

SOCIOLOGY 332: Critical Literature Review Assignment

Quick Overview

The review involves investigating the research that has been done on a particular topic and then summarizing *and evaluating* what you have found. The important task in this kind of assignment is to organize your material clearly and synthesize it for your reader. A good review does not just summarize the literature, but looks for patterns and connections in the literature and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of what others have written on your topic. You want to help your reader see how the information you have gathered fits together, what information can be most trusted (and why), what implications you can derive from it, and what further research may need to be done to fill in gaps. Doing so requires considerable thought and organization on your part, as well as thinking of you as an expert on the topic. You need to assume that, even though you are new to the material, you can judge the merits of the arguments you have read and offer an informed opinion of which evidence is strongest and why.

Requirements (All must be met)

- All Due Dates below; each of the first four due dates missed will result in a two-percentage point reduction in your final grade. Missing the final due date = 5-point reduction *per day*.
- 12 – 15 double-spaced typed pages; 12-point font; 1" margins all around.
- Title, author, and abstract
- ASA Reference Style Guidelines (on D2L)
- 10+ citations from 1995 – Present
- Scholarly, peer-reviewed articles, monographs, books
- Full Reference section, ASA style
- Grading will be based on organization, critical evaluation, writing style, and originality. This paper is worth 30% of your final grade.

Details & Guidance

The critical literature review is a detailed, original, and integrated review of scholarly articles all related to the same topic within the sociology of the family. Although the popular press includes a great deal of material about issues covered in class, the articles chosen for the review must come from high quality, social science or policy related journals. Students are encouraged to use the various indices available through the MSU library computer system.

The review must include a description of each article such that the reader becomes aware with the article's major question, methodology, results, and conclusions. This description CANNOT simply repeat the abstract. The review must compare and contrast the articles. This should include the extent to and ways in which the conclusions of the articles are in agreement or disagreement, and other research questions that could emerge from the reading of these articles. It is fine to merge the summaries of the articles with the comparisons of the articles; this procedure often makes the paper flow more smoothly. Your overall goal is to analyze and organize previous thinking and research, and identify its major strengths and weaknesses as they pertain to your topic.

The scope of your literature review will vary depending on the topic. For example, you may want to conduct a narrow review, say focusing on income and divorce and then discuss varying patterns based on other variables such as race and presence of children. Or, you may want to review the literature on divorce and then choose several specific links: income and divorce, race and divorce, age at marriage and divorce, children and divorce. Whatever you choose make sure you review the current work that specifically addresses your topic. However, if you may select a topic on which very little has been written you may have to broaden your search and concepts. I strongly recommend that you look over recent issues of the *Annual Review of Sociology* to see how research papers are organized as a critical literature review. I am, of course, available throughout the entire process.

Due Dates—Upload all documents into their respective D2L Assignment folder.

- a) JANUARY 31: Research Topic. A paragraph describing the specific topic of your critical literature review. It is OK if you decide to change this topic as the course progresses, but you will need to do so well before March 1.
- b) MARCH 1: Preliminary reference list (ASA Style).
- c) MARCH 30: Basic outline of paper. You can use bulleted style. Each topic and sub-topic should have citations attached to them.
- d) APRIL 6: Refined and final reference list (ASA Style).
- e) APRIL 25: Final Paper due by 5 PM.

****Please do not wait until the last minute to meet these deadlines. Treat this project as a semester-long assignment and not something that can be put-off until the final weeks of the semester.**