# Writing the Critical Article (i.e. Literature) Review

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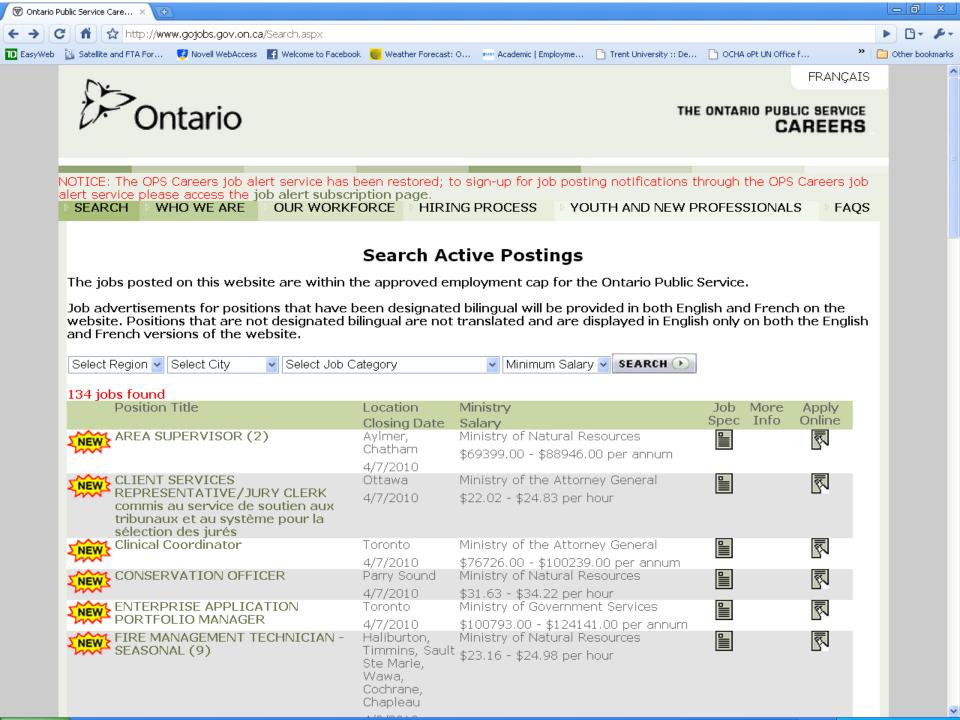
#### The literature review serves several important functions

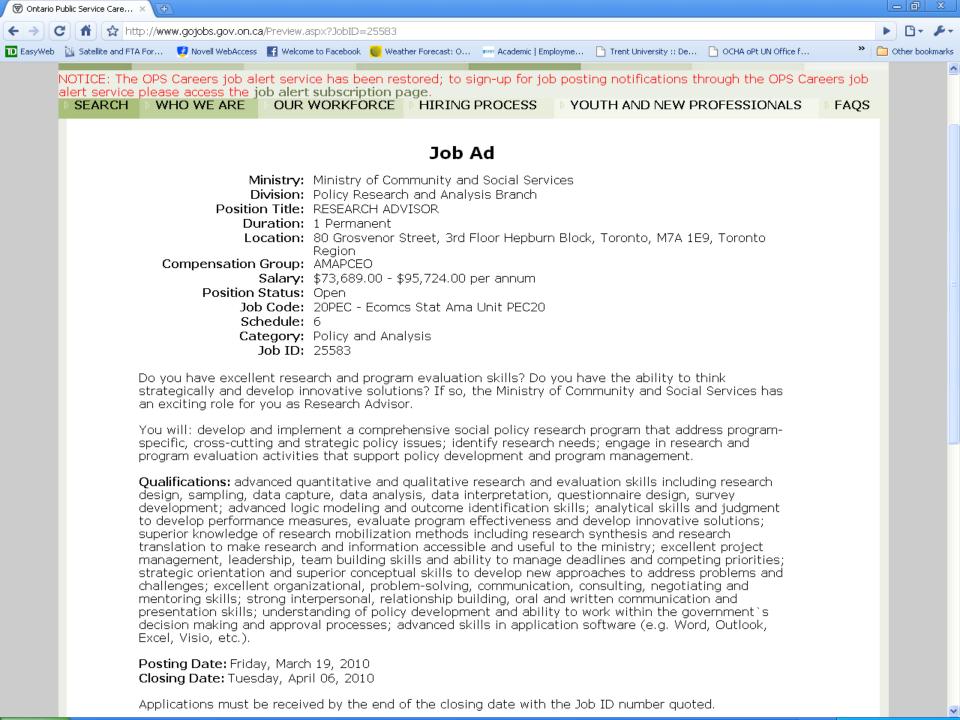
- Situates your subject area within a larger field/question/lit.
- Ensures that you are not "reinventing the wheel".
- Gives credit to those who have laid the groundwork for your research.
- Demonstrates your knowledge of the research problem.
- Demonstrates your understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to your research question.
- Shows your ability to critically evaluate relevant literature information.
- Indicates your ability to integrate and synthesize the existing literature.
- Provides new theoretical insights or develops a new model as the conceptual framework for your research.
- Convinces your reader that your proposed research will make a significant and substantial contribution to the literature (i.e., resolving an important theoretical issue or filling a major gap in the literature).

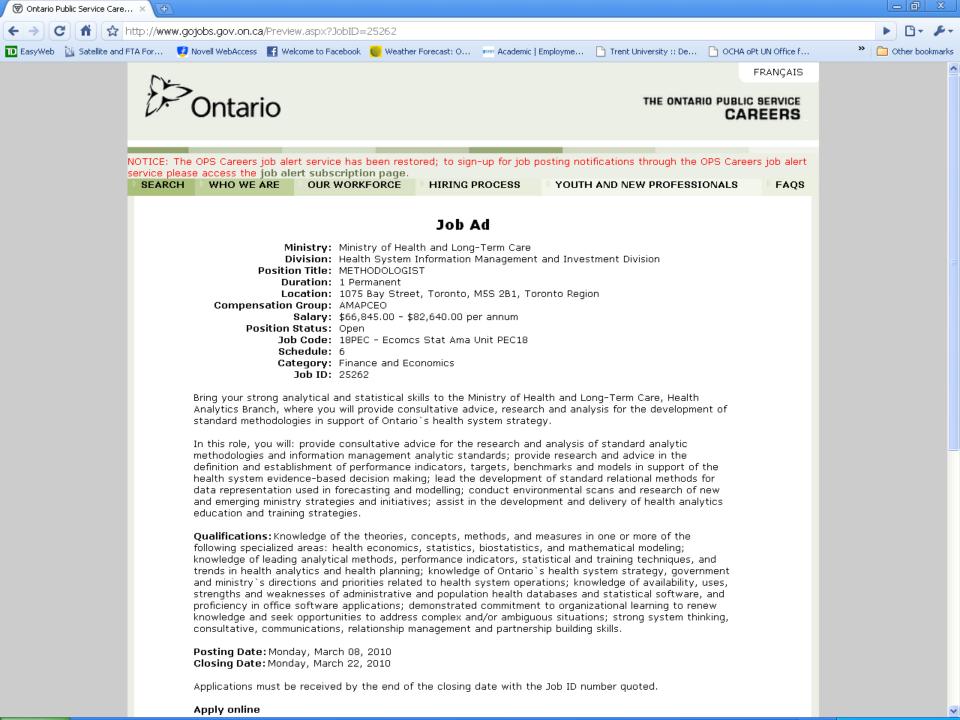
Before I begin, here's why you need to know how to write a lit review:

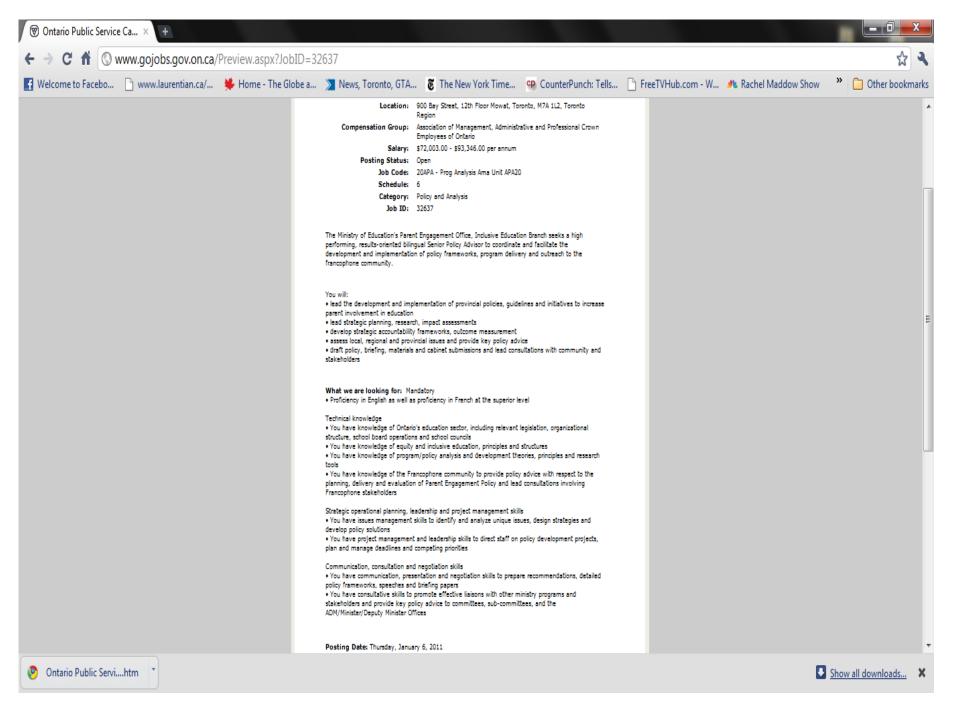
## Ontario Government Job Postings

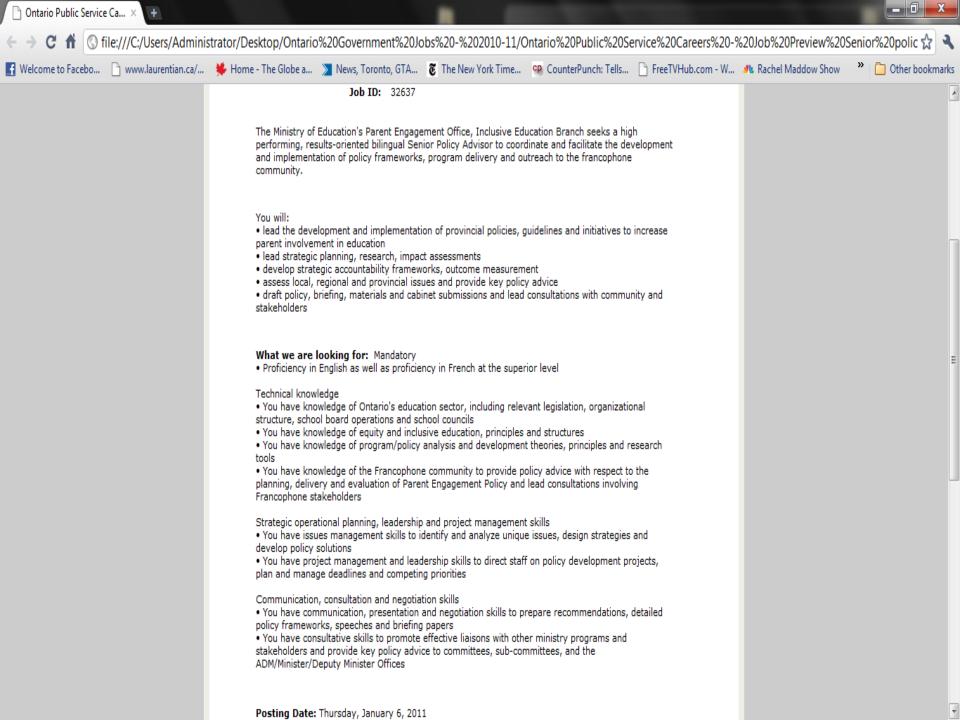
.... Or 'why you need to learn to read and analyze critically, write a proposal and conduct secondary research

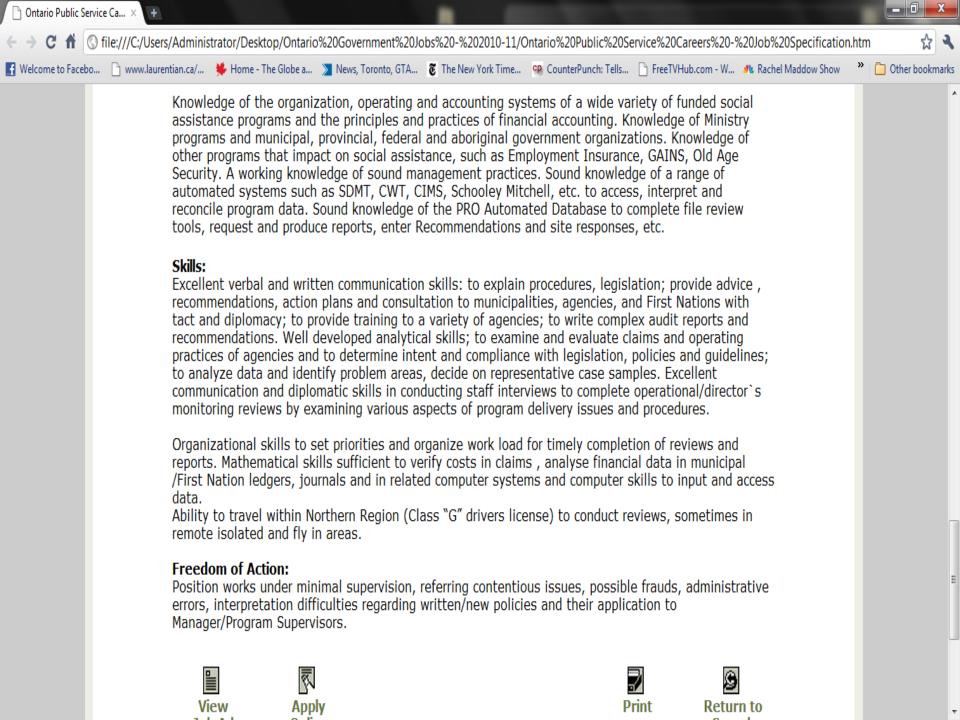


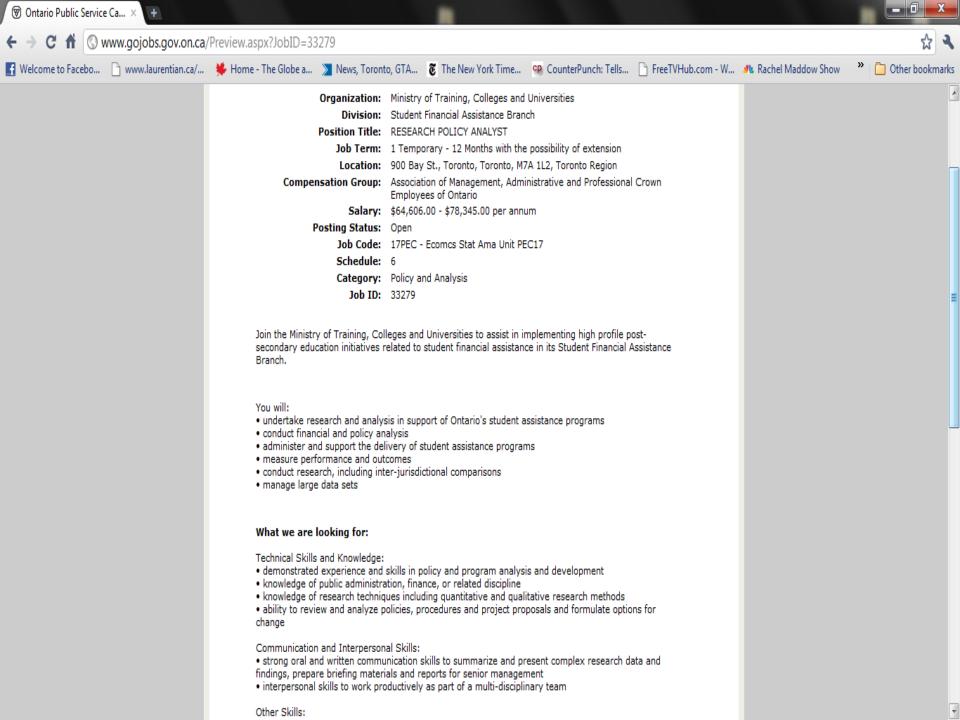


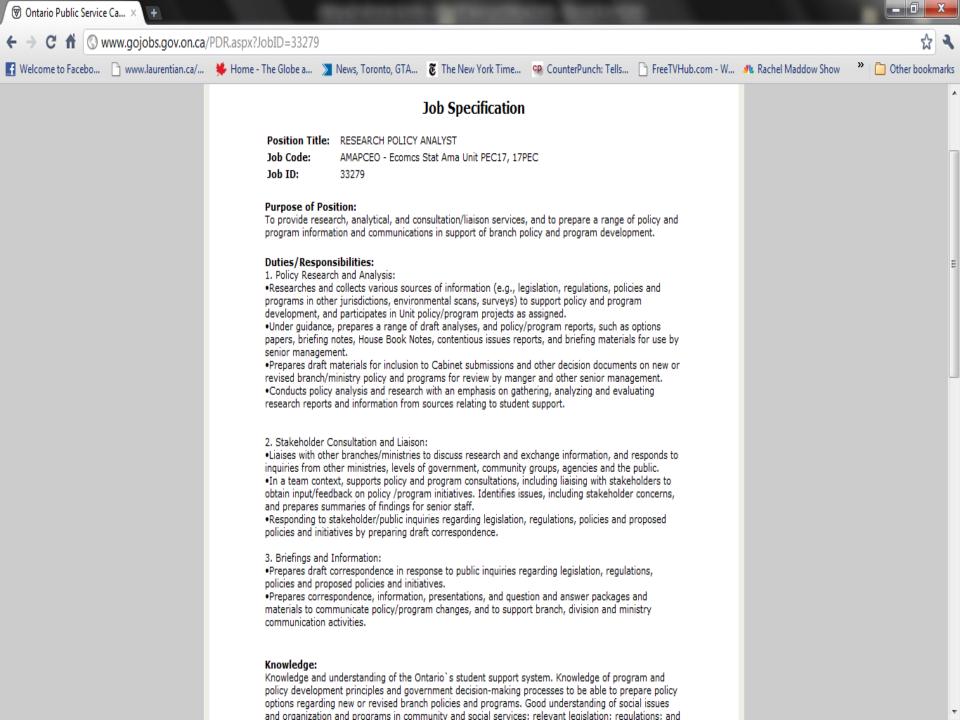












#### On to writing a critical article review:

- In order to read/understand academic articles in any discipline, you must recognize the four major elements that are found in almost all academic articles:
- Goal
- Thesis
- Controlling Statement
- Conclusion

#### **HOW TO READ CRITICALLY**

Hunt down and identify these in the margins of your readings ...in whatever subject you're taking.

Indicate them within the text as you find them throughout your readings.

- A goal is a general statement of an author's purpose in writing the article (distinct from a thesis).
- A goal is optional. Not all articles state a goal, but many do.
- Sometimes a goal is signaled by the author (e.g.: "the purpose of this article is to convince the reader that ...")

#### THE GOAL

- Keep in mind that most of our readings are actually short excerpts from larger texts.
- You won't necessarily find a goal statement in every article.
- Be careful. Sometimes goals also DOUBLE as thesis statements.

Here are some goal 'statements' from our Course Reader: "I shall examine three of the main questions that have animated the discipline since its origins in the nineteenth century ..."

 Robert J. Brym, "Foundations of Sociological Theory." p. 14. "This chapter analyzes the place of nursing within within the social relations of capitalist society, drawing out some implications for the consciousness and action of nurses as primarily female workers."

Warburton and Carroll, "Class and Gender in Nursing." p. 364. "The purpose of this chapter is, by way of introduction, to outline these paradigms and discuss their policy implications..."

 B. Singh Bolaria, "Sociology, Medicine, Health, and Illness: An Overview." p.1.

- Some goals may be declared negatively:
- "In this book I am not concerned with attention as a psychological need per se, but rather with the social conditions that affect how much attention people seek to gain and determine how much different people receive."

Charles Derber, "Every Man for Himself, Every Woman for Herself." p. 10.

- This Goal <u>followed</u> a thesis statement, so watch out:
- "I want to examine these dynamics in this essay which I titled "Stupidity 'Deconstructed" in order to connect with construction workers and to express my irritation toward postmodernists who consistently use the term (Kadi: 40)."
- "Stupidity 'Deconstructed." Joanna Kadi. p. 40

- 1. may state the article's purpose (like a goal)
- 2. declares the main idea of the article
- \*3. is a proposition, **not** a question or topic
- \*4. is an assertion or a statement of a position.
- \*5. often contains an author's hypothesis
  - 6. requires support (the evidence in a controlling statement)

In general, look for the author's thesis statement early in an article, book or chapter.

 Note the <u>structure</u> of a sentence will provide you with clues as to goals, thesis, controlling statement, and conclusion.

- Topic: Diefenbaker and the Cuban Missle Crisis
- Question: What were the results of Diefenbaker's response to the Cuban Missile Crisis?
- Thesis: Diefenbaker's indecisiveness during the Cuban Missile Crisis not only damaged his chances of reelection, but also hurt Canada's image abroad.

"As I will argue in some detail, class relations are everywhere, but they never exist in "pure" form; that is, they always combine with other social relations ..."

"Does Class Matter?" Wallace Clement. p. 175.

- "I am recalling these stories to point out that the official approach to terrorism is rather complicated, but not without characteristics. To begin with, terrorists change. The terrorist of yesterday is the hero of today, and the hero of yesterday becomes the terrorist of today. In a constantly changing world of images, we have to keep our heads straight to know what terrorism is and what [it] is not."
- "Straight Talk on Terrorism." Eqbal Ahmad, p. 47.

- Here's a thesis statement from Joanna Kadi's article "Stupidity 'Deconstructed'":
- Note that it appears <u>prior</u> to the goal:
- "So much energy goes into the social lie that poor people are stupid; capitalism needs a basic rationalization to explain why things happen the way they do... (Kadi: 39-40)."

- A controlling statement provides the support or evidence that backs up a thesis statement. It is the:
- chief idea that helps to make and/or support the author's point(s)
- It's important and identifiable because it underscores, provides evidence for, and/or clearly states or lists the major idea(s) in a book or article.

- ... is generally accompanied by a number of secondary sub-controlling statements that further support (fortify) the (main) controlling statement.
- These are simply lesser facts.

- Controlling and sub-controlling statements are important because they help to "make" or "prove" the author's thesis.
- Think of these as the "Big Facts" or the "Big Idea."

- Coakley provides us with evidence of the position or assertion in his thesis statement. Here is one of his controlling statements:
- "Furthermore, sport offers a unique context for the study of social processes and relationships. Sport teams provide ideal settings for studying group interaction and the inner workings of large organizations. The public nature of sport activities and events allows easy access to information on a variety of questions related to the sociological understanding of behaviour. These are all good reasons for sociologists to be interested in studying sport (13)."

- "Patriarchy, we will argue, needs a state society for its very existence"
- Lee and Daly. "Man's Domination and Woman's Oppression." p. 41.

- In isolation this sounds like a thesis, but it's really a controlling statement because of its placement in the article.
- Context is important ...

The CS may also 'cap' a series of facts:

- "Thus, the chain of events that starts when someone is labeled a criminal for some initial offense, can end up as a kind of invisible prison in its own right."
- Randall Collins, "The Normalcy of Crime." p. 99.

#### THE CONCLUSION

The conclusion summarizes the author's position and usually includes a restatement of the thesis or hypothesis.

Sometimes the conclusion is obviously telegraphed to the reader. For example, a sentence that begins: "In summary.." or "I conclude that.." is easy to identify.

#### THE CONCLUSION

You should be able to piece the basics of an article together by finding the thesis statement and the conclusion, which will often echo each other.

## THE CONCLUSION

"In this chapter we have indicated how class and gender relations provide the broad framework in which contemporary struggles of nurses can be understood..."

 Warburton and Carroll. "Class and Gender in Nursing. p. 371.

#### THE CONCLUSION

Note that especially in 'critical' sociology the conclusion will often give the reader a SOCIAL MISSION or leave you with a series of provocative questions.

#### THE CONCLUSION

"In these times of resurgent ethnic conflicts, the world desperately needs cross-cultural understanding. Like charity, successful crosscultural communication should begin at home."

Deborah Tannen. "Sex, Lies and Conversation." p. 248.

### THE CONCLUSION

- "Though systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing concerns for me and I imagine for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites ('perks') of being light skinned. What will we do with such knowledge?"
- "... it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader basis."
- Peggy McIntosh. "White Privilege." p. 4.

### **LAST WORD:**

- Goal, thesis, controlling statement, conclusion are general rules and may vary from article to article.
- Sometime they'll be missing in action.
- Sometimes you'll find multiples of these in an article.
- You have to exercise some judgement and rationalize your choice in your essay.

### **LAST WORD:**

- Once you've identified the 4 parts of an article, this is the last question you might ask yourself:
- What's the author's sociological paradigm?
- Structural functionalism, social conflict, symbolic interactionism, feminism, postmodernism...
- (you might also identify their ontological & epistemological approach)

#### Organization

- Clement and Miles: Canadian
- Time period: 1994 economic recession, globalization, etc.
- Citations: Olin Wright, G.A. Cohen, Raymond Williams, Michael Mann, E.P. Thompson, Goldthorpe, Poulantzas, Braverman, Esping-Anderson, Giddens, Hartmann, etc.
- Most are Marxists. Some Weberians, Feminists, PoMo.

- Organization Section subheads:
- Why Study Classes?
- Alternative Approaches to the Study of Classes
- Organizing Industrial Capitalism
- The Heart of the Matter
- Operationalizing Class
- Origins: Historical Residues of Industrial Capitalism

#### Goal:

"Ours is a study of national differences in social relations of production, not a study of class formation, social, political, demographic, or otherwise. It is the variable character of class relations in the second sense that provides the starting point of our analysis: the particular forms and organization of the social relations of production in five advanced capitalist economies in the latter part of the twentieth century (1994: 8)."

#### Thesis and Approach:

- "The data collected (surveys)..."
- "We take as our problematic relations of domination characteristics of both class and gender relations, distinguishing our approach from ... Wright (1994:9)."
- "Our questions are about national differences in the organization of production relations -whether they exist and, if so, how to account for these differences (1994:9)."

#### (sub) Thesis:

"...the economic structure of industrial capitalism acquired a social form derived not merely from a logic based on the imperative of capital accumulation -- the logic of the market; it also incorporated social forms derived from the patriarchal household (6)."

#### Introductory Questions:

- "classes exist and have real effects" (3)
- John Porter's (1965) The Vertical Mosaic
- Now: decline in economic growth (vs. 1965)
- "... doubtful that N. Americans are more receptive to class-based analyses...several reasons for this attitude (1994: 3)."
- They cover these reasons...

- Reason #1: Class are not labels, class is mediated by race, gender, nationality; is experienced differently (4)
- Reason #2: Class relations obscured in capitalist society...institutional separation between state + economy. Relations of ruling (= relations of *effective* power) dominate.
- Western capitalism also = democracy (confusing); property rights paramount but obscured.

#### Controlling Statement:

"How, whether and why people attach either symbolic or causal significance to class relation is a subject with a long and contentious history ... whether these relations are perceived as significant is not what determines either the existence of these relations or their analytical importance. ... The fact of this power and its significance, did not depend on whether or not the larger population was aware of or understood its exercise (1994:5)."

#### Subcontrolling Statements:

- History: male/female power regulated in patriarchal household.
- Household used to be site of economic activity (since eroded).
- Gendering of class relations has 'infected' the industrial economy.
- "The subordination of women in the household was reproduced in the relations of power and authority of the capitalist firm (6)."

#### Conclusion:

- Suggests alternative approaches to studying class
  - popular parlance (lifestyle)
  - neo-Marxism (production-based)
  - neo-Weberians (income, work situation)
  - Little agreement over what constitutes class
  - Dahrendorf, Parkin, Carchedi\*, Poulantzas,
    Wright, EP Thompson, etc.

## Most students' literature reviews suffer from the following problems

- Lacking organization and structure.
- Lacking focus, unity and coherence.
- No sense of where in the canon you are.
- Being repetitive and verbose.
- Failing to cite influential papers.
- Failing to keep up with recent developments.
- Failing to critically evaluate cited papers.
- Citing irrelevant or trivial references.