

The suggested format (to be finalized with your committee)

- I. Introduction and statement of your topic/problem
 - a. Identify/describe the problem or phenomena, i.e., the “dependent” variable you are focusing on in your exam. Explain to the reader why this an important issue worth paying attention to
 - b. Identify/describe your key “independent” variable(s), i.e., factors believed to cause/contribute to the problem or phenomena you are writing about
- II. Review what is known, empirically, about the relationship between the “dependent” and “independent” variables. Identify gaps in our understanding of this relationship

Things to keep in mind

 - a. Choose a topic that can be analyzed from different perspectives
 - b. Choose a topic that is sufficiently focused as to be manageable in a paper of this length
 - c. It can be helpful to frame the topic as a specific research question, such as “How does A relate to or predict B” [e.g., how does volunteering affect health?]
 - d. Review titles of recent exams for ideas
- III. Drawing from the literature, describe theoretical perspectives and conceptual approaches that have been used to understand the problem
 - a. Description of the theoretical perspectives/conceptual frameworks
 - b. Basic principles and assumptions of each
- IV. Describe what each theoretical perspective/conceptual framework identified has to say about your topic
 - a. This section is based on the empirical research literature, but the focus of the discussion is on the conceptual issues rather than exclusively documenting the empirical findings
 - b. Indicate how each theoretical perspective/conceptual framework contributes to an enhanced understanding of the relationship that you are looking at
 - c. When discussing the applicability of each theoretical perspective/conceptual framework, you will integrate empirical findings conducted specifically on the relationships you are focusing on, in addition to other analogous literature.
 - d. Consider the direct impact of factors identified by the theories/conceptual frames you are looking at in addition to potential mediating and moderating relationships, as appropriate

e. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of each theoretical perspective/conceptual framework with respect to your topic

V. Compare and contrast the theoretical perspectives/conceptual frameworks identified

a. What similarities, if any, exist across the theories/frames

b. What differences, if any, exist across the theories/frames

VI. Integrate

a. If an integration is possible, explain what that looks like (typical)

b. If an integration is not possible—if the perspectives/frames essentially offer competing or fundamentally differing views of the world—then explain that (rare)

c. Offer a conceptual model (in figure form) illustrating the processes at work. In the model identify specific factors drawn from the theoretical frameworks/conceptual frames that relate to your topic. Focus on theoretically/conceptually relevant components of the model

d. Describe direct relationships among the variables in the model, in addition to proposed mediating and moderating effects

e. Discuss and justify how the emergent model relates to both pertinent empirical research and theories/conceptual frames

f. Offer and justify a limited number of hypotheses about your topic (3 or 4 are sufficient). Make sure that the hypotheses are drawn from and consistent with the relationships you have described in your conceptual model, based on the theoretical perspectives you have discussed. You might structure your hypotheses as follows: “It is hypothesized that x is positively related to y, all else being equal”; “It is hypothesized that x is inversely related to y, all else being equal”; “It is hypothesized that z moderates the relationship between x and y, all else being equal”; “It is hypothesized that z mediates the relationship between x and y, all else being equal.”

VII. Conclusion.

a. The conclusion should extend beyond summarization.

b. Discuss implications for theory and future research