|  |
| --- |
| **Audio Transcript Literature Review** |

Hi, everyone. The intent of this video is to give you a bit of an overview of Assignment 2, the literature review, and in particular, to try to explain to you what we are trying to get at in this assignment, which is different than the type of summary of the literature that you may have done for assignments in other courses, for instance, in your undergraduate program.

One of the things that distinguishes you as a professional writer, and as a graduate level writer, is the ability to make assertions and to be creative and original in your thinking. This changes the way in which you have to approach the professional literature. Say you are given a topic to write on in an undergraduate paper, you might get away with just organizing your paper according to the themes that you see emerging in the literature, using those as an outline for your paper, and basically summarizing what you have learned from reading that literature.

Writing at a professional level is different. The expectation is different. In the first part of this course, we're giving you a few weeks to do that summary of the professional literature in the topic area that you are interested in, so that you have a really good sense of what other people have written, how they have thought about the topic, and what the various positions are. But then we are asking you to step outside of that summary position to come up with a statement of what you think is missing in the topic area.

This is where research comes from: people looking at professional practice, at programming, or at the professional literature, in this case, and seeing where the gaps are, what is missing, what questions haven't been answered, what knowledge is still missing from this information that has been gathered or the research that has been done by other people. That is where your problem statement for your literature review comes from. You cannot actually come up with a problem statement until you do that initial summary of the literature for yourself. But that is just the background to beginning to write your paper; that is not your paper. Your paper emerges from your original problem statement.

In the area of multi-cultural counselling and social justice, for example, if I was going to start to do this paper myself, I might come up with a problem statement that says, “Little has been done to integrate social justice, as a concept, into the identity of professional counsellors.” There is lots of stuff in the literature that talks about social justice, and the importance of social justice. There is some emergent stuff around social justice competencies. But really there has not been a clear rethinking or restatement around how this impacts our identity as professional counsellors. There is some beginning work, but I think there is still a gap there. So my problem statement would be, “The identity of professional counsellors needs to be reconsidered, in some way, to take into account this new emphasis on social justice.

That is an arguable problem statement. Somebody else could come along and say, “No way. I'm happy with the way professional identity is defined. The thing that makes us different from social workers, for example, is that we stay in our offices, and we focus on the individual client; whereas, social workers are much more systemic in their approach and much more engaged in the community.” But my assertion is that the professional identity of counsellors and psychologists needs to be reshaped in order to advance and embrace the social justice agenda that is emerging in the professional literature.

Once I have my problem statement, my task (or your task in this paper) is to write an argument that supports that problem statement. So again, you are not just summarizing what you learned in the literature, you are taking a step back and saying, “Okay, if this is my problem statement, if this is the gap that I see that I want to try and argue that we need to fill, then what am I going assert about that?”

So for this one, I might start with coming up with a key argument that has to do with the importance of social justice in terms of understanding the nature of the problems that our clients experience. I might have another key point that talks about the way in which the professional counselling has typically supported the status quo, instead of challenging the status quo. In that case, we are kind of complicit in social injustice. Then I might have another point that talks about something like the way in which integrating social justice into our practice expands our ability to respond in a more appropriate way, and a more culturally responsive way, to the needs of nondominant populations, in particular.

So I am building a case through my arguments. But I am thinking about my problem statement, which I am trying to support, and I am building a set of arguments. The word, *argument*, is important, not just because it references a logical flow (of argument) toward a particular end, but because it is also understood as debatable (i.e., arguable). For any one of those statements that I have made, somebody else could come along and say, “No. I have a counterargument to that.” Your job in writing the paper is to think about argument and also the counterarguments that might come up, so that you are actually presenting an opinion on something, not a summary of what other people have done. That is the significant difference.

We have given some written examples of how you might go about developing your argument, but I think it is important to just step back, and look at the whole big picture. From my perspective, what you are doing is building a funnel. You start with your problem statement, which is the broad assertion that you want to argue in your paper, and you keep working your way down through your arguments to this sort of point that says, “Okay, now that I have given my rationale through my problem statement and my list of arguments, here is the purpose of the study.”

In my case, I might do this whole funnel down and say, “Okay, the purpose of my study is to investigate what clients bring to counselling that would suggest that my identity or our identities, as professional counsellors needs to be expanded to be inclusive of social justice. So what are the social justice issues that come into play in everyday counseling practice that could not be addressed without expanding our professional identity?

That is a little long-winded. I have to refine it down, so that I have a really clear purpose statement. So the purpose statement, if I refined it down a little bit, might be to explore the client presenting concerns, within a particular population, that suggest social justice is an essential element of our role and our identity as professional counsellors. From that then, in the latter part of the assignment, I am going make a research plan around that. What is that going to look like? I have to look at what are the paradigms that fit with that? Given that I am talking about social justice, I might look at the critical or emancipatory paradigm. Or if I wanted to focus more specifically on Indigenous populations, for example, then my research could revolve around supporting the exploration of social justice issues specifically with Indigenous populations. Then I might look at an Indigenous paradigm, and I would look at how I might be able to support that kind of research within the Indigenous community and position it in a way that actually is fostering of their autonomy and ownership over that piece of research.

So how you would envision your study will depend on the framework and the lens that you apply. I might then say, "If I am choosing a critical emancipatory type of research, that would fall within the qualitative methodologies.” I would look at potentially doing focus groups with clients. Or maybe I would look at transcripts of particular counselling sessions that counsellors hold with clients who fall within the groups I decide are appropriate for my research. Or I might look at interviewing clients themselves to give me some information on their presenting concerns, how those are connected to social justice, and how that might affect the type of practitioner or the identity of the practitioner who would be appropriate for addressing those particular concerns.

I hope this has made sense to you out of how we are positioning this particular assignment. I just want to make a loop back again to the issue of your problem statement and your arguments needing to be arguable. One of the ways you might think about this is preparing for a debate. If you are given a topic and you are on a debate team, you are not going to know exactly what the other team is going to come up with. You are not going know exactly the direction that the argument that happens within the debate is going to go. But you are going to have to do a lot of background reading to be prepared for that.

The first part of this course, the first few lessons, is about doing that background reading. Then you want to come into this debate with “This is my starting position.” You may have someone on the other team who has a opposite starting position. But your starting position is your position. It is not a summary of what you read. It is the stance that you want to take based on the summary of what you read. So it is grounded in the professional literature, but you are putting your voice in there, you are extending it beyond the professional literature. That is the beginning of your problem statement—in a regular paper, it would be your thesis statement. From there, you are doing your funnel down of your arguments towards a clearer statement, a purpose for research, and your research plan.

I hope this is helpful. I hope it has giving you a bit of a sense of what we mean by the components of this paper and how it differs from what you might traditionally have expected from a literature review in other contexts.