

# Annual Assessment Report

**Department: Political Science**

**Academic Year: 2021-22**

**Date of Submission: August 24, 2022**

**Department Chair: Prof. Knecht**

## I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Item:</b> continue doing good assessment work and resume your conversation about department curriculum after returning from sabbaticals;</li> </ul>	<p><b>Response:</b> Unfortunately, the Department seems to be in perpetual flux. We have long planned to discuss our curriculum, perhaps resulting in a significant overhaul of the major. However, Drs. Knecht and Covington were both on Sabbatical during the 2021-22 academic year, and Dr. Bryant was on maternity leave. We then planned to have these conversations starting in May of 2022, but Dr. Covington moved full-time to the Augustinian program for at least two years. So, our conversation is once again on hold.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Item:</b> include the entire department in interpreting the data and discussing assessment results as much as possible.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Response.</b> This year's assessment involved both current members of the Department: Drs. Knecht and Bryant.</p>
<b>Item:</b>	<b>Response:</b>
<b>Item:</b>	<b>Response:</b>
<b>Notes:</b>	

## II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

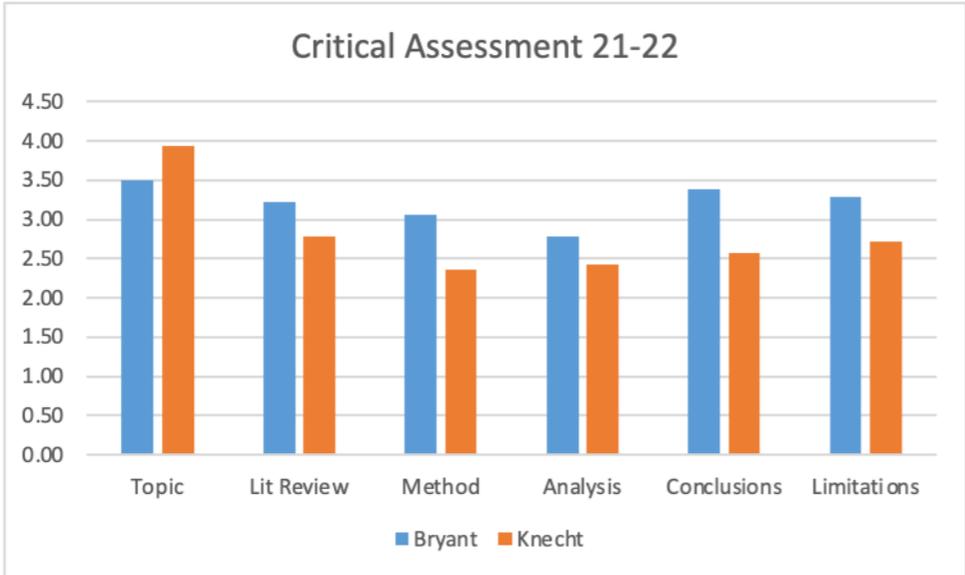
*If your department participated in the ILO assessment you may use this section to report on your student learning in relation to the assessed ILO. The assessment data can be requested from the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.*

<b>Program Learning Outcome</b>	<b>Critically Trained</b>
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	<b>Drs. Bryant and Knecht</b>

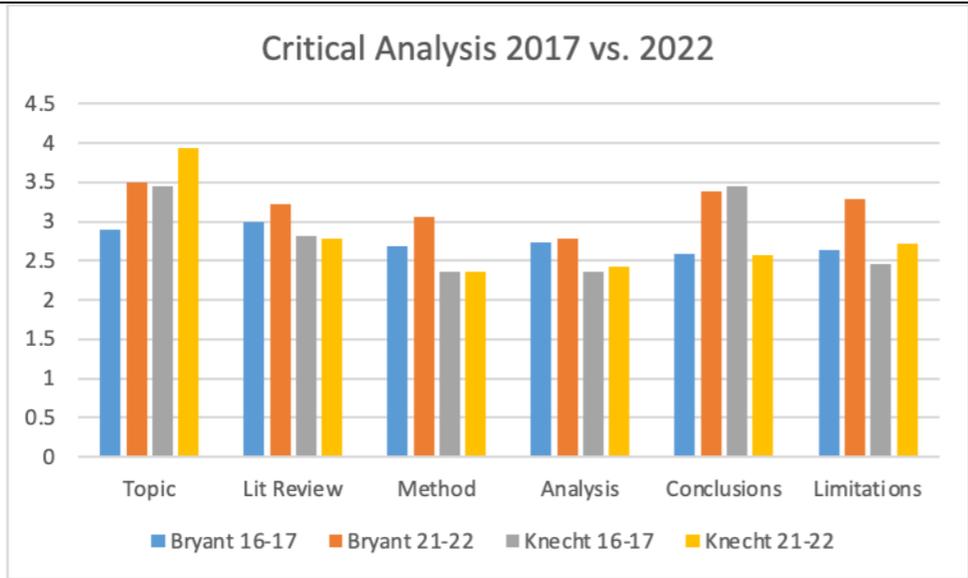
**Direct Assessment Methods**  
We assessed 32 upper-division papers from Dr. Bryant’s POL 124 (Fall 2021) and Dr. Knecht’s POL 113 (Spring 2021) courses using the AACU’s Inquiry and Analysis VALUE Rubric. We aspire to average a “3” or better on each item on the rubric.

**Indirect Assessment Methods**

**Major Findings**  
The figure below shows that our students picked good topics and reached good conclusions, but things in between were the problem. Students received the lowest marks in the “Analysis” category, which is troubling because these are analytical papers. Compared to Dr. Bryant’s students, the students in Dr. Knecht’s class picked better topics but were worse on the follow-thought (except for topic selection, however, none of these differences were statistically significant).



We thought it would be interesting to compare how these results stacked up against the last time we did this assessment in 2016-17. The figure below shows little difference over time. Dr. Bryant’s students got slightly better in every category, although the difference is trivial. Dr. Knecht’s students got better in picking topics, worse at writing conclusions, and no better or worse in all other categories. So, much to our chagrin, we can’t blame Covid.



We draw a few conclusions from these results. First, writing a good research paper is hard. Typically, we receive A papers from only our very best students. Second, teaching students how to write a good research paper is even harder. We put a ton of effort into teaching methods and writing, constantly changing our pedagogy to better reach students. The reality is that teaching the research process, statistical analysis, and good writing is a big ask for our research methods course. Third, procrastination seems to be the main culprit for the students' lukewarm scores, with general apathy running a close second. Few students take us up on our repeated invitations to office hours, and those who do generally come in at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. Those students that are on top of their papers almost always earn the highest grades. We have used various approaches to entice students to start earlier, but even having deadlines spread throughout the semester doesn't work for many students. Fourth, perhaps we should give up on the traditional research paper and do something else, such as a podcast, case study, or policy campaign. We're conflicted. On the one hand, political science is a theoretical and empirical discipline, and students are expected to be versed in these skills. They particularly need to know how to do quality research if they go on to graduate school, but very few of our students go on to get an advanced degree in political science. With many students going on to law school and into the business/non-profit world, they might be better served by learning, for example, how to host a podcast. Podcasts would certainly make our lives easier, and probably would be more useful for the students. We will continue to discuss our methods and approaches with each other and colleagues as we prepare for a review of our curriculum.

Closing the Loop Activities

Dr. Knecht will change his ways this semester. He vacillates between (a) thinking students are adults who shouldn't be micromanaged by things like intermediate due dates and mandatory peer reviews, and (b) growing increasingly intolerant of reading papers that were clearly written at the last minute. So, this year, the pendulum has swung back to hand-holding, intermediate due dates, and peer reviews. Dr. Bryant will also make some changes this year by emphasizing

	analysis more in POL and by asking students to complete a full empirical analysis in their final papers rather than just a research design. This is a big ask of sophomores, but it is clear that students need more practice completing a full research project before moving on to seminar courses. The downside is that this will require moving more quickly through other important material on causality and design.
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**Collaboration and Communication**

Drs. Bryant and Knecht collaborated on this assessment. They discussed the papers, expectations, and results. They will further discuss this report, and the PRC's comments, in a future departmental meeting.

or/and

**II B. Key Questions**

<b>Key Question</b>	
<b>Who is in Charge/Involved?</b>	
<a href="#"><u>Direct Assessment Methods</u></a>	
<a href="#"><u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u></a>	
<b>Major Findings</b>	
<b>Recommendations</b>	
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	

**III. Follow-ups**

<b>Program Learning Outcome or Key Question</b>	
<b>Who was involved in implementation?</b>	
<b>What was decided or addressed?</b>	
<b>How were the recommendations implemented?</b>	
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	

**IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects**

<b>Project</b>	
<b>Who is in Charge /Involved?</b>	
<b>Major Findings</b>	
<b>Action</b>	
<b>Collaboration and Communication</b>	

**V. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)**

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing

## VI. Appendices

- A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data
- B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data
- C. Relevant assessment-related documents (optional)

## Appendix A

# Paper Guide

POL 113: Race and Politics  
 Professor Knecht  
 Spring 2021

## Overview

You will write an original 15 to 25-page paper on race and American politics. You will also have considerable leeway in formulating a research topic and are free to choose between quantitative, qualitative, experimental, or community-engaged research projects. This guide will help you along the way.

**Accountability Groups.** There is a strong tendency to procrastinate on large research projects. To help you avoid this pitfall, you may consider joining an accountability group with other students. In your group, you will pledge to:

- turn paper assignments in on-time or face a loss of total points from your final grade.
- turn in work that warrants full points or accept a reduction in grade,
- read and comment on other students' work.

## Due Dates [all due dates are by 10 am]

January 28. Research Design -5pts  
 February 25. Literature Review -10pts  
 March 25. Research Completed [variable]  
 April 8. Rough Draft -10pts  
 April 22. Final Paper

### **Task 1. Research Design (Due Date January 28)**

For this task, you will specify your research question and describe your preliminary research design. You have considerable freedom to choose a research question of interest. However, you should be aware that formulating a good research question is always one of the most challenging tasks in writing a paper. Here are a few things to think about when thinking about a research question:

#### *Research Question*

**Pose a question, not a topic.** Think of your research as a question that requires an answer instead of a topic to be discussed. The subtle difference in mindset will alter the way you approach your research. Consider the difference between these two statements: “Did public opinion influence the Bush administration’s decision to go to war in Iraq?” vs. “My paper is on public opinion and foreign policy.” The former statement poses an interesting theoretical question that is bounded; the latter statement is vague and potentially unmanageable.

**Is my research question too broad?** Sometimes students select topics that are too broad to be answered in a term paper. For example, “what causes war?” is probably too big of a question to be covered in a mere 15 pages. A more manageable topic might be “why did the U.S. not intervene militarily in Darfur?”

**Is there enough evidence (data) to examine my topic?** Students often pose interesting research questions that cannot be answered with available data. For instance, the question of whether the U.S. tried covert operations to topple Saddam Hussein is an interesting research question that probably cannot be answered because national security concerns restrict access to files. Before you start down a road of inquiry, check to see if enough evidence is available to answer the question.

#### *Research Design*

Research design refers to the methods and evidence you will use to write your paper. Your research design should include the following:

- 1) Your research question and why it is important.
- 2) Your working thesis or set of hypotheses.
- 3) The method you will use. Will your paper be quantitative, qualitative, or experimental? Why have you selected this particular method?
- 4) The data you will use. How will you collect and analyze your data? If quantitative, which dataset will you use? If qualitative, which case studies will you conduct and why? If experimental, what is the nature of your experiment and how will you recruit subjects.

### **Task 2. Literature Review (Due Date February 25)**

There is no way of getting around the fact that doing secondary research is hard work; you will have to read a lot to get the information you need. Although you can use course readings for your paper, you are expected to conduct outside research. Your literature review should be between 4-7 pages and have at least 15 scholarly sources (Level I: peer-reviewed) read outside of class. A good literature review will (1) summarize the current literature, (2) evaluate and critique this body of knowledge, and (3) motivate your current paper. You are expected to use proper APSA formatting.

You should also be aware that there is a “hierarchy” of sources in academia, and different levels of this hierarchy are valuable for different sections of your paper.

**Level I. Peer-Reviewed Journals and Academic Books.** Your paper should rely heavily on Level I sources, especially for your literature review and argument.

At least two experts in the field have evaluated articles that appear in peer-reviewed journals. The main peer-reviewed journals in political science are: *American Journal of Political Science*; *American Political Science Review*; *International Organization*; *International Security*; *International Studies Quarterly*; *Journal of Peace Research*; *Journal of Conflict Resolution*; *International Studies Review*; *Political Science Quarterly*; *Public Opinion Quarterly*; *Security Studies*.

“Academic” books are often confused with “popular” books. Academic books are heavy on theory and evidence, while popular books appeal to a mass audience and usually play loose with theory and evidence. For instance, *Power and Interdependence* by Keohane and Nye is an academic book; *Liberalism is a Mental Disorder* by Michael Savage is a popular book. Academic books are often, but not always, published by a university press (i.e., Cambridge University Press; Yale University Press), have a university professor as the author, and cite other academic works. Rely on academic books instead of popular books.

**Level II. Magazine and Newspapers.** Magazines and newspapers are useful for providing background information and evidence but are not great sources for theory. In magazines and newspapers, there is a hierarchy of sources. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are considered the “papers of record” in the United States. *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *U.S. and World News Report* are good magazines.

Be careful of ideological bias when using newspapers and magazines. For instance, *The Weekly Standard* is conservative, and *The Progressive* is liberal.

Lexis-Nexis is a good source for newspapers and journals.

**Level III. Websites.** Although websites can be valuable sources of data and information, there is a wide variance in quality. Be very selective when researching the Internet. If your paper has a heavy dose of websites as sources, it raises a red flag. Avoid citing wikipedia.com.

### **Task 3. Formulating an Argument**

There is a large section on formulating an argument and writing a thesis statement on Canvas. Here are a few additional comments:

**Make an argument.** Your paper should have a coherent argument and should be falsifiable.

**Be original.** Your paper should try to make an original contribution to the literature. In other words, do not merely recite what others have written.

**Avoid writing a pure “opinion paper.”** Your paper should mainly be non-normative, but you can discuss the normative import of your work in the conclusion.

**Stay on track.** Many papers wander away from the main point. Write your research question and your answer on a separate piece of paper and refer to it often. If you find you are spending a lot of time on an unrelated issue, stop and refocus.

**Defeat rival hypotheses.** Foreign policy events are overdetermined, meaning that there are multiple explanations for each phenomenon. As a result, there will always be other theories and perspectives that will challenge your own. A good rhetorical technique is to anticipate objections to your work by analyzing your argument. Then try to answer these objections.

#### **Task 4. Research**

I expect you to spend significant time conducting research. You must start early, set deadlines for yourself, and complete the investigation in plenty of time to write the paper. I am happy to help you if you need assistance.

#### **Task 5. Writing your paper.**

**Rough Draft Due April 8 at 10 am; Final paper Due April 22 at 10 am**

Writing a quality paper takes a lot of work: you have to outline, write, revise, get comments from others, revise again, and then revise some more. Here is the basic outline of a research paper:

- Introduction
  - Thesis
  - Road map
- Literature Review
- Theory
- Methodology
- Results
- Discussion (optional... takes the place of a concluding section)
- Conclusions

#### **Paper Requirements**

I will grade your paper on the quality of the writing and the quality of the argument.

- The paper will be at least 15 pages.
- Use headings and subheadings as needed.
- Citations. You are free to use any acceptable form of citation (footnotes, MLA, Chicago, etc...). My personal preference is to use parenthetical notation with a bibliography. In this method of citing, you write the authors' last name, date of publication and page number with the punctuation after the parentheses (Knecht 2004: 12). If you are paraphrasing, you do not have to use quotations but do have to cite (Smith 2003: 2). "Direct quotes need to have quotation marks, and the parenthetical notation goes outside the quote" (George 2004:23). If you are communicating a finding or theory that other scholars have come up with, make sure you cite each relevant author (Bradley 1999; Jones 2004; Smith 2003). The full citation will appear in the bibliography
- Plagiarism. Do not do it. I check the authenticity of students' work. Any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please see me.
- Late work is penalized 2/3rds letter grade per day.
- All papers should be typed. Use normal margins (1") and font (12 point) and double-spaced. Include page numbers. Do not submit your paper in a binder or folder, just staple.
- A good resource on writing is: Hacker, Diana (1999). *A Writer's Reference*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Boston: Bedford/St.Martins.

## Research Paper and Presentation Guidelines

### POL 124: International Development

The research paper and presentation account for **30%** of your final grade. The paper will account for 25%, while the presentation and participation in the mini-conference will account for 5%

Overview: This is a thesis driven paper that quantitatively evaluates an aspect of development that interests you. Your paper should be driven by a strong research question for which you develop and test your own hypotheses using data. You are welcome to examine a single country, a single region, or a larger sample.

Required components of your paper include an introduction, literature review, theory section, empirical evidence, and a conclusion. Details on each of these sections are provided below.

- Introduction—This is where you “hook” your reader. You’ll need to introduce your research question in a compelling way and provide a brief overview of your argument and findings.
- Literature review—This section should summarize ***at least twelve (12) scholarly sources*** that address your research question. Think about how the articles you have chosen interact. Do they agree or disagree? Why and how? Discuss this in your paper.
- Theory/thesis and hypotheses—This is the main argument that you will be making in your paper. Your argument should offer an answer to your research question and you should be able to draw at least one hypothesis from your argument. Use other research to support your argument and address potential counterarguments.
- Data Analysis—This section should include empirical evidence testing your argument. This can be done using a variety of methods such as graphs, tables, charts, tabulations, correlations, regressions, etc. I will offer help in the computer lab to assist with questions or problems.
- Conclusion—In this section you should provide an overview of your argument and findings, highlight the importance of your research, and identify areas for future work.
- Bibliography—Please reference all sources in a properly structured bibliography adhering to the APSA Style Guide.

#### Grading and Expectations:

- Papers should:
  - Include a title page with your paper’s title, your name, an abstract, and the date
  - Be 15-20 pages in length (excluding the title page, bibliography, tables, and figures)
  - Use Times New Roman, 12pt font
  - Include page numbers
  - Include a bibliography
- Grades will be based on the quality of your research question, the execution of your analysis, and your overall writing style. Consider the following questions as you write your papers:
  - Do you introduce your topic in an intriguing way? Does your introduction make me want to read more?
  - Do you place your paper within the existing literature? Do you student cite appropriate and relevant articles in your literature review? Is the literature review well structured?
  - Do you provide a logical and coherent theoretical argument? What are the independent and dependent variables? Does the relationship you propose between them make sense?
  - Do you test your theory in a valid way? Are your variables/methods appropriate? Do you draw the correct conclusion from your analysis? Do you incorporate appropriate statistics, tables, and figures to support your conclusions?
  - Do you discuss your results in an engaging way that connects back to your broader research question?
  - Do you use proper writing style throughout the paper? Consider grammar, sentence structure, and overall flow of the paper.
  - Do you use appropriate APSA style citations and include a properly structured bibliography?
    - See: <https://psel.library.tamu.edu/assets/pdf/UsingAPSAFormat.pdf> (Links to an external site.)

Deadlines:

- Paper proposals are due on **September 29<sup>th</sup>**.
- Rough drafts are due on **December 1st**. This is a full draft of your paper that will be submitted for peer evaluations.
- Peer evaluations are due on **December 3<sup>rd</sup>**.
- Final drafts are due on **December 8th**. Your final draft should be polished and incorporate comments/suggestions from the mini-conference. Remember, you should have **at least 12 scholarly sources** in your final paper.

Presentation and Mini-Conference Expectations: For the conference, you will prepare a 7-8 minute presentation of your paper. I strongly recommend using slides. The presentation should focus on your main argument and analysis. In addition, you are expected to actively engage with other students during their presentations, and offer constructive comments and questions. **The mini-conference will take place on December 1st.**

**PLEASE SUBMIT ALL MATERIALS AS A HARD COPY AND VIA CANVAS**

# INQUIRY AND ANALYSIS VALUE RUBRIC

*for more information, please contact [value@aacu.org](mailto:value@aacu.org)*



The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

## Definition

Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.

## Framing Language

This rubric is designed for use in a wide variety of disciplines. Since the terminology and process of inquiry are discipline-specific, an effort has been made to use broad language which reflects multiple approaches and assignments while addressing the fundamental elements of sound inquiry and analysis (including topic selection, existing knowledge, design, analysis, etc.) The rubric language assumes that the inquiry and analysis process carried out by the student is appropriate for the discipline required. For example, if analysis using statistical methods is appropriate for the discipline then a student would be expected to use an appropriate statistical methodology for that analysis. If a student does not use a discipline-appropriate process for any criterion, that work should receive a performance rating of “1” or “0” for that criterion.

In addition, this rubric addresses the **products** of analysis and inquiry, not the **processes** themselves. The complexity of inquiry and analysis tasks is determined in part by how much information or guidance is provided to a student and how much the student constructs. The more the student constructs, the more complex the inquiry process. For this reason, while the rubric can be used if the assignments or purposes for work are unknown, it will work most effectively when those are known. Finally, faculty are encouraged to adapt the essence and language of each rubric criterion to the disciplinary or interdisciplinary context to which it is applied.

## Glossary

*The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.*

- **Conclusions:** A synthesis of key findings drawn from research/evidence.
- **Limitations:** Critique of the process or evidence.
- **Implications:** How inquiry results apply to a larger context or the real world.

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## **Definition**

Inquiry is a systematic process of exploring issues, objects or works through the collection and analysis of evidence that results in informed conclusions or judgments. Analysis is the process of breaking complex topics or issues into parts to gain a better understanding of them.

*Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.*

	<b>Capstone</b> 4	<b>Milestones</b>		
		3	2	
<b>Topic selection</b>	Identifies a creative, focused, and manageable topic that addresses potentially significant yet previously less-explored aspects of the topic.	Identifies a focused and manageable/doable topic that appropriately addresses relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies a topic that while manageable/doable, is too narrowly focused and leaves out relevant aspects of the topic.	Identifies and wide- and doable
<b>Existing Knowledge, Research, and/or Views</b>	Synthesizes in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.	Presents in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.	Presents information from relevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.	Presents i sources re view/app
<b>Design Process</b>	All elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are skillfully developed. Appropriate methodology or theoretical frameworks may be synthesized from across disciplines or from relevant subdisciplines.	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are appropriately developed, however, more subtle elements are ignored or unaccounted for.	Critical elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are missing, incorrectly developed, or unfocused.	Inquiry de misunderstand or theoret
<b>Analysis</b>	Organizes and synthesizes evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.	Organizes evidence to reveal important patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.	Organizes evidence, but the organization is not effective in revealing important patterns, differences, or similarities.	Lists evid and/or is
<b>Conclusions</b>	States a conclusion that is a logical extrapolation from the inquiry findings.	States a conclusion focused solely on the inquiry findings. The conclusion arises specifically from and responds specifically to the inquiry findings.	States a general conclusion that, because it is so general, also applies beyond the scope of the inquiry findings.	States an unsupport findings.
<b>Limitations and Implications</b>	Insightfully discusses in detail relevant and supported limitations and implications.	Discusses relevant and supported limitations and implications.	Presents relevant and supported limitations and implications.	Presents l but they a unsupport