

POLITICAL SCIENCE 3501 - INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

University of West Georgia, Fall 2008

Research Paper Assignment

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate an analytical understanding of the course material in the wider world. This paper is to be an analytical research paper (see below) and shall be graded as such. The paper assignment is divided into three parts. The first is the research proposal: a presentation of your research question along with an explanation of why it is a matter worthy of analysis in international relations. The second is the literature review: a survey of what people have already written on the topic you have chosen. Lastly is the final draft of the paper.

You may select any topic of interest in international relations. HOWEVER, the foundation of the paper is a research question that serves as the core of your paper. This research question must be of a nature that allows you to write an analytical research paper. This means that you must select an APPROPRIATE topic or else your paper will not meet the requirements of the assignment and your grade will suffer a horrible fate. Fortunately, you will be writing a research proposal so you will know before you finish the final draft whether or not the topic is appropriate. Sample topics follow at the end of this assignment guide.

The Research Proposal (RP):

The heart of the RP is a “research question” that is the core of what you are studying. Most often, the research question is some interesting question that you would like to answer or puzzle that you want to solve. It is an analytical tool that focuses the paper onto a workable topic that is also interesting. Most importantly it is NOT a simple call for description. It is a question to be analyzed.

Example:

What led to the genocide in Rwanda?

This is not a research question. This is a call for description: here are some events that led up to the genocide. While there is some utility to this, it does not demonstrate an analytical understanding of the information in the course, and is thus not appropriate for a research question for this assignment.

Why did the international community intervene to stop genocide in Yugoslavia, but allow it in Rwanda?

This is a research question appropriate to the analytical nature of the assignment: it takes two similar cases and asks why the international community reacted in drastically different ways. If our ideas about international relations are correct, similar cases should see similar results. So what happened? What explains these different results? This can be addressed in true research paper.

The research question is the core of the RP, but it is only a small part of what you will turn in. The RP is designed to ensure that your topic is appropriate (and hopefully interesting) but also to make sure that there is enough information out there to allow you to actually do the assignment. In order to ensure that this is so, the RP must include a justification of your research question. This is a more formal way of saying that you need to convince me that the research you are doing is worthwhile and that it contributes to your understanding of the issues. This means that you will need to do several things:

1. Tell me why your research paper matters. This can be for a wide range of reasons. Depending on what you want to write your paper about this could be presented in a wide variety of formats and with many different approaches to the issues. The key here is that you must directly relate the topic of your paper to the larger topics in the course in a way that “sells” me on it.
2. Tell me about what other people have written. This is meant to show that there is actual work out there that you can find that will let you write your paper. In many ways this is similar to a very brief literature review. The key is to demonstrate that there is enough past research out there for you to find. It is tough to have a great idea only to find out that there is not enough information to allow you to write a paper on it.
3. Tell me your thesis/hypothesis. What do you think answers your question?
4. Give me a short version of the argument that your paper will make. Argument in this case is meant as the classical form of a series of statements meant to establish a proposition (generally your thesis/hypothesis). Lay out the logic of your hypothesis for me in a concise paragraph.

5. What do you expect to find when the paper is over? In general, this will be your expected conclusions from the research.

The research proposal is meant to be short, so no item on the above list needs to be dealt with in extensive detail. The idea is to get your key points across in a concise manner. The RP is your argument in favor of your research paper topic. Be clear and parsimonious.

The RP will be graded on several elements:

1. The quality of the topic. How well does it demonstrate your understanding of the ideas of the course? How interesting is it? How original is it? How well does it reflect a realistic assessment of what can be done in a paper like this?
2. The rhetorical quality of the writing. How effectively do you communicate your ideas in formal, academic English?
3. The quality of the preliminary research. How well have you researched the topic? Do you have a good idea of what is out there to find?

The Literature Review (LR):

The LR is your presentation of the research that you have done for the paper. Substantial parts of the LR will be included in the LR section of the final paper. The LR should demonstrate substantial and important research towards achieving the goals of your paper. This should demonstrate that you have done the “leg work” that is required to gain a strong understanding of the issues surrounding your topic.

The format of the LR should include a very brief review of your research question and what areas of research are required to effectively answer it. The LR should then proceed to review the sources you have selected for the paper. This review should include a concise summary of the source, including how it relates to the larger goals of your research. At times several sources may fit the same general goals. These can be grouped together in order to avoid saying essentially the same thing several times. (Example: if your research question involved the idea that Russia’s slide into illiberal democracy is dangerous for world peace, you might include four journal articles that discuss the democratic peace hypothesis. These could be grouped together in one section where you talk about the importance of the democratic peace and describe how the democratic peace fits into your argument.)

The LR should end with a brief conclusion that summarizes where this research is taking you in the final paper. As with the introductory section, this should be concise.

The LR will be graded on several elements:

1. The quality of your research. Have you done enough research? Is it quality research? Do the sources appear to meet the needs of your topic? How much work did you do?
2. The rhetorical quality of the writing. How effectively do you communicate your ideas in formal, academic English?
3. The degree to which your research reflects an understanding of the material relevant to the course.

The Final Draft of the Paper (FD):

The Final Draft is the moment of truth. It is the final result of your work. It is the complete paper. It should be organized in the style of a formal analytical paper. This means the paper should contain the following elements:

1. A clear introduction to the paper. What is your research question? What is the thesis you intend to test in order to answer your research question? Why should the reader care about any of this? In other words, a classical introductory section.
2. A concise review of the literature. Where does your paper fit with what has been done before? This section will generally be similar to the LR (above) but you can focus on the sources that are of most direct relevance to your argument. How does previous research into the area of your research question impact your thesis?
3. A theory section. What is your argument? What is the hypothesis that you intend to test and why should the reader believe it? What is the logic behind it?

4. A section that discusses the findings of your research. What did your research discover? Does it support your argument? If it does, does it support it fully? If not, what happened? In short, did your hypothesis hold up under the weight of evidence?
5. A concluding section. Did you answer your research question? Was the answer satisfactory? Did it lead you to more questions? What should the reader take away from this paper? Are there implications for other issues? In short, a classic conclusion.

The final draft should be between ten and fifteen pages of body text, double spaced. End notes and the works cited pages are not included in this page count.

The typesetting and formatting of the paper should be as follows:

- Font: 12 point Times New Roman or Courier New with standard character spacing, leading, etc.
- Margins: 1 inch on all sides (if I have to get out a ruler and measure, you are in trouble)
- Each page should be numbered in the lower right hand corner (although no points will be deducted so long as the pages are clearly numbered)
- All papers should use end notes

Works Cited (Bibliography) and Citations:

Citations should follow the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) (CMS):

In text citations should have the form of:

(Mingst, 2008, p25)

The listing of the source in the Works Cited section should follow the CMS guides for the appropriate type of sources. Example: a single author book is cited as:

Mingst, Karen. *Essentials of International Relations, 4th Edition* W.W. Norton, 2008

The FD will be graded on several elements:

1. The overall quality of the argument of the paper. Is it a strong, analytical argument? Is it backed up by substantial research?
2. Relationship of the paper to the course material. Do the argument and its conclusions demonstrate a clear and sophisticated understanding of the concepts of the course?
3. Does the paper answer the original research question?
4. The rhetorical quality of the writing. How effectively do you communicate your ideas in formal, academic English?
5. Does the format of the paper follow the assigned guidelines?

Frequently Asked Questions:

How many sources do we need?

This is a university level research paper, so you should have enough sources to adequately cover your topic. The exact number will vary based on your topic. Some topics will rely more on books, and thus the number of sources will be fewer. An all book project would be expected to have between five and seven books as sources. A project entirely based on journal and/or magazine articles would have between ten and twenty. The mix depends on the topic.

If I find a journal article in an online service through the Library such as EBSCOHost is that a journal article or is that an internet site?

Journal articles are journal articles. If you get them in electronic form, they are still journal articles. There are a growing number of specialist online-only journals (especially from Berkeley Electronic Press). These are considered journal articles as well even though they are never issued as printed copies.

Can I use Wikipedia?

Yes and no. Wikipedia is an encyclopedia. Encyclopedias are not acceptable sources for research projects unless you are under the age of 13. On the other hand, Wikipedia does have citations for many of its entries, so you can sometimes find places to go for additional research. So while you should not use Wikipedia as a source in academic

work, you can sometimes use it as a research tool to find real sources. Having said this, if you quote directly from Wikipedia, you must cite it and include it in your Works Cited just like any other source. It's just that you should not be quoting from Wikipedia in a paper like this. You should also be aware that there are many Wikipedia pages that are not meant for use in academic work. Or worse, they are based on information that is specific to another discipline. In either case, Wikipedia could lead you to the wrong answer.

How should I treat web pages as sources?

This can be tricky. Many web pages are reputable and can be treated like standard academic sources. If it is the web page of an organization or institution that is established and reputable then you can treat it essentially as you would any other academic source. Examples of this type of site include the official web sites of the United Nations, State Department, European Union, Amnesty International, Oxfam, etc. These sites often place official documents on line in electronic form. As with academic journals, these are the same as the hardcopy version, so you can refer to these official documents as if it were the paper document. (An example of this is the World Bank Research web site where the 2-3,000 working papers from the Research Division are posted on line. These are official World Bank documents, but they are made available on line to make them widely available.)

There are also web pages that are much less reputable and you should take them not just with a grain of salt, but with an entire truck load. If it's Jason's IR Page and Jason is an out of work actor in Pacoima, the web page is most likely not reputable. Most blogs would be in this category.

There are also web pages that are in between. These can be the pages of academics that are promoting their own view of politics, or they can be from highly partisan organizations. These can sometimes be useful, but they must be treated with some care. When in doubt, look to see if they list their sources. If they give you statistics, but don't tell you where the numbers came from then you should be highly skeptical of the content of the site. Partisan groups make up numbers all the time in order to promote their agendas.

In general, use web sites with care.

Sample Research Questions:

1. Do the European Union and the United States attract different types of economic immigrants?
2. Are employees of private military companies (PMC's) mercenaries as defined under the laws of war?
3. Does the Genocide Convention matter in Africa?
4. Will China follow the model of South Korea or Zimbabwe when demands for democracy grow?
5. Are Kosovo and South Ossetia the new Czechoslovakia and Berlin?
6. Can the Grameen Bank model of microfinance work in Haiti?
7. Never mind the man behind the curtain: Authoritarian Olympics as public relations to hide human rights abuses: Is Beijing 2008 the same as Berlin 1936?