

17.869 Research Design Project: More Guidelines

Literature Review

The first step in your assignment was the selection of your research topic. The next step is to identify and review the relevant literature on your topic.

To conduct your literature review, you should first identify work that has been done on your topic by social scientists. A good way to begin is to use JSTOR, an archive of scholarly journals (<http://www.jstor.org/>), to identify recent articles on your topic. You should also consult BARTON and VERA library databases. Another good source is the Web of Science search engine (<http://isi6.newisiknowledge.com/portal.cgi?DestApp=WOS&Func=Frame>). I expect you to refer to at least 12 books and/or articles in your literature review (though you may consult as many sources as you wish).

Once you have read the relevant literature, I want you to prepare a 15 page review of the literature. The paper should be **doubled spaced with one-inch margins**. Do not use fonts that are smaller than 12 point.

You should begin your paper with a brief statement of your research topic and a description of its importance. Look to the feedback you received from your TAs to guide your research statement. You should then move to an integrated description of the material you have read. Do not structure your paper as a series of book reports or article abstracts. The literature review should show that you understand how to find scholarly literature on the topic that interests you, and relate that literature to your research question. Your goal is to describe what is already known about your topic, how it has been researched by others, and how your question differs from that of previous researchers.

The literature review is due at **the beginning of class** in Lecture 9. The standard late penalty applies – papers will be dropped 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late (with a “day” starting 1 minute after class begins.) So, for example, if you turn in paper that would have received an A- after class, your grade will be a B+. If you turn the same paper in on Monday, your grade will be a B-.

Please bring **two copies** of your literature review to class in Lecture 9. One copy will be graded by your TA. The other copy will be reviewed by the writing program faculty members to help you with your writing style and structure.

Final Paper

The final project is a 20-25 page research proposal, due at the beginning of class in Lecture 13. This proposal should include a revised version of the literature review – with revisions based on feedback from the writing program faculty, your TA, and from your classmates during your oral presentation – and a new section that proposes an original research design.

The literature review should flow into your specific research question. You should place the research question in the context of the literature that you reviewed. Some questions that might guide your effort are:

- After your review of the existing literature, what outstanding question do you have that you could answer?
- Why is this question interesting?
- How will the answer to the question further our collective knowledge in the field?
- How will the answer to the question help policymakers or scholars understand the effectiveness of various techniques?

Once you have established your research question, you are ready to describe how you intend to answer that question. Begin by clearly stating your hypothesis (or hypotheses) and describe how your hypothesis is related to theories in the literature you reviewed.

Your task for the rest of the paper is to describe how you will evaluate your hypothesis against data. You are not required to actually complete the data analysis you describe in your research design, but you should think through the hard questions involved with any data collection project.

First, choose a particular method of analysis (experiments, case study, comparative case study, or large-N) and describe why you have chosen that particular methodology. Think about which method is most appropriate for your research question. You may decide that you need to employ multiple methods.

Next, describe the data collection process, paying special attention to questions of case selection and measurement. Some questions you might consider are:

- How have other scholars defined your variables of interest? How have they measured those variables?
- How should you select your cases for analysis?
- How will you control for threats to internal and external validity?
- What problems might you encounter in your data collection effort? How might you overcome those problems?

Finally, describe how you would analyze your data. Think about the analyses you would need to perform in order to:

- Know whether your explanation is wrong (to disconfirm your hypotheses);
- Make a compelling case that your argument is right, and
- Dismiss the major alternative plausible hypotheses.