

THE PROCESS OF WRITING A LITERATURE REVIEW (Suggestions from Dr. Cameron Lippard)

That's right, folks! Writing is a process and CANNOT BE DONE OVERNIGHT. You need to figure out strategies that will help you write an effective literature review that does what I suggested above. Here are some tips:

1. **Select a Research Question/Topic:** To start any good paper, you need to pick a topic. Usually I encourage students to pick something they are really curious about since you will be spending some time with it and you don't want to get bored. You should also consider picking a topic that you heard about in a class or has come in as a current event. Remember, any topic is possible but you may have to narrow focus to complete this task of writing a paper about it in a semester.
2. **Research, Research, Research:** To write a literature review, you have to find what other scholars have found out about your topic. Sociologists rely on a mix of scholarly research articles, books, and Internet sources to provide the information they need to write intelligently about any topic in question. And, no. You are not the first to do this research; so, there are plenty of articles and books out there about your topic. Consider using the following ASU Library website to get you started in finding the materials you need: [ASU Library Research Resources for Sociology Students](#)
3. **Create an annotated bibliography:** This is a list of all sources that you have found (and vetted with your instructor) that concerns research and theory on your topic. This bibliography should give a reference of the article (so that you remember how to cite it) and a brief description of the source in question to refresh your memory. It would look something like this:

Adelman, Robert, Cameron Lippard, Charles Jaret, and Lesley Williams Reid. 2005. "Jobs, Poverty, and Earnings in American Metropolises: Do Immigrant Really Hurt the Economic Outcomes of Blacks?" *Sociological Focus* 38:261-285.

This research article examines whether the increase of a foreign-born population in a U.S. metropolitan area helps or hinders the economic outcomes of African Americans. Using a statistical analysis of U.S. Census data, the authors find when levels of immigration raise, they can have a positive impact on Blacks' income levels and unemployment rates. However, they also find that when the percentage of immigrants increases to more than 14% in a given metropolitan area, the positive effects of immigrants' begin to fade. The authors conclude that it is possible that foreign-born groups may challenge Blacks' economic success when there are enough to compete in a given occupation or industry that have similar skills or represent a cheaper labor source. This source is helpful in understanding that the economic impact of immigration is not necessarily clear, especially when we consider that it may be more harmful for other minority groups that have similar education and skills, or enter occupations or industries that immigrants do.

4. **Sketch out an outline:** Now that you have your research and HAVE READ THROUGH IT, you should now be able to write down the common discussions, findings, and conclusions of your topic suggested in the sources you collected. Take these commonalities (or even differences) and write them into a "topic-driven" outline (an outline that attempts to report about a topic, providing specific points). I would suggest that you draw up an outline that:
 - o Points out the common arguments and findings from all of the sources.

- Points out the methods and theoretical arguments used.
- Points out any holes you find the existing research or theoretical arguments concerning your topic.
- Points out the application of other researchers' arguments and findings to inform your particular research project.
- Consider listing your citations of specific sources in the outline that you found for each point to help you write this into a literature review later.

Here is an example based on the topic of immigration and its impact on black employment:

I. Increase in Immigration in the U.S.

- a. Latino concentrations (Carson and Bennett 2001; Thompson 2003)
- b. Movement to new U.S. cities like Atlanta (Bayor 2001; Zhou 1999)
- c. Fears of increased immigration – anti-immigrant attitudes (Lippard and Gallagher 2009)

II. Problems African Americans face in Employment

- a. Split Labor Market Theory (Bonacich 1972)
- b. Mismatch Issues (Wilson 1978, 1999)
- c. Discriminatory Hiring Practices (Moss and Tilly 2001)

III. Research suggesting a Negative Economic Impact of Immigration for Blacks

- a. Immigrants lower wages (Borjas 1999)
- b. Immigrants take unskilled labor positions (Borjas 2003; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Wilson 1978).

IV. Research suggesting a Postive Economic Impact of Immigration for Blacks

- a. Creates more jobs (Parcel 1990).
- b. Increases incomes (Adelman et al. 2005)

V. Problems or “Holes” in the Research

- a. No clear argument of whether immigrants are good or bad.
- b. No one has considered the percent of immigrants necessary to tip the scales of benefits

VI. Application to my Research

- 5. Start writing in “chunks”:** Once you have your outline, start writing each subsection (e.g., Roman numeral I) separately. Make sure that each paragraph in these chunked out sections have a good first sentence that represents a topic sentence (what you intend to argue/point out in the paragraph) and three to four sentences that support the topic sentence. Here is where you may want to “synthesize” source discussions about the specific points. At this point, don't worry about transitions between subsections but just get the information down, covering the points you wanted to highlight based on your outline. Check out the paragraph below, which is an excerpt from a literature review. The highlighted sentences in yellow should be topic sentences and notice the blue highlights are a synthesis of several researchers' theories or findings on this topic.

Scholars studying American racism since the 1960s have made an effort to define racism as a persistent and entrenched American ideology that denies “non-whites” resources that “whites” receive (see Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2006; Feagin 2001; Feagin and Vera 1995; Omi and Winant 1997). More specifically, as suggested by Omi and Winant's (1997:162) racial formation theory, American racism is a socio-historical and structuralized ideology that encourages social actions that “create or reproduce structures of

domination based on essentialist categories of race.” Thus, racism is about perpetuating “white” superiority by using and infusing racial categories into American social institutions and policies to promote, sustain, and protect White dominance.

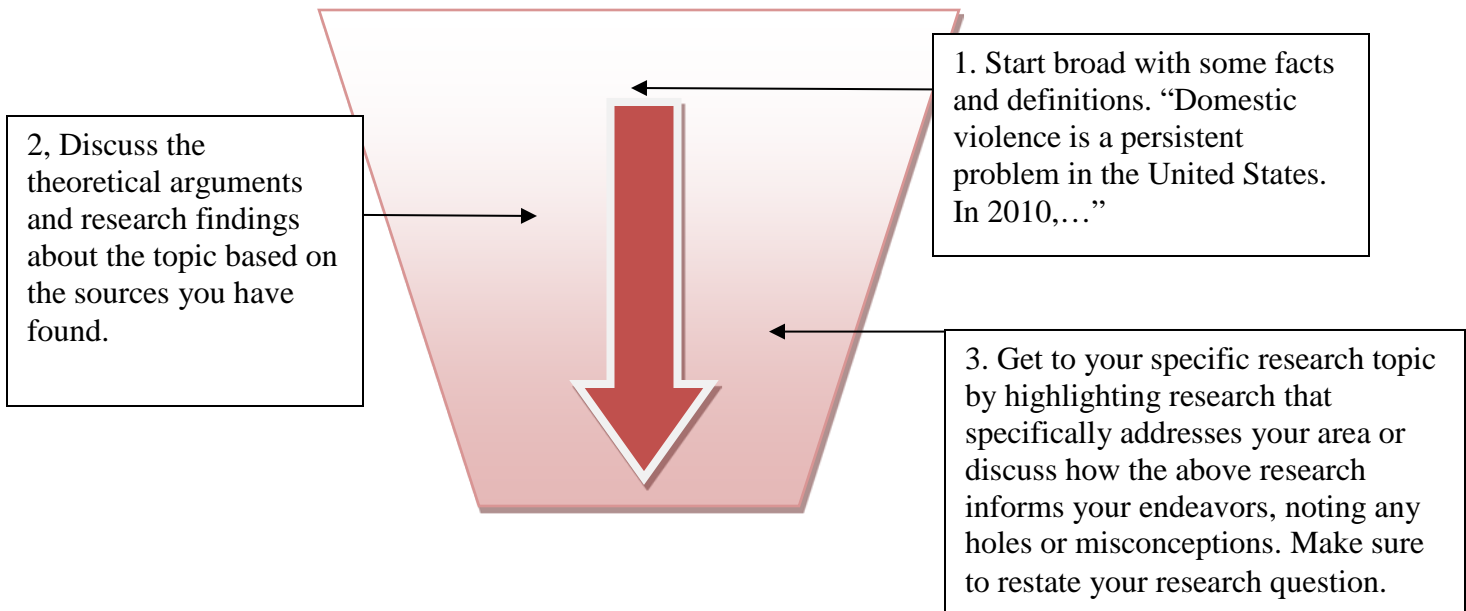
Omi and Winant (1997) also point out the mechanisms of racism today. One mechanism is the continued use of “racialization” to assign racial meaning or identity to all social groups, especially those groups that were not racially classified. For instance, in recent years, the U.S. Census has created an almost new racial category in America for all Spanish-speaking individuals – “Hispanic” or “Latino” (see Rodriguez 2000). This process of attaching value to subjective racial assumptions has happened for all groups, and these categories are constantly rearticulated and made fluid to ensure “whites” stay on top.

While there are differences, much of the separation between the two concepts is because scholarship on race relations and racism has not “kept pace” with the rapid diversification of the U.S. population (Lee, Bean, Batalova, and Sandu 2003:45). As of 2007, the U.S. foreign-born population had reached 38 million people of which 31% came from Mexico and another 24% were from South and East Asia (Pew Hispanic Center 2009). Also, Passel and Cohn (2009) estimate that there are an additional 12 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. Many of the new immigrants have settled in new places unaccustomed to significant demographic shifts due to immigration (Anrig and Wang 2006; Massey 2008; Frey 2006; Furuseth and Smith 2006). This is especially true for many southern states that saw thousands of Latino immigrants rapidly move in within the last twenty years to take advantage of jobs and a lower cost of living (see Furuseth and Smith 2006; Light 2006; omitted *forthcoming*; Massey 2008).

Thus, until recently, many scholars and commentators still view, define, and interpret race relations and discrimination with a “lens of black and white racism” (Galindo and Vigil 2006:421). While serving as the central organizing principle of race relations in the U.S. for hundreds of years (Lee et al. 2003), this limited definition does not recognize the long history of racial discrimination that many Asians and Latinos have faced (Sánchez 1997). For instance, Chinese and Mexican immigrants and citizens were forcibly removed from their homes due to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the Mexican Repatriation movement from 1929-1939.

More recently, Asians and Latinos have faced more hate crimes (Ibish 2003; Lopez and Livingston 2009), and have become subjects for current racist and nativist critiques (Espenshade 1995; Espenshade and Hemstead 1996; Jaret 1999; Passel 2005; Portes and Rumbaut 2006; Sánchez 1997). For instance, recent discussions within the Ku Klux Klan have now identified Latinos as the new threat to White America (see www.kkk.bz). Even recent legislation in new immigrant destination states like Georgia, Arizona, and North Carolina all identified Mexicans as their “immigrant problem” (see Anrig and Wang 2006; Kingsolver 2007). Latinos have faced discrimination in employment, housing, and accessing public education, which has recently surfaced in new destination states as well (see omitted, *forthcoming*).

6. **“Funnel” IT!!:** Remember, when you start writing this literature review you may need to start with some broad statements and facts about your topic and whittle it down to your own research question/topic. Think of it like the diagram below:



7. Insert transitions and clean up the sentences: Go back to your first draft and clean it up. Make sure that when you read it out loud (Yes, read it out loud) that sentences don't sound too awkward, go on forever, or never really say anything important. Look for spelling mistakes and make sure it has a clear flow.

8. Do your in-text citations correctly: There is nothing worse than getting kicked out of school for plagiarizing your paper and this could even mean you just forgot to do in-text citations. Therefore, do in-text citations and provide a reference page that lists the sources you actually used. You should list sources you never used in the literature review. Finally, follow the ASA style guidelines provided and make sure you follow these simple rules of citation:

- **ALWAYS CITE IF YOU ARE USING SOME ONE'S ELSES WORK OR FINDINGS, REGARDLESS IF YOU PARAPHRASE THEM.**
- Always provide a citation for direct quotes and when using results reported in a research journal.
- **USE the citation guidelines suggested and follow them to the letter.**
- When in doubt, always provide a citation. Citing too frequently is better than not citing at all.

9. Draft it AGAIN!!!!!!: The sad thing about writing is that there are always ways to improve it. Even Stephen King finds mistakes and sloppy writing in his books well after 1 million people have read them. You need to go through at least two drafts **BEFORE** saying it is done. Please try and you will see a difference in your writing quality.