**COM 290 Literature Review**

The ultimate goal in this class is to not just teach you about theories, but also to show you how to implement them to back up research you propose – just like we’ve been reading in our application pieces. In other words, this is like the first part of what you’ll be doing for senior thesis (Research Methods should teach you the second part). Therefore, we’ll work on how to do background research from articles and write it up for a formal APA paper. For the final paper in this class, you’ll do a Lit Review – something researchers actually use – *not* a Review of Literature – which is just a summary paper with no real final goals.

A Lit Review – when properly done – is a chance to apply the principles of a theory to your own interests. You’re basically laying the groundwork for a potential study to be conducted in the future (and yes, you’re usually allowed to recycle these – with fine-tuning – for your senior thesis).

We’ll break this project up into two parts to keep it manageable. But it’ll go fast so start as soon as possible!

***Step One: Compile & Read Sources!***

1. First, you need to pick a communication topic to study. Perhaps choose the theory from class that most resonated with you – the one that “clicked” with how you see the world and that you feel would be good to apply to a topic you’d be interested in knowing more about. Or start with a comm question that you’re interested in knowing more about & then pick a theory that explains it best.
2. Once you have your theory and your topic chosen, then start searching for articles. At this point in your college career, we’re assuming you’re familiar with using the search engines on the library page. Another great resource to use is Google Scholar (not the regular Google, though). Once you start searching by topic and theory, then you do what we call “pulling” your articles. That means getting copies of them. The library has remote access for you to get pdfs of all articles they have – just go through our library website to get these.
3. Sift and sort. This process can be overwhelming, especially if you choose a theory or topic that’s been done a million times. The goal here is to really narrow down your topic to a specific one. So rather than “nonverbal communication” according to the Hyperpersonal Model, I’d want to do “generational differences/similarities among Connecticut residents in nonverbal signals in maintaining long-distance romantic relationships online” & the Hyperpersonal Model. See how much more specific the second one is with *who* I’m studying, *what aspect* of a general area of comm I’m studying, *in what* *specific situation* I'm limiting it to? You need to do that as well. That will help you only “pull” and read the articles that are most relevant to your topic and avoid broader ones.
   1. Remember, you don’t just want to read articles that deal with your exact topic. If they existed, then I wouldn’t need to study them further, right? So it’s good to not find your *exact* study already done. Instead, I might find an article on how old people versus young people use the internet; and an article on how the Hyperpersonal Model has been applied to pre-existing relationships; and an article on long-distance relationships in general; etc. etc. – all of these would be good for me to then incorporate into my larger paper when I make my argument about what’s already been done and where my new study will fit into the existing literature.
4. Read! You can skip/skim the methods/results/stats stuff because you’re really interested in how they make their argument and what they actually found. This is why you’re sticking to *primary*, *scholarly* sources – because you want to cite the original studies/papers like we did in our lectures – not people who just cited them (like in textbooks or citing me for my ppt slides).

To make sure you’re on the right track for your final lit review and to help you with your APA, you’ll turn in a “finalized” draft of your paper’s reference list before the paper is actually due. I will evaluate the contents to make sure you’re on the right track. I’ll also give you feedback on the APA citations so you can make final revisions before you submit it with your actual Lit Review at the end.

1ST REFERENCE LIST IS WORTH 25 POINTS AND IS DUE \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ .

(check your schedule)

***Step Two: Write!***

A lit review does NOT simply go through each source and summarize what they did/found. That would be a Review of Literature or an Annotated Bibliography – something researchers rarely do/use; more often, those are done just for classes to learn the skill. Instead, a Lit Review is like the first part of a research paper. You can think of it like a proposal to actually do the research you want or to give the reader a great reason to keep reading the problem you want to solve. This means that the skill you’ve been practicing in your theory application journals (with the in-text citations) is the one you’ll be using here. See? I don’t have you do useless stuff along the way! ☺

Your paper should have the following parts to it:

1. Intro
2. The beginning of your paper should be brief. You give us (1) some attention-getting info (stats, statement, finding, etc.) about your specific topic (X), (2) make a declarative statement about the importance of studying X, and (3) briefly list the main points that will be in your paper. That’s it. Then you move to the next section.
3. Rationale/Importance
4. You need to build a case to the reader that your topic is important to study – a “warrant for investigating your construct”. Why does your topic deserve research attention? Does it affect a lot of people/situations? Or some people/groups very seriously? How so/in what ways does it affect them? How would understanding this “problem” better make a contribution to building certain theories, to helping people, to understanding something better?
5. This is also the section where you’ll want to clarify any key concepts – explain them in your own words like I do in lectures, but make sure to credit the originators of those concepts.
6. Background/Theory
7. This is the section where you’ll apply the theory. So you’ll give a brief overview of whatever theory it is you’re using to “frame” your study. Do the “in a nutshell” thing and cover the main concepts it contains so that the reader knows what they mean when you use the terms later. You’re basically showing the reader that the thing you want to study can be really well explained in terms of the theory you’re applying.
8. Synthesize (remember, you’re not just listing other studies and what they did/found!) what’s already been done in areas related to your topic. Remember, you want to say this all in your own words and then bring in the sources/studies to back up your points – more like examples (like I do with the application readings in our class) of what you want to say. This is where you’ll show what we already know about certain areas (nonverbals online, for example) and what we still need to look at in the thing you’re proposing we study. That will lead you into the final component of a Lit Review…
9. Research Question/s
10. At the latter part of your paper, you’ll basically be saying, look, X is important (Rationale) and what we already know (Background) about some areas related to it tells us that the next thing to discover is … and that’s where you’ll formally state your RQ – the question you’re testing and want to study with your project. This is the last part of a Lit Review. The very next section we’d see in a formal paper would be the Methods section (where you explain how you did your study). So for this project, the last thing we’ll see in your paper is the RQ. Then the References list should start on the following page. That’s it.

LIT REVIEW IS WORTH 100 POINTS AND IS DUE AT THE END OF CLASS.

DEETS

* You only need to use ONE theory from class to frame your study.
* There is no page guideline set in stone, but to really conquer this project well, I would anticipate the actual text (writing parts, not including cover or Reference pages) would be around 7-12 double-spaced pages (Times New Roman 12-font), depending on how concisely you write.
* You should incorporate a minimum of *at least* 15 primary (i.e., the study you’re citing was written/conducted by the author you’re reading – not just mentioned by them), scholarly (journals or actual books by primary author/s – not compilations or textbooks) sources in your paper. Of course, you can use sources that are not primary or scholarly, but they won’t count in the minimum tally. You’re welcome to re-use the primary sources from class, obviously, since those are the “seminal” works on the theories.
  + Remember, your Reference page only lists sources that you actually cited in-text. So anything you incorporate needs to be mentioned in the text (last name, year) in paraphrased form.

*\*All of the Application Readings we’ve been using in this course provide great examples of what your paper should look like too. Basically, it’s everything from the first words through to where the Methods starts. The only differences for you all will be that yours will likely be shorter, only need one main RQ (rather than a ton of individual testable ones), and probably won’t incorporate quite so many sources at this time.*