

About this sample literature review: The following literature review was composed as part of an honors capstone project proposal in the field of communication sciences and disorders. It served as the introduction to the project proposal and, thus, was part of a larger work (as opposed to a stand-alone piece).

The assignment was: *In this literature review, you will create a justification for your honors capstone project (and its design) by examining the state of knowledge on your topic, the key concepts and theories that will serve as the foundation for your project, and the gaps or needs that your project will address. The literature review should be 4 to 5 double-spaced pages—slightly longer than the literature review in a typical journal article.*

This sample literature review is more comprehensive (meaning it draws on more sources) than many class assignments but less comprehensive than literature reviews for a thesis or dissertation. Class assignments that require students to carefully examine a limited number of sources or graduate level literature reviews (which are expected to provide a thorough analysis of many sources) may offer more detailed descriptions of the studies under review than this sample does. For an overview of literature reviews (created in conjunction with this annotated sample) and for more literature review resources, please visit [this link](#).

Examining Verb Usage in English Learners

English learners, those learning English in addition to other languages, composed 10% of the American school-age population in the 2014 – 2015 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The U.S. Department of Education (2016) estimates that the percentage of English learners is even higher for those under the age of 6. Scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) demonstrate that many of these children will need support in acquiring English language skills. On the 2015 NAEP reading assessment, the scores of fourth graders identified as English learners averaged below the basic reading level and only two points above children who were identified as having a disability (The Nation’s Report Card, 2015). Many English learners struggle to acquire English language skills, but it is important to note that there may be different causes for this difficulty.

This literature review introduction uses statistics to establish the scope and significance the topic.

Here is the big-picture problem that the writer’s research project is responding to.

The writer explains the implications of the data in her own words.

If this were a stand-alone literature review, it might offer a purpose statement here (e.g., This review of the literature will examine existing research on [topic x] in order to...).



It would be helpful to have a topic sentence / transition that connects the concepts of language differences and disorders to the previous topic of English learners.

Some children simply have a language difference, “a rule-governed language style that deviates in some way from the standard usage of the mainstream culture,” while others have a language disorder, “a significant discrepancy in language skills relative to what would be expected...for a client’s age or developmental level” (Paul & Norbury, 2012, pp. 138). A language difference can be due to the cultural and linguistic variables from another language influencing the way English learners acquire English, such as the sounds they produce and the grammatical structures they utilize. An English learner with a language disorder will have consistent errors throughout all the languages they use, which may negatively impact their reading and writing skills (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017a).

In writing in the health and social sciences (as well as natural and physical sciences), quotations very rarely appear in literature reviews. However, this is one exception: when sharing an established definition.

Strong transitions often use a term or concept from the previous paragraph as a hook that links old information to new information. A stronger way to begin this paragraph would be to use the term “SLP” as a hook: *SLPs face a number of barriers and limitations to accurately assessing the language skills...*

Speech language pathology is one profession that supports English learners’ various language needs. Interventions for these students focus on the language and literacy abilities they need to succeed in the classroom (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017a; American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017d). According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association’s (ASHA) scope of practice (2017c), in order to be clinically competent, a speech language pathologist (SLP) is required to differentiate a language difference from a language disorder in English learners. However, a 2016 survey showed that only 8% of SLPs felt that they were very qualified to address the cultural and linguistic needs that arise when working with English learners (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2016).

The focus of the paper narrows in this paragraph. The author shows how the topic of the previous paragraph (language differences and disorders in English learners) is relevant to the particular profession of speech language pathology.

There are a number of barriers and limitations to accurately assessing the language skills of English learners. These include similarities between typically developing English learners and English learners with a language impairment, a shortage of developmental data for English learners, and a lack of cultural

In this sentence, the writer is outlining what is to come. She will expand on each of these ideas in the coming paragraphs.

consideration in standardized assessment. Language impairment is a type of language disorder identified in children who show deficits in either receptive (understood) or expressive (used) language skills compared to peers with the same amount of language exposure (Bedore & Peña, 2010). When compared to their monolingual peers, English learners can show similar expressive and receptive delays as children with language impairment (Bedore & Peña, 2010). Therefore, it can be difficult for an SLP to differentiate between typically developing English learners and those with language impairment.

This concluding sentence successfully explains why the information provided in this paragraph is significant.

More issues arise when testing English learners because there are very few bilingual SLPs and little data on typical and atypical development in languages other than English (Paradis, Schneider, & Duncan, 2013). Many SLPs rely on standardized tests to assess English learners (Caesar & Kohler, 2007). However, these tests often do not include English learners in the normative sample, nor do they take cultural factors into account (De Lamo, White, & Jin, 2011). For example, children from culturally diverse backgrounds may not have experience completing standardized tests. Of the 55 frequently used standardized tests of language, only 13 report acceptable levels of sensitivity and specificity (Betz, Eickhoff, & Sullivan, 2013), defined as 80% or higher (Plante & Vance, 1994).

In this paragraph, the writer uses five sources that build upon each other to show why standardized tests may not accurately assess English learners. This is a good example of synthesis.

Notice the organization of this paragraph. It presents a causal chain (one problem leads to the next and to the next). The writer skillfully leads into each new link in the chain by referring to the previous one. The underlined phrases all serve as transitional hooks.

This paragraph demonstrates one difference between writing in the sciences and writing in the humanities. Science writing foregrounds data and findings and often deemphasizes authors (whose names may only appear in parenthetical citations). In contrast, humanities writing often prioritizes and leads with the name of the author and/or the publication responsible for the ideas under discussion.

Due to the lack of appropriate assessments available for English learners, SLPs risk under-identifying or over-identifying these students as having language impairment (Muñoz, White, & Horton-Ikard, 2014). Under-identification of English learners can occur when SLPs either delay or choose not to assess a disorder because they do not feel confident in the assessments available for English learners (Muñoz et al., 2014). When SLPs under-identify English learners with language impairment, students may not receive the appropriate

services they need. These services may include therapy focused on reading, writing, and the development of language skills to better equip the child in academics and communication (American Speech-Language Hearing Association, 2017d).

In contrast, over-identification in English learners occurs when SLPs label a student as having an impairment when they are developing normally.

Over-identifying English learners violates the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which states that a child cannot be identified as having a disability based on a lack of English proficiency (The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, 2006). Both under- and over-identification violate ASHA's Code of Ethics, which requires SLPs to competently provide their services and to not discriminate based on culture, ethnicity, or dialect (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2017b, para. 30 & 32).

★ In response to these issues, recent research has provided new ways to accurately differentiate typically developing English learners from English learners with language impairment. These methods include using a combination of dynamic assessments, such as test-teach-retest, response to intervention (i.e. teach-test-teach), assessment of information processing skills, and language sampling. Dynamic assessments allow a professional to consider the child's environment, home, and culture, while standardized assessment compares English learners' knowledge to norms that are culturally and linguistically biased, dynamic assessments allows SLPs to analyze English learners' learning processes (Paradis et al., 2013; Pieretti & Roseberry-McKibbin, 2016; Rosa-Lugo et al., 2010). Since difficulty learning new information is an indicator of language impairment, this feature of dynamic assessments allows an SLP to identify English learners with language impairment without being proficient in

This paragraph, like the one before it, continues to establish the importance of the research topic by demonstrating what is already known about it.

Everything up to this point has served as an introduction to the broader problem that inspired this honors project. Depending on the assignment, context, and discipline in which the literature review is being written, it may or may not be appropriate to dedicate as much time and space to developing "the problem." Short literature reviews usually establish the problem (and its context) in one or two paragraphs.

It would be helpful to have a concluding sentence that answers one of the following questions: What do we know now? Why does this information matter? What's the upshot?

The concluding sentence wraps up this paragraph and the one before it. Combining the two paragraphs would unify related information and solve the problem of the missing conclusion in the last paragraph.

Notice the shift from providing context about the problem to reviewing current research. Here, the writer moves into describing what is known about assessing English learners with language impairments.

What do these statistics illustrate? Without analysis or explanation, readers may be confused about their meaning or significance.

their native languages (Peña et al., 2014). The importance of this type of assessment can be seen in one study that found dynamic assessments identified English learners with language impairment with 80.6% to 97.2% accuracy (Peña et al., 2014).

It would be helpful to have transition that moves the reader from the topic of dynamic assessments to the topic of this paragraph.

Current research suggests that monolinguals with language impairment have the most difficulty with verbs, particularly those that mark tense, such as third person singular -s and past tense -ed (Rice & Wexler, 1996; Rice, Wexler, & Cleave, 1995). Individuals with language impairment show a significant difference in their acquisition of grammatical knowledge and do not appear to understand that tense marking in main verbs is a requirement of the language (Rice et al., 1995). Therefore, experts in the field suggest the use of verb tense as a clinical marker for language impairment in monolinguals (Rice & Wexler, 1996; Leonard, 2014).

Notice how the focus of the literature review is narrowing. After reading this paragraph, a reader can reasonably assume that this writer's project will have something to do with verb tense as a clinical marker for language impairment. That said, the writer wisely waits to introduce up her project until the end of the literature review.

Here, the writer makes three effective moves:

- (1) She synthesizes by speaking of a *body of research*.
- (2) She connects several of the topics she's discussed.
- (3) She uses this transition as a signpost, signaling where she's going.

Research conducted in the last ten years shows that English learners with language impairment also have particular trouble with verbs (Blom & Paradis, 2013; Gutierrez-Clellen, Simon-Cerejido, & Wagner, 2008). Blom and Paradis (2013) found that English learners with language impairment demonstrated particular trouble with regular past tense markings on verbs in English, whereas typically developing English learners achieved higher accuracy in this area. Taken together with research showing verbs are also more difficult for monolingual speakers with language impairment, these results suggest that difficulty with verbs is a hallmark of language impairment, regardless of the child's first language.

This honors project will add to the current research on identifying English learners with language impairment, furthering the knowledge of English learners' language development and leading to more appropriate assessments for

This is the gap in research that the writer intends to investigate. The word "suggest" indicates an area that needs more exploration, according to the writer's analysis of existing research.

This paragraph makes several moves common in conclusions of literature reviews that introduce a research project:

(1) It explains the purpose of the present study—in particular, how it will fill a gap in knowledge or build on existing knowledge.

(2) It gives the research question or hypothesis.

(3) It gives a brief summary of the methods it will use to answer the research question.

this population. It will analyze data collected from English learners whose first language is Spanish. The researcher will examine 11 language samples from English learners who passed the Test for Examining Expressive Morphology (TEEM) and compare them to 10 language samples from English learners who failed the TEEM. The TEEM is a norm-referenced test used to examine grammatical structure by having children complete sentences (Merrell & Plante, 1997). The main goal of this project is to determine if this data is consistent with the hypothesis that students with language impairment have particular difficulty with verb usage regardless of their first language.

[This literature review was followed by a methods section, project outline, and timeline—not pictured in this document.]

The writer probably needs to moderate or qualify her claims. It is unlikely that a single study by a novice researcher will cause such a significant change in the field.

References

This literature review draws from 27 sources. Some kinds of literature reviews require far fewer sources, and some require far more. Check with your professor or adviser to find out the appropriate range for your literature review.

Also worth noting is that this literature review drew from several different types of sources, which are discussed in subsequent annotations.

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2016). *2016 Schools Survey report: SLP caseload characteristics*. Retrieved from www.asha.org/research/memberdata/schoolssurvey/
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2017a). Bilingual service delivery. Retrieved from http://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589935225§ion=Key_Issues
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2017b). Code of ethics. Retrieved from <http://www.asha.org/Code-of-Ethics/>
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2017c). Cultural competence. Retrieved from http://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589935230§ion=Key_Issues
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (2017d). Spoken language disorders. Retrieved from <http://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589935327§ion=Treatment>

The writer cites several pages on the website of a professional organization. Formal reports from professional bodies or government agencies may be considered part of “the literature” on a topic, but general information typically isn’t (it may be based on scholarship but isn’t considered scholarship itself). Still, such information can be used in literature reviews to establish background or context for the topic, problem, or issue.

This article, which appears in a scholarly journal, does not report the findings of an original research project. Rather, it reviews existing research and then proposes a decision-making framework. This article is, in fact, a type of literature review. Review articles like this one may be considered part of “the literature” on a topic.

- Bedore, L. M., & Peña, E. D. (2010). Assessment of bilingual children for identification of language impairment: Current findings and implications for practice. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 11, 1–29. doi: 10.2167/beb392.0
- Betz, S. K. Eickhoff, J. R., & Sullivan, S. F. (2013). Factors influencing the selection of standardized tests for the diagnosis of specific language impairment. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools*, 44, 133-146. doi: 10.1044/0161-1461(2012/12-0093)
- Blom, E., & Paradis, J. (2013). Past tense production by English second language learners with and without language impairment. *Journal of*

Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 56(1), 281-294.
doi:10.1044/1092-4388(2012/11-0112)

Caesar, L. & Kohler, P. (2007). The state of school-based bilingual assessment: Actual practice versus recommended guidelines. *Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools*, 38(3), 190-200. doi:10.1044/0161-1461(2007/020)

This article is a typical example of scholarly literature within a scientific discipline. It presents the findings of an empirical research study in a peer-reviewed journal. This is the most common article type cited in literature reviews in STEM fields.

Cicchetti, D. (1994). Guidelines, criteria, and rules of thumb for evaluating normed and standardized assessment instruments in psychology. *Psychological Assessment*, 6, 284-290.
doi:10.1037/1040-3590.6.4.284

De Lamo White, C., & Jin, L. (2011). Evaluation of speech and language assessment approaches with bilingual children. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 46(6), 613-627.
doi:10.1111/j.1460-6984.2011.00049.x

Gutierrez-Clellen, V. F., Simon-Cerejido, G., & Wagner, C. (2008). Bilingual children with language impairment: A comparison with monolinguals and second language learners. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 29(1), 3-19. doi: 10.1017/S0142716408080016

Heilmann, J., Miller, J. F., Iglesias, A., Fabiano-Smith, L., Nockerts, A., & Andriacchi, K. D. (2008). Narrative transcription accuracy and reliability in two languages. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 28, 178-188.

Merrell, A. W. & Plante, E. (1997). Norm-referenced test interpretation in the diagnostic process. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 28(1), 50-58. doi: 10.1044/0161-1461.2801.50

Muñoz, M. L., White, M., & Horton-Ikard, R. (2014). The identification conundrum. *The ASHA Leader*, 19(11), 48-53.
doi:10.1044/leader.FTR3.19112014.48

This article is from the news magazine of a professional organization. It presents an argument that informs "the problem" described in this literature review. News articles and opinion pieces, however, are not considered scholarship (or "literature") in many fields, as they do not undergo a rigorous peer-review process.

"The literature" on a topic may include books written by scholars or experts, as in this case.

Paradis, J., Schneider, P., & Duncan, T. S. (2013). Discriminating children with language impairment among English-language learners from diverse first-language backgrounds. *Journal of Speech, Language & Hearing Research*, 56(3), 971-981. doi: 10.1044/1092-4388(2012/12-0050

Paul, R. & Norbury, C. F. (2012). Language disorders from infancy through adolescence (pp. 138). (4th ed.) St. Louis, MS: Mosby Inc.

Pavelko, S. L. & Owens, R. E. (2017). Sampling utterances and grammatical analysis revisited (SUGAR): New normative values for language sample analysis measures. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Peña, E. D., Gillam, R. B., & Bedore, L. M. (2014). Dynamic assessment of narrative ability in English accurately identifies language impairment in English language learners. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 57(6), 2208-2220. doi: 10.1044/2014_JSLHR-L-13-0151

Pieretti, R. A., & Roseberry-McKibbin, C. (2016). Assessment and intervention for English language learners with primary language impairment: Research-based best practices. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 37(2), 117-128. Retrieved from: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1525740114566652>

Plante, E., & Vance, R. (1994). Selection of preschool language tests: A data-based approach. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 25 15-24.

Rice, M. L., & Wexler, K. (1996). Toward tense as a clinical marker of specific language impairment in English-speaking children. *Journal of Speech & Hearing Research*, 39(6), 1239. doi:10.1044/jshr.3906.1239

Rice, M., Wexler, K., & Cleave, P. (1995). Specific language impairment as a period of extended optional infinitive. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 38, 850–863. doi:10.1044/jshr.3804.850

Rosa-Lugo, L. I., Rivera, E., & Rierson, T. K. (2010). The role of dynamic assessment within the response to intervention model in school-age English language learners. *Perspectives on School-Based Issues*, 11(3), 99-106. doi: 10.1044/sbi11.3.99

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 300.306 (2006).

The Nation's Report Card (2015). National Assessment of Educational Progress. Retrieved from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2015/#reading/groups?grade=4

U.S. Department of Education. (2016, September 23). U.S. department of education releases guidance on English learners. Retrieved from <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/us-department-education-releases-guidance-english-learners>

The author of this literature review uses several government sources—a piece of legislation, a national assessment, and a press release—to provide background on her topic.