

Physical Geography

Lab Activity #14

Due date _____

Geographic Research

COR Objective 6, SLO 3

14.1. Introduction

One of the most important college skills is the ability to conduct research. Academia exists to learn more about the world in a meaningful and often scientific way. This exercise will introduce you to concepts like a literature review, annotated bibliography, and how to formulate spatial questions. As you are working through this lab remember that every piece of writing you do in college should *say* something. A college paper should never be a regurgitation of known facts, but rather your own unique perspective on a topic.

This lab does not require a paper to actually be written. Rather, it is designed to introduce you to how to properly begin to write for other classes you will take in the future.

14.2. Spatial Thinking

Any good research paper requires a lot of work before you even begin to write the paper itself. You will need to focus your effort to a specific topic and ultimately a specific thesis statement to ensure your paper is not a rambling collection of facts. In this section you will work to formulate a thesis statement for an imaginary research paper for a Geography 101 class.

1. Think of the subjects that have interested you in your Geography 101 lecture class. Write down three general topics that were covered or will be covered.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

A simple topic like “volcanoes” is much too broad a topic for a research paper. You need to focus your topic by selecting a region or point in time. For example, I could change my broad “volcanoes” topic to “stratovolcanoes in Northern California.”

2. Choose your favorite topic of the above three and limit it to a point in time or a place in the world.

14.3. Thinking about your subject

The best way to quickly generate information on your subject is to conduct a few general Internet searches. In this section you will visit a few search engines to gather information that can help you develop your thesis statement.

First go to Google (<http://www.google.com>). Below, write down a series of key words to enter into the search engine. Then enter them into Google and take notes on any useful websites you find. You should be looking for websites that can trigger ideas regarding your thesis. Wikipedia is fine for this step of your research, but you should also be finding scientifically valid information from other trusted organizations.

3. Keywords:

a. Notes:

4. Keywords:

b. Notes:

5. Keywords:

c. Notes:

6. Keywords:

d. Notes:

7. Now visit (<http://www.bing.com>) and enter the same key words. Do you find any new websites that Google did not show you before?

You have found a handful of websites, but the biggest trick is determining if the information they provide is actually valid. Anyone can post a website using any content he or she feels like. Think about the things that make a website seem valid and write down five clues that will help you determine if the websites you found are worth using

8.

9.

- 10.
- 11.
- 12.

14.4. Crafting a thesis

A thesis statement is what guides your research paper. It is the main point you are trying to make with your paper and it helps you to focus your writing and supporting arguments. It may be difficult for you to write a definitive thesis until you conduct more research. A thesis statement can change as more information is gained from researching a subject. At this point forming a broad thesis is acceptable. For example, my thesis could simply be: I want to explore the relationship between stratovolcanoes and where people live in Northern California. As I conduct research on the subject, I can then formulate a specific thesis for my paper.

13. Using your own topic and place or region from Question 2, write your own thesis statement here:

14. What are three maps you could use to support your thesis statement?

14.5. The Literature Review

A college level paper should use both classic works and the latest research to ensure the thesis and arguments are well informed. No bit of academic work starts in a vacuum. We build off of the work that has come before and hopefully contribute to academic literature with everything we produce. To begin this process you conduct a literature review.

A literature review is a survey of existing academic work in order to see what other researchers have done on your topic. The best way to do this is to utilize an electronic database through your college or university. The Antelope Valley College library subscribes to EBSCOhost, a collection of online databases that catalog thousands of articles from academic journals. If you were to search for these articles through Google, you would have to pay the publisher a fee in order to download them. EBSCOhost allows you to do this for free.

15. You will need to find at least four full length articles that will help support your thesis. To use EBSCOhost, do the following:
 - Login to your MyAVC account.

- Click on the Academics tab.
- In the Library Channel you will see a link to EBSCOhost. You will also see the username and password you need to access the database from off campus.
- Click on the EBSCOhost link.
- Enter the username and password when prompted by EBSCOhost.
- Click on Research Databases.
- Select Academic Search Premier and hit continue.
- Click on Advanced Search before entering your keywords.
- Check the boxes next to Full Text and Scholarly (Peer Reviewed) Journals.
- Enter your keyword(s) and click Search.

If you have any trouble with off-campus access, you can call the Reference Desk at 661-722-6300 ext. 6276.

Be sure to save the articles you will use to your computer. You will be reading them and using them to complete the final part of this lab.

14.6. Digital Books

A new tool in conducting a literature review is Google Books (<http://books.google.com>), which houses millions of digital scans of books from publishers and library stacks. Journal articles found through EBSCOhost are valuable for reading the latest in research, but scholarly books typically contain the foundations of a scientific field.

16. Go to <http://books.google.com>

17. Type in your keyword(s) and click Search Books

You will probably get a lot of results. When looking for a book that can help you with your literature review you want one that is neither a textbook nor an unscientific work and one that has a “preview” within Google Books.

18. Experiment with your keywords and find two books that will work for your thesis. *If you cannot find anything, you can also <gasp> go into the AVC library...*

14.7. Finishing your thesis

Now it is time to finalize your thesis statement. Remember that a thesis statement is the guiding message of your paper. It tells your reader what he or she can expect from your paper and it helps you focus as you are researching and writing. Now that you have done

more research you should be able to come up with a definitive statement you want to make with your *imaginary* paper.

In a geography paper you always want your thesis to have a spatial component. This means your paper will tie in with a location or region. A good way to check this is to think about how you could use maps to support your argument. Using my example from above, I could come up with the following thesis statement: *The presence of stratovolcanoes has not deterred human settlement patterns in Northern California.*

19. Write your specific thesis statement here:

20. How could maps be used to support your thesis?

14.8. Annotated Bibliography

To finish this lab you will create an annotated bibliography of your six best sources you discovered in this lab. Remember, four of these sources must be journal articles from EBSCOhost and two must be books from books.google.com or the AVC library.

An annotated bibliography is like a work cited page at the end of a paper, but with descriptive paragraphs under each entry. This will make you think about the sources you chose and how they fit in with your thesis. Your annotated bibliography must follow the Chicago Manual of Style author-date system, which is the style of choice in geography. If you are not familiar with this system of citation, you can find a good overview at <http://library.osu.edu/help/research-strategies/cite-references/chicago-author-date>.

Your bibliography will be in alphabetical order by author and have a paragraph under each entry explaining what the article or book is about and how it ties in with your thesis. Type and attach your annotated bibliography to this lab.

End of Lab 14