

## NYU DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH—TIPS FOR THE DRAFTING OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW ESSAY

THESE GUIDELINES ARE MEANT TO COMPLEMENT THE INSTRUCTIONS FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS ON COMPLETING THE DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND PREPARING THE DISSERTATION PROPOSAL, AND THEY SHOULD BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THAT DOCUMENT.

After the student's successful completion of the Doctoral Exam the Doctoral Exam Committee will be reconstituted as the Core Dissertation Committee. While the two committees might theoretically be identical in composition (with the Topic advisor, and perhaps the Major Field advisor, in any event almost certainly serving on both), it is likely that some retooling will occur, so as to orient the Core Dissertation Committee toward the area to be addressed in the dissertation. The drafting and discussion of the literature review will constitute the four-credit Dissertation Seminar I (to be registered for during the third fall semester), which will not meet as a formal class

Under the supervision of the Core Dissertation Committee the student will continue reviewing the works on the Topic list through the fall of the third year, with an eye toward developing a dissertation project. That continued study will culminate in the student's summarizing the import of the Topic materials in a formal literature-review essay of 2500 to 3000 words (approximately 10 pages), to be submitted to the Core Dissertation Committee by the end of the eleventh week of the student's third fall semester. The literature review will conclude by presenting a research question—or set of research questions—issuing from the engagement with the Topic bibliography, and to be taken up in the dissertation.

In the literature review, you should seek to summarize the various questions and approaches central to your field(s) of study to date. Consider the essay to be a “polemical survey” of the field(s), in order to assess where further contributions—especially your own—remain to be made. You should consider this to be your “due diligence” with regards to what other scholars have already accomplished, which includes not only recent scholarly work in the field, but earlier watershed innovations and interventions that might have an impact on your own project.

You might consider framing and organizing your essay with the formula: “In the field of x, scholars have taken x typical approaches” [three is often an optimally workable number of approaches to survey in the review]. You should then move to summarize and elaborate these points with examples from your topics list and other more recent readings you might have undertaken. The objective is *not* to give a detailed account of each and every scholar or critic on your list, but to provide an overview of the general principles in the field and to “map” the field in a fairly concise way. This can include strengths and limits of each of these general approaches.

The literature review begins your own inquiry into fields. Your understanding of the issues involved will be further refined during the process of writing your dissertation proposal and the dissertation itself. (As such, expect that you will continue your reading in the pertinent areas and subfields as you write the proposal and then the dissertation.) Ultimately, the literature review should serve as a springboard for writing the dissertation. By the end of the process, you should

begin formulating the questions that you would like to be address in the dissertation, and these will, in turn, be more formally and fully elaborated in the dissertation proposal. The survey and summary of other scholarship and criticism should constitute the majority of the literature review essay, and a final section (approximately 20%) can address gaps in the field or areas in need of reconsideration, especially as they pertain to your future research interests.

The literature review is a genre that you are likely to encounter in the future, for example, when devising new book projects or drafting an introduction for a book. It can be especially useful if you are undertaking cross-field and/or interdisciplinary topics lists, as you can have a sense of similar precedents and begin explicating a rationale for working across such boundaries. Your dissertation committee will be especially helpful for articulating approaches to challenges that come up in this respect.

At some point during the final three weeks of the fall semester, the student will meet with the Core Dissertation Committee to discuss the proposed dissertation topic and receive advice about how to apply the findings of the literature review in the drafting of the official Dissertation Proposal. Prior to this meeting you should submit a penultimate draft of the literature review to your committee, which members can read beforehand. At the meeting, you should discuss any minor revisions and suggestions for completing the literature review essay, but also use the document to discuss the next steps in your process (i.e., proposal).

A PDF of the final literature review essay should be submitted, along with the dissertation proposal, and the “Approval to Write Dissertation and Literature Review” Form to the Graduate Administrator and the DGS at the end of the spring semester of your third year.