

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS**  
**Department of Geography**  
**GEOG 5800**  
**Research Design and Geographic Applications**  
**Dr. Murray Rice**

## Literature Review: Background & Expectations

**The purpose of completing a literature review** for this course is to give you experience in compiling and summarizing previous work done in your area of interest. The literature review is not intended to be a final product or statement that you could “plug in” to a thesis or report, but rather it is supposed to help you start to broaden your own acquaintance with the literature of your field. I anticipate that you will encounter and write about some books, articles, and authors with which you have some familiarity. Having a stronger grasp on this “familiar” literature is an important product of this exercise. However, I also hope and anticipate that you will encounter some new work in the course of your literature research effort. Gaining these new ideas and perspectives is an important step in your development as a professional geographer.

The literature review also gives you an opportunity to exercise your writing skills in advance of the submission of your project paper. Doing this also gives me an opportunity to read your writing and provide feedback before you submit your more lengthy (and more important) term paper write-up. I will try to give you some hints in class as to what I will be looking for in terms of writing style and structure for all of your assignments, plus you are welcome to consult with me on a one-on-one basis to work through any research and writing questions you have.

**I expect your literature review to have three main elements.**

**1. An introduction to your area of research interest.** The purpose of these introductory remarks is to provide the reader with some context as to where your area fits within the broader field of geography/geoscience. Remember, it is quite possible that your main reader (me) will have no idea of what your field is about, so context is important. This section does not have to be lengthy, but it must show that you took it seriously. A perfunctory short paragraph will not be enough to do this, but multiple pages of introduction would definitely be overkill. I leave it to you to find the right balance for your topic and interests.

**2. A survey of development in your area** over the past few decades (timeline is somewhat open, depending on how long researchers have actually been working in your field). This survey must clearly depict the various themes and schools of thought that have been represented within work in your field, and how these things have changed as your area has developed. The survey must not be a simple (and boring) listing of “this person did this, and then this person did that, and then ...”. It is very important that you provide some structure to your accounting of research in your area: the trends you see developing, the questions people have investigated, and the important ideas that have emerged and are developing.

**3. A conclusion that identifies gaps in the literature**, including possible areas for future research contributions. Please note, this section does not have to discuss your personal research. You just need to note and comment briefly on the opportunities for research that now exist, given what has been done in the past.