receive a Conditional Pass will submit a revised version of the paper in response to remedial measures specified by the committee, and/or complete an oral examination. In such cases, the revised version of the paper and oral examination (if required) will be graded as Pass/Fail; the revised paper and/or oral examination would need to be graded as a Pass (by at least two of the three committee members) in order for the student to continue in the program. A student who does not pass both the revised paper and/or oral examination would be withdrawn from the Ph.D. program.

All outcomes of the examinations (written and oral) will be communicated to the Psychology Graduate Chair.

### **3E) Schedule of Tasks & Deadlines**

A detailed schedule of the due dates for the various parts of your Ph.D. comprehensive examination is listed below. For most students, the process begins in first term of their PhD1 year. If the Masters degree is completed in less than 6 terms, the Clinical Program will look favorably on a possible 1-term extension following entry into the Ph.D. Program for competition of Comprehensive Requirements. See the clinical director for requirements pertaining to an extension.

The below schedule applies for students entering the Ph.D. clinical psychology program in any of the three academic terms (i.e., Fall, Winter, or Summer). The dates listed apply to students starting the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination in September.

#### ***i) Format and process overview***

Clinical area informs students in writing of the format, nature, and timing of the comprehensive requirements, policies and procedures, and examinations.

Deadline: *Two weeks into first term of Ph.D. Year 1.* **Sept 17/17**

Meeting with students to review requirements and process

Deadline: *Within first month of Ph.D. Year 1.* **Sept /17**

#### ***ii) Selection of advisory committee***

Notify the Chair of the Clinical Area Ph.D. Comprehensive Committee of who the second member student’s advisor committee will be. The Chair will forward him/her a copy of the expectations for the Clinical Area Comprehensives. This allows sufficient time for the advisory committee to be aware of the requirements and expectations prior to approval of the students’ outline.

Student Deadline: *6-weeks into first term of Ph.D. Year 1.* **Oct 13/17**

### **iii) Outline**

An outline of the major areas to be covered in the paper and a proposed reference list is reviewed and approved by the student's advisor committee (advisor and 1 other faculty member). Signed approval form and a copy of the approved outline and reference list are submitted to the Chair of the Clinical Area Ph.D. Comprehensive Committee.

Student Deadline: *Two months into first term of Ph.D. Year 1.* **Nov 17/17**

### **iv) First draft**

First draft of paper submitted to the student's advisor committee. (Advisory committee feedback to be provided to student within 3 weeks)

Student Deadline: *Mid-way through second term of Ph.D. Year 1.* **Feb 15/18**

Advisory Committee Deadline: *Within 3 weeks of receiving draft* **Mar 2/18**

### **v) Peer evaluation/feedback**

What should be the final draft of your paper is to be submitted to a peer for feedback. (Peer Feedback due within 1 week)

Student Deadline: *End of second term of Ph.D. Year 1.* **Mar 30/18**

Peer Deadline *Within 2 weeks of receiving draft* **Apr 6/18**

### **vi) Final written paper**

The final version of the comprehensive paper is submitted to the Chair of the Clinical Area Ph.D. Comprehensive Committee. The chair will distribute copies of the paper to the students' advisory committee and one other faculty member from the Clinical area for evaluation. (Evaluations are due within 3 weeks). The student is informed of the outcome of the written examination. If the student has obtained a Conditional Pass or Failure, remedial measures, if any, will be specified.

Student Deadline: *End of second term of Ph.D. Year 1* **Apr 20/18**

Evaluation Deadline: *Within 3 weeks of receiving paper* **May 11/18**

### **vii) Revised written paper**

(if required by the committee) At the discretion of the clinical program, students who receive a Conditional Pass will be required to submit a revised version of the paper in response to remedial measures specified by the committee.

Student Deadline: *Within 3 weeks of receiving feedback* **Jun 8/18**

Evaluation Deadline: *Within 2 weeks of receiving revised paper* **Jun 22/18**

### **viii) Oral examinations**

(if required by the committee) An oral examination will be scheduled as soon as possible after the written evaluation of the final paper. Dates are determined by the Chair of the comprehensive examination committee.



#### 4) DETAILS OF EACH STEP IN COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATIONS

##### 4A) Advisory Committee & Outline

###### *i) Preparing the Outline & Reference List.*

The outline of your proposed comprehensive paper should provide sufficient context for your advisory committee to provide feedback and guidance and to determine that the content and scope of the proposed paper is adequate to meet the requirements of the comprehensive evaluation. It should be clear and provide a good indication of the literatures you will review, what issues you will look at, how you will be conceptualizing your paper, your proposed model and/or integration, and *how your paper will advance scientific understanding in this domain*.

The outline should be written in paragraph format. An overall page (or 2) should state the issue/problem and need for the proposed review, and the objectives of the paper.

The rest of the outline should be by proposed subsections. Each subsection should have a short paragraph outlining the material to be reviewed and the purpose of the subsection. A reference list of papers to be covered with each subsection should be provided immediately following the subsection.

The completed outline and reading list must convince both your advisor and reader that your paper:

- is on a topic that is worthwhile doing, and
- will make a significant and unique scientific contribution to our understanding in that topic area

Outlines are typically 4 to 6 pages of text.

*An e-copy of the outline and reference list along with signed paper copy of the “**Approval of Reading List and Outline for the Major Paper**” should be handed in on or before the deadline.*

There is a process involved in obtaining the advisory committee’s approval of the outline. In order to meet the deadline, students will have to have discussions of topics and references with their committee and provide draft copies of the outline for review **in advance** of the deadline.

Your outline and approved reading list may be a different from your final paper, as you may still be formulating your paper when at the approval/reading list stage. As you proceed with your paper, you may drop some readings, add others, and also consider additional conceptual issues and perspectives. However, aim to getting *as close as possible to the final paper description* for the outline. Doing so will yield the best and most complete feedback from your advisor and second reader. Consider their approval of outline and reading list as an indication that you are on track, *thus far*, in the comprehensive process. Remember that the outline is not yet the final paper. The writing of your paper is a dynamic process and there may be changes. **Note.** If during the process of reviewing and drafting your paper you plan to make a *major* deviation from what was proposed in your outline, *the proposed changes* should be discussing with your advisor and second reader.

## **ii) Advisory Committee Selection**

The Ph.D. comprehensive examination advisory committee will consist of the student's dissertation advisor and a second reader who should be selected by the student with input from his/her advisor.

## **iii) Getting Feedback from the Advisory Committee**

The schedule for the comprehensive examination has various tasks designed to allow you to get feedback along the way. Consider both your advisor and second reader as similar to academic colleagues who would give comments and feedback on a major project.

### a) Advisor

- The input from your advisor should be limited.
- You may have meetings with your advisor to get input on specific decisions related to the content of the paper. You can present issues, etc. that pertain to preparing your comps.
- Your advisor may suggest additional readings, literatures to look at, and discuss with you some conceptual ideas that you may wish to pursue.
- Carefully consider the feedback you receive and use this information to help you write your paper.
- However, you are ultimately responsible for the paper.
- Your advisor's input will be similar to consulting with a colleague for assistance with making decisions in writing a manuscript.
- You are encouraged to discuss the nature and timing of feedback from your advisor during the process of completing the outline/reference list.

### b) Second reader

- Comments and feedback from your second reader should be done prior to handing in your outline and reading list.
- It is highly recommended that you meet with your second reader *very early on* in the process to let him or her know what you are doing (or considering doing) for your paper.
- Your second reader may also have some ideas and readings to suggest.
- Thus, it is important to think early on about whom you want as a second reader.
- This also gives this faculty member a chance to consider and schedule in your comps paper.

## **4B) The First Draft**

You should submit a draft of the entire paper for review by your advisory committee. This is your opportunity to ensure the paper benefits from your advisor and second reader's comments **prior** to the formal examination stage.

The advisory committee will provide written comments on the draft. It is not uncommon for the advisory committee to come back with suggestions to cut major sections of the paper, if they feel the scope of the paper is too broad. The committee may also recommend substantive expansion to subsections felt to be lacking in detail.

**Note:** Your committee members using the same form as you will be graded on for the final version to grade this draft. They will be grading your draft "as if" it were the final version. This process ensures that you have a clear understanding of the overall quality of your paper and allows for time to revise the paper prior to the final evaluation.

This is the only time you can expect to receive written feedback from your committee. Plan your time accordingly. To maximize the quality of feedback from your committee you need to submit a solid draft.

In addition to this written feedback, many students find it helpful to have a meeting with their advisor and second reader to ensure they understand the feedback provided.

#### **4C) Peer evaluation/feedback**

After receiving feedback on the draft paper from the advisory committee and having made revisions based on the feedback, students will exchange their papers with a peer for polishing and review prior to submitting the final copy for evaluation.

The process for choosing peer reviewers will be agreed upon by the cohort of students during the organizational meeting. Peer review provides students:

- the opportunity to expand their knowledge of a specific area within clinical psychology, which is consistent with the overall aims of the comps,
- identify minor problems with spelling, grammar, etc.,
- identify and correct any points of confusion in the paper,
- gain experience in providing constructive feedback to a colleague.

Written feedback should be provided similar to reviewing a journal article. If you do not have experience in writing journal reviews, a good resource is the following:

Drotar, D. (2009) How to write effective reviews for the J Pediatr Psychol, 34(2), 113-117.

An e-copy of the feedback should be sent to the peer and the chair of the committee by the deadline.

The actual content of the peer evaluations is not part of the overall evaluations and, unless the student him/herself chooses otherwise, the advisory committee will not receive copies of the peer reviews.

#### **4D) Final written paper**

The final version of the comprehensive paper must be submitted to the Chair of the Clinical Area Ph.D. Comprehensive Committee by the deadline. The chair will distribute copies of the paper to the students' advisory committee and one other faculty member from the Clinical area for evaluation.

The evaluation committee will provide ratings and written feedback on paper. A summary of evaluations and committee's decision will be provided within three weeks of the deadline.

#### **4E) Revised written paper/oral examinations**

If the student has obtained a Conditional Pass, students may be allowed to submit a revised version of the paper in response to remedial measures specified, and/or complete an oral examination. In addition to receiving written feedback, the student will meet with the chair of the comps committee to review the feedback and procedure for revisions and/or oral examination.

## 5) SUGGESTION IN WRITING COMPREHENSIVE PAPERS

### 5A) Researching relevant literatures

#### *i) Selecting articles*

When writing your paper it is important to articulate your rationale for citing specific papers. With this end goal in mind, it is important when you are doing your literature search to think about how you are identifying and selecting relevant studies to review and potentially include. The methodology for conducting systematic reviews can be helpful in guiding your thinking and search strategy (see Oxman, A. D. (1994) Checklists for review articles. *British Medical Journal* 309[6955], 648-651.).

For example, record the keywords used in PsychInfo and PubMed searches, along with date the search was completed. Ideally, downloading the full search to a reference manager database (e.g., EndNote, ProCite) can allow you to capture the literature at a specific point in time. If you have not done so already, now is a good time to start using a reference manager database systems for keep track of your own research literature. These computer programs greatly simplify generating reference lists and can save time in the long run.

The Cochrane Collaboration is another excellent resource for how to conduct reviews and for reviews that have been conducted or are underway (<http://www.cochrane.org/>). Often Cochrane reviews come out as reports prior to the publication of manuscript versions of the reviews. By checking the Cochrane reviews that have been completed, you can avoid conducting a review on a topic that has already been covered. By checking the Cochrane reviews that are underway (a "Protocol"), you can avoid conducting a review on a topic that may be completed prior to your review.

For information on clinical trials, you can find information on trials that have been completed or are in process at: <http://clinicaltrials.gov/> and <http://www.controlled-trials.com/>

#### *ii) Reviewing studies*

It is very helpful to construct and keep an annotated bibliography.

- Pay attention to the methods of studies.
- In your paper you may find it helpful to discuss study results as a function of population, measures/procedures used, data analytic approach etc.
- This can be very useful not only for your comps paper, revisions in preparation for publication version, and also for dissertation work (if in the same area).
- Keep a brief record for each study on number of participants, design, main measures, main hypotheses, findings, etc. This makes it much easy to refer back to, later on.

Be **critical** when reviewing the literature. Do not blindly accept everything.

Consulting with your advisor and second reader on possible areas for literature reviews and searches may be helpful.

#### *iii) Choosing articles to include*

In your paper is important to articulate your rationale for citing specific papers. This is particularly true for empirical articles. You need to explain to the reader why you are expanding

on a specific article: Is it a good example of studies in the area, is it a seminal article, does it present a novel or key finding?

Ask yourself “Why am I giving this article a detailed description vs. citing it as part of a summary of studies?” Similarly, when choosing theoretical models you need to explain your choice of models in light of competing alternatives. With this in mind, it may be helpful to develop and record your decision making on article selection as you read and even, similar to a systematic review, articulate specific inclusion and exclusion criteria that guide your decisions.

## **5B) Writing a comps paper**

### ***i) Keep the target in sight***

a) Where will this be published?

We hope that students will publish their comps papers. With that in mind, consider journals where you could submit your paper. Read published review articles in these journals, and pay attention to how authors in these journals write a review

b) Who is your audience?

The primary audience for your comps paper is your evaluation committee. The committee will include someone (likely the second reader) who likely has specific content expertise in the topic of your paper. The other members will have expertise in clinical psychology or another area of psychology related to your paper, but they are unlikely to be experts in the specific topic you are writing on. As such, write so they can understand your paper. This includes: explaining terms the first time you introduce them, providing step-by-step articulation of your logic, etc.

### ***ii) Issues to consider in writing***

a) Avoid providing unnecessary background material

- Tell the reader what they have to know in order to understand the points you wish to make in your paper.
- Do not go off on long tangents of *unnecessary* background/general information as this only confuses the reader and limits the space you can then use in order to highlight your own unique and novel contribution to the literature.

b) Consider using Tables and Figures to help present your ideas in a clear fashion

- Tables are particularly useful for succinct reviews of a number of studies, and can also be used to provide some types of conceptual information in a clear format (e.g., theoretical frameworks).
- Figures can often be used to provide a good overview/summary of conceptual models.
- Use Tables and Figures appropriately (i.e., when they can clearly advance your arguments and ideas).
- The use of Tables and Figures is also very useful as you work through the conceptual thinking stages of putting your paper together.

c) Avoid “Telephone directory” reviews of the literature

- It is not helpful for the reader to wade through paragraph after paragraph of summaries of individual studies that do not highlight for the reader what the critical points are.

- Instead, ensure that you tell the reader only what they **need to know** (for purposes of your paper) about past work. In other words, provide the critical details and points.
  - Clearly highlight and tell reader what is important, but don't put in unnecessary information about past studies.
- d) Make sure that the major sections of your paper are balanced
- When you put together the detailed outline for your paper, make sure that your *paper is balanced*.
  - Do not spend 90% of the paper on a literature review and then allocate 10% for your integration, model and advancement of our understanding of the area.
  - Ensure that you provide an appropriate balance in your paper.
  - You must ensure that your unique contribution and advancement is described and discussed in *appropriate and sufficient detail*, as this is the core essence of your paper.
- e) Organize your paper so it is easy to follow and read
- Use the organizational aspects of your paper (such as headings, etc.) to ensure that your main message gets across to the reader in *as easy a manner as possible*.
  - Use headings and subheadings to provide “sign-posts” to the reader about what you are going to discuss, or what you have just discussed.
  - Carefully consider the wording of your title, your abstract, and the first few pages of your paper to clearly inform the reader what the paper is about, how you are going to present your ideas (the overall organization of your paper), and what you will conclude.
  - Avoid “mystery” papers, in which the reader has no idea *why* you are reviewing certain studies and literatures, and *where* you are going with your ideas, and *what conclusions* you will arrive at.
  - A table of contents can help guide your organization and give the reader an overview of topics to be presented.
- f) Ensure clear flow of ideas and transitions across the sections of your paper
- Make sure that your integration of various literatures and ideas flows clearly from one section of your paper to the next, and can be followed conceptually by the reader.
  - One way to do this is to carefully consider and prepare the transition sentences and/or paragraphs between the major sections of your paper. For example, these transitions might provide the major conclusions of one section, and how these conclusions then lead to the information considered in the next section of your paper.
  - If you are integrating literature from distinct domains, you need to ensure that your paper does not consist of two (or more) separate literature reviews that are presented in “complete and splendid isolation” from each other.
  - The reader needs to clearly be told, for each section, *why* that section is important for the advancement of your ideas, and *what* in that section is important.
  - False cues can be given to the reader by spending a large amount of space on issues which are *not* really relevant. You force the reader to try and retain in memory, irrelevant information that they do not really need to know to understand the next part of your paper which is frustrating.

- Instead, consider a “just in time” approach to writing, in which you only provide the amount of information *that is required at that point in the paper* for the reader to follow your arguments.
- Thus, you might provide a brief and general overview of a given literature near the start of the paper (to acquaint the reader with that domain and the central issues) hold off on providing specific details until required for your integration/model (this could be done in several different places throughout the paper).
- This parceling out of information can make it much easier for the reader to follow your arguments and also avoids the problem of having to repeat information too many times throughout the paper.
- Remember that the 3rd reader of your paper is not necessarily an expert in the topic domain of your paper; as such, ensure that you clearly define the basic constructs pertaining to your topic.

g) Keep your paper an appropriate length

- Your paper should be of sufficient length to fully and appropriately cover your topic as described in several points in this document, consider *very carefully* what is necessary to include in your paper, and what is not be succinct and clear throughout your paper.
- 50 pages of text (excluding references, tables and figures) is the maximum.
- However, 50 pages of text is well the accept length/word limit for most journal articles. Consider writing a shorter paper and, if necessary, use an appendix to provide supplementary material that you feel is needed for the comprehensive paper but could easily be removed for a manuscript submission.

**iii) Resources on writing theoretical/review articles**

Listed below are some additional sources you may wish to consult for further tips and suggestions on how to write theoretical review articles

Bem, D. J. (1995). Writing a Review Article for *Psychological Bulletin*. **Psychological Bulletin**, 118, 2, 172-177.

Eisenberg, N., Thompson, M.S., Augir, S., & Stanley, E.H. (2002). “Getting in” Revisited: An analysis of manuscript characteristics, reviewers ratings, and acceptance of manuscripts in *Psychological Bulletin*. **Psychological Bulletin**, 128, 6, 997-1004.

Cooper, H. (2003). Editorial. **Psychological Bulletin**, 129, 1, 3-9. (about types of reviews & evaluations)

An on-line tutorial that provides instruction on evidence-based practice has a module on conducting systematic reviews available at: <http://www.ebbp.org/training.html>

In particular, you should be aware of guidelines such as PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) <http://www.prisma-statement.org/> Even if you are not conducting a formal systematic review or meta-analysis, understanding the details of these approaches to reviews should be helpful. See Shamseer et al. 2015 Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta-analysis protocols (PRISMA-P) 2015: elaboration and explanation. *British Medical Journal* 349, g7647. doi: 10.1136/bmj.g7647

***iv) Writing resources at Western.***

Accredited school provides more opportunities to develop your writing skills than any other time in your career. You are encouraged to avail yourself of the opportunities available. An excellent resource is the writing skills center at the Student Development Center.

<http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/writing/index.html?grad>