

29:225 Final Project: Literature Review

Due at the beginning of the last day of class Thursday, December 6, 2012.

The final project of this course is to produce a literature review on a topic of your choice. A wise choice is to pick the topic of your Ph.D. thesis research. The completed literature review assignment will then constitute the first version of Chapter 1 of your thesis, often one of the tasks that Ph.D. candidates leave until the very end of their thesis writing. Guidelines for the assignment are:

1. The literature review should cover a minimum of 20 references. For those of you who have already begun your thesis research, you may already know of a number of important references to include, and may even have already read through several of them.
2. The literature review should be approximately 5–10 pages in single-spaced format, not including the reference list.
3. On the class website, I provide a LaTeX template for the literature review writeup, and I encourage you all to use BibTeX to produce your reference lists. I also provide instructions on how to typeset your assignment using LaTeX and BibTeX.
4. Please feel free to consult your thesis advisor, or anyone else, to compile the list of references you will include in your literature review.
5. In writing the literature review, the intended audience is your Ph.D. thesis committee, and the intended purpose is to serve as an introduction to the topic of your Ph.D. thesis research.
6. Note that you do *not* have to read in full every reference included in your literature review. Often a particular result that you want to cite is only part of a longer paper. You should read enough of the reference to understand the result you are citing and to cite it accurately, but you need not read the entire paper. But you should *never* include a citation simply because someone else cited it—you should always go back to the original work to confirm that the citation is accurate. You will often discover a lot of information that is otherwise missed by doing this. For example, the result may depend on an assumption that is now known to be invalid, but may not have been known to be invalid when the reference was originally cited. Without going back to the original source, such problems are impossible to discover, and incorrect results are propagated through the literature (this is not as uncommon as you may think). Fortunately, going back to the original references is much easier now in the age of electronic access to materials, eliminating the need for incessant trips to the library to look up journal papers.