

ANT 267: Food and Culture
Spring 2008 Tu,Th 10:00 — 11:15 am, Chambers 1006

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Literature Review Handout

A literature review provides an overview of the published information about a particular ethnographic subject area and/or body of specialized theory. Ethnographic subject areas (i.e., sports in Asia, Latino immigrants in the United States) specifically look at a particular cultural phenomena in a particular place, while specialized theory (i.e., sports and society, diaspora ethnicity) will address similar questions but in different ethnographic regions. Most literature reviews will contain both, if your topic has been widely written on.

Like an academic research paper, it features a particular argument – but unlike an ethnographic research paper, the focus of your analysis will not be a particular social group or cultural practice, but a synthesis of what other social analysts have said. It is a useful step in the research process, because by reviewing the literature, you will be able to:

- Clarify the focus of your research by narrowing down the issues involved in your research
- Contextualize your own thinking with what others have said on the subject
- See what other questions you need to address
- Construct a deeper analytical framework for your project

A good literature review is *comprehensive*, in that a wide array of different perspectives and approaches are brought into discussion. It is also *current*, in that it contains the most up-to-date publications on your topic. A good literature review is *analytical*, in that it breaks down the field into categories of approaches, so that different themes or research questions become salient.

Like any prose, a literature review has an **introduction**, **body of text**, **conclusion**, and **bibliography**. The introduction features your take on the literature that looks like a thesis statement – it argues that a specific approach (which could be a combination of a number of different approaches) is the best way to understand a particular social group or cultural practice. The body of the literature review contains summaries and synthesis of the literature in your field, and is organized either thematically (the categories of approaches, often the best way to present the literature), chronologically (showing how seminal authors have structured the discourse within a field), or methodologically (arranged by research methods). Not every work needs to be summarized, if it is part of what you see as a thematic group – but it should be cited. You should try to avoid direct quotes, unless they are pivotal in establishing a theme. Lastly, it should include an extensive bibliography, with each citation showing up somewhere in the text.

For this class, your literature review is designed to help you understand the wider context of your service project – so depending upon your project, your review can either be of the “ethnographic specific” type or “specialized theory” type. For example, I see the Freedom School project as having more “specialized theory” possibilities (childhood nutrition, etc.), while the Vail group having more “ethnographic specific” literature (composting, etc.). I think it is OK for there to be overlap of literature within groups, as long as the writing is your own – and you can work with each other to develop a shared bibliography. There is no specific limit on the number of citations, but I cannot see one that has fewer than five citations adequately covering your topic; don’t forget to include, if applicable, readings from the class. Try to keep your review to five double-spaced pages. I am also going to push back the deadline for this project – **it will be due on Thursday, 20 March** instead of Tuesday, 18 March. Please email the literature review to me as a Word document. If you have any problems or questions, don’t hesitate to email me or see me in my office.