

Guideline for Writing Papers and Essays

Prepared for Pol 261: International Organizations

This writing guideline mainly serves the students who are writing traditional research papers and essays for introductory courses.

A traditional research paper usually focuses on issues, institutions, leaders, theories, and important concepts. It intends to explain some important aspects of politics and society and to inform its readers about the background of the issue under discussion, historical development, and different arguments from different approaches and groups. It also tries to offer a possible solution, or at least point out a possible direction for solution. A traditional research paper must have two basic parts: (1) stating a thesis and (2) supporting that thesis with appropriate documentation. To perform these two tasks, traditional papers normally include four basic types of information:

- A specific definition of the topic or subject of the paper.
- A description of the historical, legal, and institutional context of the subject.
- A careful description of the subject.
- A concluding evaluation of the subject. In this section, you are expected to draw conclusions from the materials you have studied. To have an effective evaluation, you need to establish evaluation criteria (such as public interest, fairness, constitutionality, economic development, etc.) and apply them to the results you have found in order to draw conclusions.

There is no hard-and-fast rule about the order in which these sections should appear, with the exception of the Introduction, which appears at the beginning, and the Conclusion, which appears at the end. In addition, there is no rule as to how long each part should be, the amount of space that each should take up within the essay, or whether or not each needs to be in the text or merely included within the footnotes. These decisions will be governed by the topic and approach of each essay. A successful research essay will normally include all of the following items: Introduction, Statement of Thesis, Discussion of Historical Background and Institutional Context, Argument and Documentation, Conclusion, and Reference and Source.

- **Introduction:** This section of the essay introduces the reader to the topic and to your particular orientation on the topic. Some writers like to "set the scene" with an anecdote that illustrates something important or interesting, or catches the interest of the reader and focuses it on the essay's topic. Others prefer to state vital data and background to the topic. Another easy way to start your writing is to quote a saying from someone famous. The way you begin your essay is very much a matter of personal taste. Many find it easier to write the introduction after they have written the body of the essay; others like to write it first thing. Again, follow your own instincts.
- **Statement of Thesis:** This commonly appears within the introduction, or else very early in the essay. Your thesis should be clear and straightforward, and if it is complex, it is often successful to state a general thesis in one simple sentence,

followed by additional sentences that clarify, detail, and build upon the general thesis. However, it's a good rule to remember that if you cannot state your thesis statement succinctly, you may need to think more carefully about what you are trying to argue in your essay.

- **Historical Background and Institutional Context:** Research essays usually contain at least a cursory overview of the literature that addresses the topic, or in the context of which academician, politician, or the public, approached the topic. You can relate to your reading assigned by the class, or articles and books you found from library, or the encyclopedias that offer entries on the topic.
- **Argument:** Once you made a thesis statement, then you must support that statement. You can rely on primary sources (such as newspaper, survey, interview, and census) or secondary sources (such as writings by other people, authorities on this subject) to support your argument. You should also apply logical reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical tools in your writing.
- **Conclusion:** This will draw your essay to a close. Commonly, conclusions restate the thesis statement and recap the argument made to support it. In addition, you may wish to point out other directions for further research on the issue, or state the significance of the topic for present-day concerns. The conclusion may also provide you with the sole appropriate place (with the exception of footnotes) to express your personal opinion. But you must remember: “Opinion without knowledge is shabby” (Socrates).
- **Sources:** At some point in your essay--most commonly in footnotes--you should discuss the sources consulted in the research process. This may include sources from which you will not quote. You may wish to address this on a case-by-case basis, or you may wish to provide a general note (in a footnote) on sources consulted.
- **Format:** Your essay shall include notes (footnotes or endnotes), references (articles and books consulted). Here are examples of proper citation for a book, a newspaper report, a journal article, and a chapter in a book.
 1. James C. F. Wang, *Contemporary Chinese Politics: An Introduction*, 4th Ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), p. 80.
 2. Charles P. Wallace, “Making a Case for Kinder, Gentler ‘Big Brother,’” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 May 1992, p. H 15.
 3. Hari Singh, “Political Change in Malaysia,” *Asian Survey* 31, No. 6 (August 1991): p. 712.
 4. Chai-Anan Samudavanija, “Thailand: A Stable Semi-Democracy,” in *Democracy in Developing Countries: Asia*, ed. Larry Diamond et al. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), pp. 320-325.

However, you can choose a format from any handbook for the writing style. But you should use the same format in the entire report.

In the case of sources online, you need to provide documentation of the author of the document, date when you viewed it, its location, and the sources cited in the online document. This is an example:

Peter Bolen, "Creating Design in Social System," *The Internet Journal of Sociological Welfare* 14:6 (1997). [Http://www.carmelpeak.com](http://www.carmelpeak.com).

All written work must be presented at an "adult standard." This means type-written, double spaced, one side of the paper, reasonable margins, neat, accurately spelled, page numbers on the pages, and stapled together, etc. All computer word processing programs (Microsoft word, Microsoft work, Word-perfect, etc.) are acceptable.

How to Avoid Plagiarism?

The essay requires you to do some research to identify sources, to summarize and synthesize materials, to provide systematic background information and to give some of your comments and explanations. Your written assignment for another class cannot be used for this course. You cannot turn in a newspaper report as your work. When you paraphrase from several sources, you have to give sources. If you quote directly from one author, you must use quotation marks and indicate its source. You cannot work with your classmate and use a same report to satisfy the course requirement for both of you. You cannot download papers from websites as your work. Plagiarism may inflict an F grade and expulsion, or both. I will use all my resources to find out and punish plagiarism.

If you still have questions, you are welcome to stop by my office (2N236, Phone: 982-3197) and we can have further discussion.

Prepared by Professor Ming Xia of Political Science. This guide is based on The Research Essay Guideline by [Catherine Lavender](#), [The Department of History](#), The College of Staten Island of The City University of New York.