The TESOL MA Literature Review

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 sections: 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);
  - 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 sections: 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.