RESEARCH PAPER WRITING GUIDE

*Below is a basic outline for any research paper (and certainly this one) and a description of what should be found in each section. Please consult this guide, along with your class notes and readings for the course, as you write the various installments of your paper. Remember that each installment of your paper (should you choose to hand in drafts) should have a title page, endnotes or footnotes, and a bibliography. Note that the research paper is a major part of your grade. The paper should be 20-25 double-spaced pages. You need **not** follow this guideline religiously (as some aspects don't apply to every paper-- many papers will be more qualitative than quantitative), but you do need to address the tenor of the guidelines.*

SUMMARY OF SECTIONS

I.   *Introduction*. (maximum of 2 pages--concisely written) An introduction includes your thesis and introduces the reader to your research paper. This part should be punchy and compelling, not wordy and flat.

II. *Literature Review*. (2-3 pages) A literature review presents to the reader the most important **scholarly** answers **to date** to your **general** research question and provides a rationale for your own paper (if others addressed this topic, why are you writing it? Usually it's because you are offering something new, or applying a new approach, or approaching it from a new angle or based on recent developments, etc.)

III. *Model and Hypothesis*. (1-2 pages) The ideas developed in this section follow **directly** from the Literature Review. For your preferred school of thought or discourse and the most compelling challenger, you need to generate a **model**. In other words, you need to determine what causes (independent variables) lead to what outcomes. The **hypothesis** then provides in words **the way** in which these variables are related. If your paper is not amenable to such dissection, you still need to provide a discussion of the important factors that drive your paper.

IV. *Research Design and Methodology*. (~2 pages) In this section, you explain exactly how you are going to conduct your research and why your research strategy will help you answer your question as accurately as possible. Here, you will address your sources and why you chose them.

V.   *Data Analysis and Argument*. (minimum of 8-10 pages) In this section, you evaluate your thesis and make your argument. This is the "meat" of the paper, what you are used to spending most of your time on. It is also good to debunk other arguments that you do not support (hence, the importance of a good literature review as your starting point).

VI. *Conclusion*. (~2 pages) What can you conclude from all your work? What did you learn? What are the implications of your findings on the larger concerns of the course *and* research topic. What additional questions does your paper raise?

PAPER SECTIONS DETAILS

I. *Introduction*. (maximum of 2 pages--concisely written) An introduction introduces the reader to your research paper. It does so by:
    A. communicating what your research question is (not in question form);
    B. explaining why that question is interesting and important to a general reader as well as to a political scientist, i.e. by identifying the debates it will illuminate;
    C. provide a well thought out and clearly-written thesis (preferably in one sentence).
    D. providing a "road map" to the rest of the paper, i.e., your introduction contains at least one sentence summarizing each major section of your paper.

II. *Literature Review*. (2-3 pages) pages A literature review presents to the reader the most important **scholarly** answers **to date** to your **general** research question. You should group the answers to your question into schools of thought, where the schools are defined by the different factors (or sets of factors) that are the most important for answering your question. Literature reviews necessarily uncover debates in the field and show exactly where and why the participants disagree. In the conclusion of your literature review, you should choose which school of thought you find most convincing and justify your answer. In addition, you should identify the most compelling alternative argument. To summarize, a literature review:
    A. explains the different possible **answers** to your general research question;
    B. develops a label or name for each school of thought--if unavailable, you name it cleverly;
    C. concludes by explaining to the reader which approach appears best and, when applicable, which seems second best. These choices should be clearly justified.

There are several common mistakes students make when writing the literature review (note that you cannot write a literature review before doing the bulk of your research--it becomes progressively easier and it WILL help you structure your thinking/argument/presentation):
    i)   "I can't find any literature . . ." If I've approved your question, there is literature out there and you're not looking in the right places. How to find the "right places?" Make sure that you've stated the general form of your question properly.
    ii) "There is only one answer . . ." Students often think that their job in writing a research paper is to show that they have found THE ANSWER to the question. Therefore, when they find the answer they're looking for, they stop looking for others. Very few questions in the social sciences, however, are settled; there is almost always debate. Moreover, our understanding of any phenomenon improves when we acknowledge that debate exists and try to learn from the various participants in it.
    iii) Perspectives but not answers. As you may have noticed from some of your courses or your research, there are several general perspectives out there – institutionalism, the political culture school, constructivism, materialism, the rational choice perspective, or realism, to name a few (some of these are clearly not discussed in all courses). Any one of these or other general perspectives might be helpful to you in answering your question. But if you choose to put forth an answer consistent with one of these perspectives, be sure to answer your question in a manner consistent with the perspective.
    iv) Summary of sources. Sometimes students take the first few sources they find on the subject, write a paragraph summary of each source, and call that a literature review. There are a couple of problems with that approach. First, while there may be one leading exponent of a particular view, most of the time you want to cite *several sources* for each approach. Remember, you're looking for a *school* of thought or a well establish "way" or "manner" of thinking--i.e., a discourse. That phrase implies that several different people share a particular view. Second, sometimes in presenting summaries, students don't realize that several of their articles actually make similar arguments and belong in the

same school or discourse. A good way to avoid the literature-review-as-summary mistake is to give your schools of thought or discourses names that focus attention on the key explanations. For instance, in the case of, say, voter decline, you could identify "The Satisfied Citizen," "The Disgusted Citizen," and "The Registration is Too Easy" schools/ discourses. In this class, we have featured several terms that describe schools of thought, e.g., theologocentrism, etc.

III. *Model and Hypothesis*. (1-2 pages) The ideas developed in this section follow **directly** from the Literature Review. For your preferred school of thought or discourse and the most compelling challenger, you need to generate a **model**. In other words, you need to determine what causes (independent variables) lead to what outcomes (dependent variable). Imagine that you were positing that two different factors (X and Z) caused the phenomenon that you want to study. You can actually indicate your model in the text as:

> Cause X
> $\rightarrow$ Outcome
> Cause Z

If you had one independent variable (Cause X), then the model would look like this:

> Cause X $\rightarrow$ Outcome

(Please note: you can make the arrow by typing two hyphens and then a greater than sign ">." Word will then transform that into the arrow)

Or less abstractly, for a paper on ethnic conflict, here's a Model for the "Clash of Civilizations" School

> levels of globalization in a state
> $\rightarrow$ intensity of ethnic conflict
> geographical closeness of different ethnic groups

So, the model maps out the variables (causes and effects; things that can change) for you.

The **hypothesis** then provides in words **the way** in which these variables are related. Continuing with the example above, the hypothesis would be: the higher the levels of globalization within a state and the geographically closer are its different ethnic groups, the more intense is ethnic conflict. You must develop a model and hypothesis for your preferred school of thought *and* its best challenger. To summarize, the Model and Hypothesis section:
A. identifies a model with a **dependent** variable (**outcome**) and **independent** variable(s) (cause/s). You should actually include flow diagrams or causal chains in your paper.
B. develops a hypothesis. This explains how variations in the independent variable(s) affect(s) the dependent variable. (Typically, the statement of a hypothesis looks something like "the more of X, the more of Y" or "the less of X, the less of Y" OR "if X is A, then Y is B, but if X is C, then Y is D")

IV. ***Research Design and Methodology***. (2 pages) In this section, you explain exactly how you are going to conduct your research and why your research strategy will help you answer your question as accurately as possible. In this section, social science researchers often acknowledge the imperfections in their definitions, data, or cases and explain why these choices were the best possible given real-world constraints. For our purposes, you research design section will consist of the following:

    A. Variables: Exactly what are you trying to explain (dependent variable) and what factors (independent variables) do you think cause or are correlated with this outcome.

    B. Measurement: How are you going to measure your variables? Not necessarily a simple question to answer. If national income or inflation or voter participation rates are your variables, you've got an easy job, but what if you are trying to measure levels of power in the international system, the extent of reductionist thinking, or citizen efficacy? You need to come up with ways to measure these variables. Most of the time you'll borrow a measurement strategy from an established scholar, but you still need to explain it and justify your choice in your own words.

    C. Case Selection: What case(s) are you studying and why? (In other words, exactly what instances of the general phenomenon are you going to study. If your question is about voting behavior, for example, which elections, which voters, etc. and why. If your question is about the conflict and peace process in Palestine-Israel, exactly what time periods and why.) To what extent does this choice help you understand the general phenomenon under investigation? (Will your study allow you to apply your insights to related cases? Why or why not?)

    D. Data Sources: Where are you going to get your information? What kinds of information are you going to seek? Why are you confident that these are the best possible sources of data on your topic?

V. ***Data Analysis and Argument***. (minimum of 8-10 pages) In this section, you evaluate the performance of your hypothesis and its best competitor across the cases you have identified. This is the "meat" of the paper, what you are used to spending most of your time on. For instance, if you are investigating why the Gulf War occurred, the data analysis section would be where you explained exactly what happened on the eve of the Gulf War. But what is different in this paper from what you are used to doing is that here you are evaluating the quality of your hypothesis. In other words, you are looking to see whether the factors you've identified as the most important really are correlated with the outbreak of war and whether the logical connection appears to hold. So, to write this section you need to find out the "values" (these need not be quantitative) for your variables (independent and dependent). This can entail tracking down information from government or international agencies (inflation rates, poverty rates, income levels, numbers of wars) or it can mean examining the historical record and determining (given your measurement strategy) these factors (levels of violence, citizen efficacy) during a particular time period. Then, you need to present this data to the reader to show clearly how (or whether) factors are related to results. You should use text to tell the "story" and charts, where possible, to summarize your findings. Though you should not try to quantify "things/factors/variables" that are not amenable to quantification. Finally, as suggested in class, if you wish to reserve the second part of your paper to discussing the issue of Orientalism and its influence on what you are arguing, then you can do that. Though it is best to integrate the two in the Model and Research Design Sections.

NOTE: Each paper will be different based on the topic and the particulars of the thesis. It is up to you to devise the best strategy. Hint: the more time you spend on your **model/hypothesis** *and the* **research design***, the smoother the paper writing will be and, chances are, the less time you spend organizing and re-organizing your paper.*

VI. ***Conclusion***. (~ 2 pages) What can you conclude from all your work?   What did you learn? In other words:

    A. Which answer/hypothesis looks best to you now? Examine how hard you had to work to make the data/facts "fit" the different hypotheses. The one in which the data fits with the least work is your better explanation. While you may find that one is clearly better, you may also discover that neither is very good, both are good, or that one works in some cases and the other works in others. This is OK. Just think carefully about why what you found is so and explain it.

    B. What are the implications of your findings? If your findings are right, what does that mean for other similar instances? (Can you extend your findings to other time periods, other states, elections, parts of the world, etc?) Most importantly, what are the implications of your work on the endeavor of producing knowledge and the methodologies used for that purpose?

    C. What are the limitations of your findings? What about your research design and access to data raises questions about the generalizability of your findings?

    D. If you had the time, money, and/or desire, what other questions would you ask to continue this line of research in a fruitful and interesting manner? (considering the "current" importance/salience of what you are researching.