

WRITING IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Adrienne Lynett, Writing Consultant
UCLA Graduate Writing Center



Topics Covered

- Reading in the social sciences
- Writing papers in the social sciences
- Managing your projects



Reading Strategically

- Determine what kind of article you're reading from the outset
 - Theoretical or Empirical?



Reading Strategically

- Theoretical vs. Empirical
 - Theoretical: intent is to advance knowledge in the field through new conceptual frameworks
 - Relies on existing concepts and theories
 - Manuscripts will include introduction/background information, detailed explanations of theory, and argument for justification of new theory



Reading Strategically

- **Theoretical vs. Empirical**
 - Theoretical: intent is to advance knowledge in the field through new conceptual frameworks
 - Relies on existing concepts and theories
 - Manuscripts will include introduction/background information, detailed explanations of theory, and argument for justification of new theory
 - **Empirical: intent is to answer a specific research question**
 - Relies on data
 - Two major types: quantitative or qualitative
 - Manuscripts include specific sections and information: introduction, methods, results, and discussion



Reading Strategically

- Determine what kind of article you're reading from the outset
 - Theoretical vs. Empirical



Reading Strategically

- Determine what kind of article you're reading from the outset
 - Theoretical vs. Empirical
- Learn the geography of the text
 - Section headers



Reading Strategically

- Determine what kind of article you're reading from the outset
 - Theoretical vs. Empirical
- Learn the geography of the text
 - Section headers
- Give yourself an overview of the reading
 - Abstracts
 - Introduction
 - Discussion or Conclusion



Reading Strategically

- Prioritize relevant sections
 - Skim the rest



Reading Strategically

- Prioritize relevant sections
 - Skim the rest
- Annotate (Annotated Bibliography)
 - Author/Title
 - Subject
 - Thesis
 - Scope
 - Important concepts
 - Relevance to your issue
 - Critique (overlook)

Author/Title:		
Subject:		
Thesis:		
Scope:		
Methodology:	Theories Used:	Advances Made:



Reading Strategically

- Manage your sources and reading lists
 - Find citation management system you like
 - EndNote
 - Zotero



Writing the Social Sciences Paper

- Writing requirements vary by degree objective



Writing the Social Sciences Paper

Possible writing requirements:

Master's degree		Doctoral degree
Course papers	vs.	Course papers
Master's comprehensive examinations		Comprehensive examinations*
Master's thesis		Qualifying examinations/papers
		Dissertation proposal
		Dissertation

** For doctoral students who have not obtained the master's degree or equivalent prior to being admitted to the doctoral program.*



Writing the Social Sciences Paper

- What is type of paper is it?
 - Reflection Paper
 - Literature Review
 - Analysis/Position paper
 - Research Proposal
 - Research Paper
 - Critique of a Research Article
 - Book Review
 - Annotated Bibliography



Literature Review

- Elements
 - Summarize the current literature
 - Synthesize (integrate) findings
 - Critique available literature (what's overlooked, overstated)
 - Compare



Literature Review

- A lit. review is a critical look at the *existing relevant* literature
- Provides some background knowledge
 - Demonstrating your familiarity with the knowledge base
- Look at the body of literature like it's a conversation between and among scholars
 - By writing a lit review, you're joining the conversation
 - Tone of the conversation
 - Address a gap
 - Extend knowledge (build upon existing knowledge)
 - Corrective (all this time, we've been looking at this all wrong)



Literature Review

- Give context to your research: Where does my research fit in the larger scope of literature on a given topic?
 - Shows the importance of your research
- Assemble your sources: (not exhaustive)
 - Include prominent theorists and well-known articles
 - Determine the scope of your lit rev. (set parameters)
 - Proper citation (APA style manual)
 - For a dissertation, many topics; for a class, just one



Literature Review

- Five approaches for how to organize your review:
 - Topical (thematic)
 - Distant-to-close
 - Debate (issue not well settled)
 - Chronological (evolution or linear progression)
 - Seminal study (work that was instrumental in laying the groundwork)



Literature Review

- Topical organization
 - Characteristics
 - Most common
 - Breaks field into subfields, subject areas, approaches
 - Treats each section individually, sometimes with critiques
 - Most useful for large bodies of literature with no obvious standouts



Literature Review

- Topical organization

- Characteristics

- Most common
 - Breaks field into subfields, subject areas, approaches
 - Treats each section individually, sometimes with critiques
 - Most useful for large bodies of literature with no obvious standouts

- Language

- *Three important areas of this field have received attention: A, B, and C.*
 - *A has been approached from two perspectives F and G.*
 - *The most important developments in terms of B have be*



Literature Review

- Distant-to-close organization
 - Characteristics
 - Studies grouped by their relevance to current research
 - Starts with studies with similar to current research
 - Ends with studies most relevant to the specific topic
 - Most useful for studies of methods or models



Literature Review

- Distant-to-close organization
 - Characteristics
 - Studies grouped by their relevance to current research
 - Starts with studies with similar to current research
 - Ends with studies most relevant to the specific topic
 - Most useful for studies of methods or models
 - Language
 - *Method/Model M (slightly similar to current research) addresses X*
 - *Drawing upon method/model N (more similar to current research) can help Y*



Literature Review

- Debate organization
 - Characteristics
 - Another topical approach; has chronological component
 - Emphasizes strands of research in which scholars openly criticize one another
 - Most useful when there are clear opposing positions



Literature Review

- Debate organization

- Characteristics

- Another topical approach; has chronological component
 - Emphasizes strands of research in which scholars openly criticize one another
 - Most useful when there are clear opposing positions

- Language

- *There have been two (three, four, etc.) distinct approaches to this problem.*
 - *The first model posits X.*
 - *The second model argues that the first model is wrong for three reasons. Instead, the second model claims Y.*



Literature Review

- Chronological organization
 - Characteristics
 - Lists studies in terms of chronological development
 - Useful when field has clear development over time
 - Linear progression



Literature Review

- Chronological organization

- Characteristics

- Lists studies in terms of chronological development
- Useful when field has clear development over time
- Linear progression

- Language

- *This subject was first studied by X, who argued/found ...*
- *In (date), Y modified/extended/contradicted X's work by ...*
- *Today, research by Z represents the current state of the field.*



Literature Review

- Seminal study organization
 - Characteristics
 - Detailed description of important study
 - Later work is organized using another pattern.
 - Useful when one study stands out



Literature Review

- Seminal study organization
 - Characteristics
 - Detailed description of important study
 - Later work is organized using another pattern.
 - Useful when one study stands out
 - Language
 - *The most important research on this topic was the study by X in (date).*
 - *Following X's study, research fell into two camps (extended X's work, etc.)*



Analysis or Position Paper

- An analysis or position paper will analyze an issue, scenario, or dataset using theories and concepts learned in class
- Assume a position, and provide well-supported argument



Analysis or Position Paper

- A well-constructed argument will:
 - Make a claim
 - Provide reasons to support the claim
 - Provide evidence that supports the claim
 - Use specific language
 - Acknowledge alternative views



Analysis or Position Paper

Five kinds of weak thesis:

1. The thesis that makes no claim
2. The thesis that is obviously true or a statement of fact
3. A thesis that restates conventional wisdom
4. Thesis that offers a personal conviction as the basis for the claim
5. The thesis makes an overly broad claim



Research Proposal

- Usually written to receive funding, but may be used as class exercise
- Draw on methodological training and topic-specific information



Research Proposal

- Sections you may find in research proposal:
 - Background/Introduction
 - Specific aims/Research questions
 - Methods
 - (Limitations)



Research Paper

- A research paper informs other scholars about a new discovery
- General format (IMRD):
 - Introduction
 - Methods
 - Results
 - Discussion
 - Conclusions



Writing the Social Sciences Paper

- Literature Review
- Analysis/Position Paper
- Research Proposal
- Research Paper

Building blocks
of the thesis and
dissertation



Writing the Social Sciences Paper

- Understand the writing process
 - Assemble your sources
 - Prewriting
 - Drafting/writing
 - Revising
 - Editing



Writing process

Prewriting:

- considering possible topics and interests
- listing ideas
- selecting topic
- organizing ideas

Techniques:

- brainstorming
- free-writing
- outlining
- clustering
- note cards

Drafting/Writing:

- preliminary intro & thesis
- drafting body paragraphs
- drafting conclusion

Techniques:

- writing parts out of sequence
- writing quickly
- not editing too much

Revising:

- analyze structure
- reorganize material
- strengthen thesis
- check argument's development in body
- strengthen and focus intro & conclusion

Techniques:

- backwards outlining
- topic sentences & paragraph transitions
- intro vs. conclusion

Editing:

- sentence-level clarity
- active verbs
- word choice
- sentence-to-sentence flow
- grammar and spelling

Techniques:

- read aloud
- spell checker
- read backwards



Writing the Social Sciences Paper

- Style
 - Citation/attribution
 - Word Choice
 - Tone



Managing Your Projects

- Adopt positive writing habits
- Improve time management skills
- Keep materials organized
- Avoid distractions



Conclusions

- Most of your time in graduate school will be spent reading
 - Learn to read strategically!
- There are many types of documents that you may be asked to write as a graduate student
 - E.g. literature review, analysis/position paper, research proposal, and/or research papers
- Developing effective project management techniques can help manage the workload



Graduate Writing Center

- Provide FREE appointments for graduate and professional student for writing consultations
 - Writing assistance for dissertations, theses, journal articles, course papers, résumés, CVs, cover letters, etc.
- Webpage: <http://gwc.gsrc.ucla.edu/>
- Appointments: <http://gwc.gsrc.ucla.edu/appointments>
- Workshops: <http://gwc.gsrc.ucla.edu/workshops>

