PLS 210
Literature review instructions

The literature review is the first component of the research project that you will undertake in the course. Its primary purpose is to help you select your research topic—and the associated research question(s)—and explain how it relates to, builds on, and contributes to the existing scholarly literature on this topic. To do so, you will need to:

1) Identify the research topic and explain its importance.
2) Locate the most important scholarly sources that make up the literature on the topic.
3) Explain the current scholarly consensus on the topic, if any, and outline the main strands of the literature, such as theoretical perspectives or methodological approaches, as well as primary debates and disagreements among scholars.
4) Identify the main contributions that previous studies have made to our understanding of the topic.
5) Specify the themes on which the literature has focused to date and the primary methods of inference and data collection used in existing scholarship.
6) Explain the limitations of and gaps in the literature and state which of them you intend to address in your research.

There are many valid ways to structure a literature review. You can distribute the foregoing tasks in your literature review in any way that you think helps the reader to make sense of the scholarship that you outline. That said, the literature review should start with 1) a clear and concise overview of the literature and the main claims that you make in the review, followed by 2) the main body that explains the state of the literature, and conclude with 3) a final section that ties up the main threads of your argument. In other words, the literature should follow the basic structure of a university essay.

The literature review is an analytical assignment in which you should summarize, synthesize, and critically evaluate scholarship in your chosen topic. It outlines *your* assessment of the literature. As such, you should keep direct quotations to a minimum. Direct quotations included in the review may not exceed 200 words in total. Relatedly, you may need to paraphrase the arguments advanced in some scholarly sources, but your focus should be on analyzing—rather than restating—those claims.

Your literature search is likely to yield a large number of scholarly sources on your research topic. To get a sense of the literature and be reasonably certain that you have not missed any important contributions, you will need to review a substantial amount of scholarship. At the very least, your literature review should draw on ten scholarly sources directly relevant to your research topic. A very good literature review is, however, likely to be based on a considerably larger number of scholarly works.

The literature review should be no shorter than 1,000 words long. There is no upper word count limit and you may write a longer review if you think you need additional space. However, highest-quality literature reviews concisely explain the state of scholarship on a particular topic, providing only the information that the reader needs to develop an understanding of the literature, and avoiding superfluous information that detracts from the primary argument advanced by the author. As you can easily infer from the rubric, provided below, your grade will reflect the quality of your argumentation, rather than your review's length.

The list of sources does not count towards the specified assignment length, and neither does a cover page if you choose to include one.

The literature review should be double-spaced with one-inch margins in Times New Roman 12-point font. All citations should follow the American Political Science Association Style Manual (https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/), which is the citation style used in the course syllabus.

The literature review is worth 15% of the course grade. It is due at by 11.59 pm on September 14.

You can optionally participate in peer review of the assignment. If you choose to do so, you must sign up to participate prior to the submission deadline, submit the initial version of the literature review, provide your feedback on the work of the peer with whom you have been matched, and revise your assignment in response to the comments that you receive from them. I will share the link to the sign-up spreadsheet on Moodle. Peer feedback is most useful when it identifies specific areas for improvement and involves detailed, actionable suggestions for changes; conversely, vague, overly broad, and difficult-to-implement comments offer little value. I suggest that peer reviewers use the assignment rubric to assess the initial drafts and complement it with specific suggestions for improvement. You are by no means obliged to accept your peer reviewer's feedback. Your revised literature review is due at 11.59 pm on September 21.

Submission details and other assessment policies can be found in the syllabus.

Literature review rubric

	Failure	Minimally acceptable	Acceptable	Good	Excellent
Literature overview (introduction)	The literature review does not identify the research topic or outline the state of the literature. Alternatively, the literature overview is not comprehensible.	The literature review identifies the research project but does not clearly outline the state of the literature.	The literature review identifies the research project, but the argument overview could be stated better and in a more focused way. The outlined argument may not be compelling.	The literature review identifies the research project. An outline of a reasonably compelling argument is developed.	The literature outline is focused and clear. It directly identifies the research topic and provides a compelling overview of the state of the literature.

Literature assessment (main body of the literature review)	The literature review fails to identify relevant scholarship or does not address the existing literature.	The literature review identifies relevant scholarship but shows limited understanding of the literature and does not successfully explain its current state.	The literature review identifies relevant scholarship and provides evidence of a meaningful, but not entirely successful, effort to explain the current scholarly consensus, the main strands of the literature and scholarly debates. The author also makes an effort to identify the contributions and limitations of existing scholarship and the gaps that new research can address.	The literature review provides a reasonably compelling explanation of the current scholarly consensus, the main strands of the literature and scholarly debates. It also correctly identifies some of the contributions and limitations of existing scholarship and the gaps that new research can address.	The literature review effectively explains the current scholarly consensus, the main strands of the literature and scholarly debates. It also correctly and cogently identifies the contributions and limitations of existing scholarship and the gaps that new research can address.
Conclusion	The literature review contains no conclusion or the concluding paragraphs fail to encapsulate the author's assessment of the literature.	The author provides a conclusion, but it does not successfully convey their assessment of the literature.	Conclusion is indicative of the author's partly successful attempt to encapsulate the main claims advanced in the literature review.	Conclusion offers a reasonably compelling encapsulation of the author's assessment of the literature.	Conclusion encapsulates the author's assessment of the literature clearly, effectively, and cogently.

Organization, writing style, spelling, and grammar	Weak or no organization. Random expression of ideas. Thoughts are expressed in a disjointed or incomprehensible way. Writing style, spelling, and grammar need major improvement. The literature review is too short or too long.	The literature review needs better transition and flow between ideas. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the literature review. The literature review follows the word count instructions.	Mostly logical progression of ideas, but the writer must do more to make connections. Some awkward and confusing passages detract from a thorough understanding of the literature review. The literature review follows the word count instructions.	Mostly logical progression of ideas, but the writer must do more to make connections. A few distracting errors or awkward phrasing. The literature review follows the word count instructions.	Good flow or progression of ideas and good presentation of how the points made fit into a broader argument. Eloquent expression of ideas with no distracting or obvious grammatical or mechanical errors. The literature review follows the word count instructions.
Citations, quotations, and bibliography	Missing or inadequate citations, insufficient number of sources.	Referencing does not follow the required citation style. In some cases excessive use of quotations. Sufficient number of sources.	Referencing follows the required citation style, with some errors. Sufficient number of sources.	Mostly correct referencing, with a few minor errors. Sufficient number of sources.	Correct referencing. Number of sources which is at least sufficient and likely exceeds the requirements.