TESOL MA PROJECT GUIDELINES

1. Purpose of the MA Project

To measure your ability to write an academic literature review about a topic in TESOL, where you show that you can analyze a topic critically from a number of perspectives, supporting your assertions with evidence in the research literature and with concrete information gained through your teaching or language learning experiences.

2. Literature Review Prompt

Write a review of the literature on a topic of your choice within TESOL. Once you have chosen your topic, you should read widely on the topic and construct a research question that can be addressed within 25 pages. For example, you may ask: 1) Do graphic organizers facilitate students' comprehension of expository texts? (2) What factors need to be taken into consideration when using graphic organizers in reading instruction? You must have your topic and question approved by an advisor. Your review should provide a coherent answer to your research question by (1) synthesizing the relevant themes or perspectives in the literature, and (2) offering an analysis and evaluation/critique of that literature.

To effectively synthesize, your review should not be a mere regurgitation of the literature. Rather than a one-by-one summary of each article, organize your review around your research question(s) by presenting the relevant themes (e.g., perspectives, categories, findings, contradictions) in the literature. Provide transitions between themes. The purpose of including each article should be clear and related to the organizational structure of your review. It is not always necessary, for example, to discuss all study participants in detail. What is relevant from each article hinges upon your research question(s).

In analyzing and evaluating the literature, you could, for example, discuss (1) whether the methodology bolstered or compromised the results, or (2) how the findings compare with those of other studies or what you have experienced in your own teaching and language learning.

Although there is no single "recipe" of guidelines for organizing a literature review. However, the following is a list of essential components:

(1) An introduction in which you clearly state your question and rationale, and outline the organization of your review.

---

1 Students may petition to conduct an empirical study instead. If interested, please write a letter to your advisor detailing your preparation for conducting empirical research. Permission is occasionally granted on an individual basis.
(2) A synthesis and evaluation/critical review of relevant studies that respond to your research question.

(3) A conclusion in which you summarize your main points, express your take on the literature, and discuss the potential implications of your review or the need for future research.

In addition to the three components outlined above, your paper will be evaluated on the quality of the organization and the quality of the writing (i.e., a formal academic essay with APA referencing protocols).

Your paper should be written in formal academic register. It is very important that it be free of grammatical and mechanical errors, misspellings and punctuation errors. Be sure to use spell check, grammar check, and proofread the copy personally (and have someone else proofread it as well). Your paper should include in-text references and a bibliography. Make sure you know how to cite both paraphrased material and direct citations. Use the APA Style Sheet. It is highly recommended that you show your paper to your colleagues for constructive feedback before you submit it.

Please observe the following in formatting the MA Project:

a. Page limit (not including the bibliography): 20-25

b. Your paper must be done on a computer. (e.g., no white out, erasures, etc.). Use a 12-point font, double-spaced, and one-inch margins on all sides.

c. Include a cover sheet with your MA Project. Prepare your cover sheet in the following way:
   - Title your paper: “TESOL MA Project”
   - Give your literature review a meaningful title.
   - Indicate the last four digits of your TC identification number.
   - Indicate the MA Project due date.

d. On ONLY ONE of the four copies of your MA Project that you submit, include your full name (last, first—as it should be sent to the registrar) on the cover sheet in addition to the other details listed above.

e. Do NOT include your name in a running footer/header.

f. Number your pages.

3. MA Project Eligibility
You may write the TESOL MA Project in any semester of your choice, but it is recommended that students not do so until their second year, after they have had SLA. Your paper must be written in consultation with a faculty member.

4. MA Project Orientation and Due Dates

The TESOL MA Project will be accepted twice a year—usually the last Friday in September and the last Friday in January (though this is subject to change in any given semester). An orientation is given only once per year, in the Fall semester (though this may change). Announcement of time and place of the orientation meeting and the due date with instructions will be posted on TC_TESOL/AL listserv.

**Due date | Fall 2011**
---
**MA TESOL Project | Friday, September 30th @ 5:00 pm**

a. **No late papers will be accepted.** ALL projects submitted after the due date will be scored in the following submission period—no exceptions.

b. **DO NOT** submit any project either below or above the 20-25 page limit (not including the bibliography). Any project not in compliance with the page limit will be returned to be resubmitted in the following submission period—no exceptions.

c. **FOUR COPIES** of your project should be placed in the MA Project Coordinator's mailbox in 316 Zankel no later than 5:00 PM on the due date. Please place these copies in an envelope with your name on the outside (last name, first name), preferred email address, and your student ID number. Please print clearly. Electronic submissions are not accepted—no exceptions.

6. Scoring of the MA TESOL Project (see also Appendix)

a. **Procedures**
   - All projects will be rated “blind” (raters do not see the student’s name).
   - Two faculty members will read each paper and rate it as “High pass” (A), “Pass” (B), or “Rewrite”, based on the MA Project Scoring Rubric.
   - In the event that two raters differ significantly on whether the literature review should receive a grade of pass or rewrite, a third rater will be asked to judge the paper and the two closest rating will be counted.

b. **Rubric**
**Content** (A, B, Rewrite) (weighted by 3)

- The literature review provides an organized, coherent, and cogent response to the question.
- The main idea is clear and treated with sophistication.
- The literature review provides support of the assertions made with:
  - Evidence in the research literature
  - Concrete examples of information gained through teaching or language learning
- The literature review provides a critical approach to the analysis with a consideration of the issues from multiple perspectives.
- The literature review shows depth and breadth of reading and thinking.

N.B” The literature review should avoid pure summarizations, absolute statements, and linear cause-effect conclusions.

**Organization** (A, B, Rewrite) (weighted by 2)

- The literature review includes an introduction which effectively orients the reader to the topic.
- The literature review includes a conclusion which not only reinforces the thesis but which also provides new insight on the main idea of the literature review.
- The literature review contains paragraphs that are separate, yet cohesive, logical units.
- The literature review demonstrates inter-paragraph cohesion.
- The literature review shows effective use of logical connectors and cohesive devices.
- The literature review contains logical headings for the different subsections.

**Language/Mechanics/Referencing** (A, B, Rewrite) (weighted by 1)

- The literature review is written in formal academic register.
- The literature review is free from grammatical and mechanical errors, misspellings and punctuation errors.
- The literature review demonstrates knowledge of the conventions for in-text referencing and writing a bibliography in the APA style.

7. **MA Project Results**

a. The results of the MA Project will be available when ALL projects have been scored. Given the logistics of the scoring procedures and the availability of the faculty, this may take up to two months.
b. The results of your MA Project will be placed in your individual student mailbox outside 316 Zankel. **Please note that results will NOT be given over the phone or via e-mail.**

c. When the results for the MA Project scoring are in, we will post a message on the TESOL/AL Listserv stating that the results are in your mailboxes. Again, please do not call in or e-mail us for your results.

d. Note that no materials relating to the TESOL MA Project (your review or your ratings) will be returned to you.

8. MA Project Rewrites

If you receive a "Rewrite," you should schedule an appointment with the faculty member(s) on your results sheet to discuss your paper. The purpose of this meeting is to synthesize the comments made by the raters about your paper and to work with you in understanding how to improve the quality of your literature review. Once you rewrite your paper, you can resubmit it at a mutually convenient date, which should be set up in consultation with the designated faculty member(s). You may only rewrite your literature review once within the same semester. Please remember that the scoring of your rewrite will go through the same scoring procedures, and this will take time.
TESOL MA PROJECT TUTORIAL

The TESOL MA Project: Literature Review
One of the purposes of this program is for you to acquire the skill of writing a literature review that deals with a topic in depth and provides a cogent critique of an aspect of the field you are interested in. What follows is an outline of what to include in this paper and some things to avoid.

The Introduction
Purpose: The introduction should provide the reader with the rationale for the question/topic you have chosen. You should make clear your reasons why you think this is a question/topic that needs to be addressed/discussed. You can also mention what prompted you to initially select this topic. You should also tell the reader how your topic/question is relevant to current research in the field.

Points to include:
- Declaration of topic/question: Clearly state your research question/topic.
- Thesis statement: Clearly and concisely state what the purpose of your review (e.g., to answer a question(s), to make an argument, etc)
- Organizing statement: Let the reader know where you are headed. Provide a cogent, concise plan of what is to follow, highlighting the main points you are going to present.

Content section(s): What to do
Purpose: This section should provide an organized, coherent and cogent response to the topic/question presented in your introduction.

Points to include:
- Organized Structure: You should impose a structure upon the literature using logical headings for the different subsections. The organizing scheme can be:
  - Chronological (subsections grouped by time period);
  - Topical (subsections grouped according to subtopics of the overall topic);
  or
  - Theoretical (subsections grouped according to a grounding theory or “school of thought”).
- A stand: Give the reader a clear evaluation and explanation of your stand on the issues discussed in the articles you’re discussing. This will be the thesis of your paper.
- Support: Give well explicated support of your thesis and the assertions you make with evidence gained through a critical reading of the research literature.
- Perspectives: Give consideration of the issues from multiple perspectives (i.e. beyond just the focus articles).

Content section(s): What to avoid
- Pure summarization. When discussing a study or critical review you do not have to cover everything that the writer mentions. Glean the points pertinent to your
question/topic and move on.
- Creating a laundry list. The description and discussion of the articles you include should not be treated separately, but should be embedded in the discussion.
- Overuse of direct quotations. Try to avoid direct quotation of commonplace thoughts or well established concepts. Only directly quote groundbreaking or especially revelatory thoughts or concepts.
- Absolute statements. Do not use expressions such as “It is a fact that…” or “It has been proven that…” unless you are 100% sure that this is the case. The TESOL/Applied Linguistics/SLA field is a large area of inquiry and there have been very few proven facts that all researchers agree on. Temper these statements by using terms such as “might,” “could,” “it appears”, “this suggests”, etc.
- Losing your voice. Do not simply present a catalog list of studies. Critique and synthesize them as you go along. Also, do not get too bogged down in one study that you miss the forest for the trees.

**Conclusion**
This section pulls everything together. It considers and critiques the current state of knowledge and research on this topic. It should:

- Reinforce your thesis by restating it
- Provide new insight on the main idea of the review. Try to avoid a mere rehash of what you have said.

**References**
Using proper citation is crucial. Use the APA style sheet or *TESOL Quarterly* as a guide for in-text and bibliographic references.
TESOL MA Project Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

How many pages must it be?
At least 20, but not more than 25, not including references (or appendices, if applicable).

How do I decide on a topic?
Choose a topic that is interesting to you. Read on the topic and do a preliminary literature search to identify and locate 5 to 10 sources that will help you formulate a research question. Then, meet with a TESOL/AL faculty member who is interested in the topic to see if this topic is acceptable, feasible, and worthwhile. This faculty member will be your MA Project advisor. If your advisor approves, you can continue researching and begin writing.

When do I begin this process?
The due dates for the MA Project are usually the last Friday in September, and the last Friday in January. Obviously, this means that you have to begin the process in the previous semester to make these due dates.

How many references are required?
While there is no set number of references required, it is expected that the review will include the most important and relevant references. 10 to 15 references is a minimum—30 might be too many. The goal is not to list a specific number of references, but rather to locate and include the relevant sources for your topic. When conducting a search, one indication that you have enough references is when you find that you are not turning up anything new or more current than what you already have.

How many of the references must be primary sources, rather than secondary sources (e.g., literature review articles or position papers)?
In the past, some students have at times relied too heavily on secondary sources, and did not include enough primary sources. This can turn the exercise into a review of the review of the literature, which is not the purpose. Often, it is useful to refer to literature reviews/position papers to identify and define the themes/perspectives/categories related to your research question, and then analyze the data-driven references to see if there is empirical support for these theories. However, there are also particular topics that are inherently theoretical in nature and lack empirical studies, such as identifying changes in theory over time, critiquing a theoretical model, or comparing and contrasting theoretical models. If you would like to write on a topic like this, you should consult with a faculty member about the possibility of doing so.

Can I cite dissertations?
Yes, dissertations are certainly appropriate, but like all other works cited, it is necessary to actually read the relevant parts of the dissertation (not just the abstract).

Sometimes it is difficult to get the original source. Is it acceptable to refer to a source that was cited in another reference (e.g., as cited in…)?
You should make every effort to access and read the primary source, rather than rely on secondary sources. If this is not feasible, then it is acceptable to use secondary citations. However, the use of too many secondary citations is problematic.

**How current must the references be?**
In general, it is important to have current references. While it is appropriate to refer to seminal publications that may be older, our field changes rapidly, and a review of current works is important.

**Where does personal experience and opinion come in?**
While it is inevitable that your personal experience and opinion will influence how you read and interpret the literature, the actual literature review should be as objective as possible. Your personal experiences are only one of the resources to be used in evaluating the literature—this exercise is not a thought piece or a reaction paper. Drawing on your opinion or experiences is most appropriate in shaping your research question and providing a rationale for your topic, and in the introduction and the conclusion, but the sections in which you review studies should be reported objectively.

**Is it appropriate to report on action research that I or others have conducted?**
Citing action research is acceptable. However, as with all data-driven studies, it is necessary to report/critique the methodology of the study, and the generalizability of the results (for quantitative studies).

**What is the appropriate register for the literature review?**
Formal, academic register is required. The use of the 2nd person “you” should not be used. The first person “I” can be used when appropriate, but it is a good idea to minimize it. Contractions should be avoided, as should slang and colloquial language.

**Can I get help from the writing center? Can I have someone else proofread the review?**
Yes, by all means. It is definitely appropriate to get help from the writing center. It is also important that someone else proofread your review. There should be no typos, language problems, APA citation issues, or grammatical errors in the paper, and thus it is important to proofread carefully, and also to have someone else proofread. However, you are responsible for the writing—you can get assistance from the writing center or a tutor, but you have to do the writing. One component of the rating scale is Language/Mechanics/Referencing, and this influences the overall mark.

**Can I use a paper that I wrote in another class?**
Yes, it is certainly appropriate to use a paper that you have written to be the basis for your research question, and the beginning of your literature review. However, it will be necessary to expand the review. You must consult with the instructor of the course in which you wrote the original paper for advisement on the appropriateness of using this paper as a springboard for the MA Project, and how best to revise and expand it.

**Can I use acronyms?**
It is appropriate to use acronyms, but be careful about overusing them. Sometimes too many acronyms can be distracting and confusing for the reader. When using acronyms, remember that the first time you use the term in your paper, you should write it out, and put the acronym in parentheses. With subsequent references to the term, use the acronym: “…this test is more common in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, so most EFL learners are familiar….“
MA PROJECT SCORING CRITERIA

Each essay will be given one of three grades: A, B, or Rewrite. A should only be used for exceptional work: any essays scored with two A’s may be considered for an award. Your assessment should be based on the following criteria.

1. CONTENT (A, B, Fail) (weighted by 3)
   - The essay provides an organized, coherent, and cogent response to the question.
   - The main idea is clear and treated with sophistication.
   - The essay provides support of the assertions made with:
     - evidence in the research literature
     - concrete examples of information gained through teaching or language learning
   - The essay provides a critical approach to the analysis with a consideration of the issues from multiple perspectives.
   - The essay shows depth and breath of reading and thinking.

   N.B.: The essay should avoid pure summarizations, absolute statements, and linear cause-effect conclusions.

2. ORGANIZATION (A, B, Fail) (weighted by 2)
   - The essay includes an introduction which effectively orients the reader to the topic.
   - The essay includes a conclusion which not only reinforces the thesis but which also provides new insight on the main idea of the essay.
   - The essay contains paragraphs that are separate, yet cohesive, logical units.
   - The essay demonstrates inter-paragraph cohesion.
   - The essay shows effective use of logical connectors and cohesive devices.
   - The essay contains logical headings for the different subsections.

3. LANGUAGE/MECHANICS/REFERENCING (A, B, Fail) (weighted by 1)
   - The essay is written in formal academic register.
   - The essay is free from grammatical and mechanical errors, misspellings and punctuation errors.
   - The essay demonstrates knowledge of the conventions for in-text referencing (including both paraphrased references and direct citations) based on the TESOL Quarterly.
   - The essay demonstrates knowledge of the conventions for writing a bibliography based on the TESOL Quarterly.