

# Doing Good and Doing Well: Teaching Research-Paper Writing by Unpacking the Paper

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Learning how to write a research paper is an important skill for political science majors, and faculty can also benefit when their students develop their research-paper-writing talents. Few departments, however, teach these skills explicitly, and many curricula seem to be based on the assumption that students will arrive at college with adequate basic writing skills. Several programs also suppose that a major will develop the ability to write a research paper through her experience with political science and other courses.<sup>1</sup> These expectations are faulty, as most students are not "proficient" writers when they move to campus (McGrath 2004; NCWASC 2003, 16–7; Persky, Daane, and Jin 2003, 20–1), and writing a research paper in political science is a specific skill set that must be developed (Scholes 1998, 95; Russell 2002, 9–10). The approach I advocate here is to demystify the paper and the process for students by identifying and explaining the different parts of a typical paper—introduction, literature review, model and hypothesis, research design, analysis and assessment, and conclusion<sup>2</sup>—and showing how the paper-writing process is broken into manageable tasks. While faculty know the components of research papers, most students have no idea what these sections should contain or what their titles mean. In addition, because revision and editing are essential general writing skills linked with the overall substantive learning process (NCWASC 2003, 1, 9; Maimon 2002, x), I suggest that students submit their

papers in pieces, benefiting from feedback from faculty, peers, and themselves. In this essay, I unpack the parts of the paper and the writing process, providing suggestions for teaching about these segments and integrating research-paper-writing skills into the curriculum.

## Writing Skills of American Students

In the last 10 years a number of education specialists and institutions have raised concerns about the writing ability of American students (Persky, Daane, and Jin 2003; NCWASC 2003). These worries are not so much due to a documented fall in ability (although some faculty might suspect a decline among college students has occurred),<sup>3</sup> but because relatively few students are good or excellent writers—yet the American economy and society increasingly demand superlative written communication skills (NCWASC 2003, 9–10; Russell 2002, 305). Confirming these fears, *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2002*, a report of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education, rated 22% of twelfth graders proficient writers and called another 2% advanced,<sup>4</sup> while the vast majority of students earned a basic (51%) or below (26%) rating (Persky, Daane, Jin 2003, Table 2.1, 21). According to the evaluators:

Writing at the basic level demonstrates only a limited grasp of the importance of extended or complex thought. The responses are acceptable in the fundamentals of form, content, and language. These students are able to organize their thoughts and provide some supporting details, while their grammar, spelling, and punctuation are not an utter disaster. (NCWASC 2003, 17)

Students deemed advanced write at "high levels of skill, maturity, and sophistication required in a complex, modern economy" as well as in a democracy (NCWASC 2003, 16).<sup>5</sup>

Advocates of improving writing note that teaching this skill has lost importance

at the primary and secondary levels in the recent push to improve substantive knowledge and demonstrate success on standardized tests. According to the National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges (NCWASC):

at the elementary school level . . . practically all students (97%) report spending three hours a week or less on writing assignments, which amounts to about 15% of the time they spend watching television. The situation is only marginally better in high school. About half of twelfth-graders (49%) report that they are assigned a paper of three or more pages once or twice a month in English class. Nearly four in ten (39%) reported such assignments "never" or "hardly ever." And the extended research paper, once a rite of passage in the senior year, is rarely required any more because teachers do not have time to deal with it. (NCWASC 2003, 20)

Scholars of writing, like David R. Russell, argue that concentrating on the mastery of subjects alone is shortsighted, as writing and learning are closely intertwined in any discipline. Therefore, spending part of a class on writing is not time away from content, but an essential part of developing students as thinkers who can communicate their ideas and reach a higher level of understanding in that discipline (Russell 2002, 9, 294; Maimon 2002, ix).<sup>6</sup> In fact, advocates call for more time and emphasis on writing as a learning tool throughout the American education system—primary school through college (NCWASC 2003, 27–8, Russell 2002).<sup>7</sup>

According to Russell, the denigration of writing is related to the myth that "writing is an elementary (and largely transparent) set of skills rather than a central tool for learning and doing myriad human activities," an idea that has been reinforced by the American university system (312). Good writing, then, is more than simply proper grammar, usage, and paragraph construction; it embodies the conventions, values, and norms of the discipline for which it is written. Scholars of writing note that the

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academy is divided into discourse communities: "group[s] of people who are unified by similar patterns of language use, shared assumptions, common knowledge, and parallel habits of interpretation" (Deans 2003, 136). Therefore, if political scientists want to see better student writing in their courses, they are the ones to transmit this knowledge, and teaching research-paper writing becomes their responsibility.

These national studies and the perspectives of writing specialists suggest that political science faculty have reason to be concerned about the written communication skills and inexperience with research papers that typical, contemporary first-year students possess. In keeping with the recommendations of the National Commission on Writing and the National Center for Educational Statistics, more attention to improving writing skills within the discipline of political science seems warranted.

## Why Research-Paper Writing Is Good for Students and Faculty

Research-paper writing is an important talent for students to develop, serving their own self-interests as well as that of faculty. The skills that are essential for writing a research paper—identifying and understanding the debate within a field, designing a strategy for evaluating competing claims, finding appropriate information, engaging in an analysis of that data, and communicating this process and its results to others—are critical thinking skills that liberal arts majors, like political science, are supposed to instill. Research shows that this particular skill set helps to make majors better students while still in college, prepares them for life-long learning, and increases their marketability (Breuning, Parker, and Ishiyama 2001; Ishiyama 2002; Ishiyama 2005b). Moreover, teaching the logic and practice of social science inquiry helps groom students to be citizens in democratic polities, as responsible participation requires the careful weighing of competing claims (Dewey 1916). In research-paper writing, students do more than become acquainted with academic debates; they are required to collect information and take a stand on important and controversial issues. As such, writing a research paper develops students' moral and ethical understandings, which enhance their capacity as citizen-decision makers (NCWASC 2003, 18).<sup>8</sup>

The benefits of writing quality research papers not only flow to students,

but also accrue to instructors. When students can handle reading "real" political science, writing essays, performing research, and putting all these skills together to turn in good research papers, then the job of grading tests and essays becomes less onerous and even invigorating. Better-skilled majors, especially for instructors at less academically competitive institutions, provide faculty with classroom opportunities for challenging themselves and enhancing their professional lives. Although teaching these talents is time consuming and rarely professionally recognized (Russell 2002, 295), developing student research-paper writing skills may also be a way to enhance the reputation of one's institution, as graduates go on to greater academic and professional success. Moreover, improving students' abilities to think and write like political scientists may boost the ability of faculty to integrate their own research into courses, increasing their satisfaction.

## One Approach to Teaching Research-Paper Writing: Unpacking the Paper into Its Constituent Sections

Teaching research-paper writing is not confined to instructing students on writing and grammar or methodology (Russell 2002; Deans 2003). Using the parts of the paper to organize the work and delineate the tasks, faculty can engage in a multipronged (and often multi-semester) strategy of training students to think and write like political scientists. As students begin writing these sections for themselves, they can also develop sophistication regarding sources and the Internet, become acquainted with the proper standards and formats for citation (student ignorance regarding plagiarism is remarkable) (McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield 2001, 221), learn to develop effective titles and section headings,<sup>9</sup> recognize that long sections of a paper need their own introductory and concluding segments, and practice revising and editing skills (as well as understand how they are different).<sup>10</sup>

Although it is not the first section of the paper, an appropriate place to start acquiring research-paper writing skills is the literature review. Acquainting students with the concept and even the content of these essays can begin at the introductory level. Literature reviews identify, classify, and explain the most important scholarly answers to important research questions. Professors can organize introductory classes, designed to develop students as political scientists,

around debates on important topics in the subfield. Many textbooks, particularly in international politics but increasingly in comparative too, have been using this method for at least two decades.<sup>11</sup> The school-of-thought approach has many advantages for helping to develop students as political scientists and analytic thinkers. They learn to think through and evaluate the quality of the logic of a perspective. In addition, as they assess different explanations, students need to consider the appropriate evidence for each account, learning that certain pieces of information have purchase on some but are irrelevant to others. Moreover, advancing schools of thought and then evaluating their explanatory power across cases helps students expand their analytic skills. Ultimately, faculty can ask students at the introductory level which explanation they prefer and require that they defend that argument with evidence. Here instructors are helping students at an early stage in their careers to hone their analytic skills.

Reading the actual works of scholars with different perspectives on an important issue is also of great benefit to students. Over the last 40 years, students' reading-comprehension skills have declined,<sup>12</sup> and in my experience, average students often have trouble understanding articles from prestigious political science journals. When a set of readings is organized around a debate, professors can prompt students to identify competing arguments and evidence. Thus, such an approach takes into account potential weaknesses in reading comprehension skills and better prepares students for more advanced materials at the intermediate and upper division levels.

While learning about the literature review in an introductory course, students can also become acquainted with scholarly databases and discover tips for navigating the Internet to find the most reputable sources. Although students have grown up "surfing the web," faculty should not assume that they can find their way around their institution's library web site or perform a database search. Some do not know the difference between a scholarly journal, journal of opinion, magazine, or appropriate newspaper of record. Students also often fail to understand that they should not accept everything they read on the Internet, but need to be careful that the source of their information is respected. A useful exercise related to course substance could be to ask students to find a literature review on a particular topic or to identify several sources that they might use in writing their own.<sup>13</sup>

Developing basic library web site and source know-how is an important early skill that will serve students well throughout their academic and professional lives.

As students start finding sources, they should also be learning about citation conventions and plagiarism. Some undergraduates do not recognize that there are actual formats to follow. Others do not realize that they need to give credit for ideas and even phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that they include; otherwise, they are committing the academic equivalent of stealing (McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield 2001, 221). Showing students how to cite properly, what is acceptable borrowing and what is not, how easy it is for faculty to discover their dishonesty, and how serious are the consequences of being caught plagiarizing is an important service that faculty can perform, even at the earliest points in undergraduates' careers (Malesic 2006; Hard, Conway, and Moran 2006).<sup>14</sup>

After students have written a literature review, they are ready to advance a model and state their hypothesis or thesis, and the model and hypothesis can be an explicit, combined section. In putting forth a model, students often choose an argument that they believe is strongest, based on their findings in the literature review. Then they map the relationships between the concepts that follow from their contention. In identifying the model, students arrive at the analytic "bones" of their argument. The task of identifying the school's fundamental claims is a huge achievement for many beginning and intermediate students.

In addition to reducing a school to its basics by determining the model, figuring out exactly how the concepts affect each other is important. Because even after identifying a model some students can be unclear about how the factors are purported to relate to each other, developing a hypothesis that explicitly states the ways in which one variable can affect the phenomenon in question is a very important learning experience. For instance, if increases in the first are supposed to lead to decreases in the second, then data that show both increasing together would undermine the hypothesis.<sup>15</sup> While this conclusion might seem obvious to faculty, students often understand neither that point nor that their goal is to discern the extent to which the thesis describes reality. Focusing attention on the underlying models and arguments in course readings can enhance students' ability to uncover these relationships themselves.

While some would argue that introduction writing should be the last task to complete (Zerubavel 1999, 54), I think that students need to develop this ability early on in both the writing of their research papers and their college careers. In terms of the paper, I advocate writing an introductory section once a student has identified a puzzle to study (literature review) and developed a preferred approach for accounting for what she observes (a hypothesis or argument).<sup>16</sup> While it may still be early, writing the introduction highlights the research question. Frequently, students lose sight of what they are studying, why it is important, and what their arguments are going to be. The introduction renews a student's focus and serves as a springboard for the rest of the project. In that section, writers communicate a succinct question as well as explain why it is interesting and important to political scientists, policy makers, and citizens.<sup>17</sup> If they can't state their puzzles briefly or their questions are of little importance to scholars, practitioners, or ordinary people, then they should revise their work. In addition to this backward-looking function, introductions propel students forward into the rest of their papers because they also contain a road map for the text. This means that students must begin to identify their methodology and case studies at a very early stage. Therefore, in writing the introduction near the outset, students begin thinking about how to research instead of getting bogged down in the swamp of theory and articulation that is so essential to the literature review and hypothesis.

Closely related to the introduction is the task of coming up with a title. In many ways, a good title is the miniature version of the first section of the paper. It communicates in memorable phrasing the puzzle or question under study, the corresponding argument or answer, and often, the cases used to evaluate the contentions.<sup>18</sup> At early stages, students are often not ready to identify their specific cases, as this decision is related to the question of how to test the hypothesis. However, some students have an idea of the cases that they would like to study (and can support the argument that these cases are "important"), and asking them to compose a title is another helpful way of focusing their minds on the essentials of their research papers.

Working on the introduction and title are important for another reason: Developing the ability to compose them are excellent skills that students will use when writing a response on an exam, a five-page essay, or a research paper. For longer essays, students also need to be

aware that papers have sections, each with its own introduction and title. In reinforcing the importance of good introductions and titles to students, faculty can point to course readings as examples, showing how well-written introductory sections and headings provide immediate clues to the substance, argument, and methods of a paper or book.

While a beginning student may have some idea of what a full paper will entail, preparing a research design that both maps out the plan for conducting the research and provides justifications for choosing the precise direction selected typically requires more advanced training and some facility with logic or social science methodology.<sup>19</sup> At the intermediate and more advanced stages, however, students should be able to think analytically about the research task at hand. In setting out their plans, they need to conclude four basic tasks. Again, for professional political scientists what has to be completed here is common sense, but for students, even those who have had experience with methodology, what is essential for this section might not be obvious. The research design section needs to: (1) define the concepts and establish a strategy for conceiving of or measuring them, (2) select the cases for study, (3) identify the data sources, and (4) if necessary, provide the instruments for generating information (such as surveys or interview questionnaires).<sup>20</sup>

As students decide how to accomplish these four tasks they must provide a discussion defending their choices. In my experience, too many students either (a) are stymied when unable to find the precise information<sup>21</sup> or study the cases they would like or (b) seek to use *any* source or set of cases in order to finish the assignment as quickly as possible. I try to stress that operationalizing concepts, choosing cases, and locating information in order to evaluate a hypothesis can be challenging and that students must do their best based on their knowledge of methodology and their resource constraints.<sup>22</sup> As they become aware of different types of research designs, how to control for competing explanations, and ways to minimize bias, they can advance plans for research, recognizing that their findings are only as good as the compromises they have made.

Writing the research design section can be particularly empowering for students. While they have begun making independent and creative choices with their literature reviews, arguments, introductions, and titles, here is where they truly assert themselves as political scientists. They are putting forth their plans

for study that skeptical but helpful readers (their professors and perhaps, in the future, their bosses) will agree are sound. In effect, then, a faculty-approved research design shows a level of respect for the students' intellectual abilities. Moreover, once they have completed the plans, students should find some relief in knowing that they have delineated what they have to do. Much of the mystery of the research process is solved; they simply need to implement the plans, although the findings are still unknown.

Weaving the skills necessary for designing a research project into intermediate, upper division, and, of course, methodology courses, is not hard to do. Journal articles have research designs and sometimes simply pointing these out in discussions of course readings and looking carefully at the challenges and decisions that established scholars make can be very helpful. Moreover, as students advance arguments in class for preferred approaches, faculty can ask them how to operationalize their concepts, as well as what kinds of sources and types of cases they would need to evaluate in order to convince others that they are right.

After making a plan for their research, students can sometimes forget that they actually have to conduct it (as proposed) and write up their results. The analysis and assessment section, what might commonly be called the case study/ies or the data analysis portion of the research, is often what students initially think the whole project should be about: let's just tell the relevant story or analyze some information and be done with it. Faculty can use students' instinctual approach to this section to illustrate the ways in which they are "naturally" political scientists, as well as to show how their commonsense approach may be lacking. Again, using examples helps. Op-ed pieces from newspapers, journals of opinion, and scholarly journals all provide different forms of analyzing and assessing a thesis. Comparing the differences in the nature of these essays as well as in the confidence one can have in their conclusions is another productive exercise. Moreover, showing students, with published examples as well as from their own writings, how the analysis and assessment of the thesis is of more use to multiple audiences and can be conducted more rigorously if couched in a broader discussion of existing knowledge and a careful plan for research, is another way for professors to underline the importance of the research-paper-writing endeavor.

Whether a student is performing qualitative or quantitative analysis (or some combination of the two), the analysis and

assessment section performs three basic functions. First, it provides the evidence or data related to the thesis. For correlational or causal arguments, this involves examining the factors that were purported to affect the outcome as well as the actual phenomenon itself. Second, a student needs to determine what the significance of all this information is for the thesis. Does the argument appear to be supported, contradicted, or can no judgment be rendered? And third, a student needs to explain the reasons for reaching a precise conclusion on the thesis.

Determining the extent (if any) to which a thesis holds is an enormous accomplishment, but many students do not realize that even after making this finding they are still not ready to turn in their papers. Undergraduates frequently reach the end of their research papers, other papers and essays, and even test questions without a conclusion, undermining their own work. They can make their efforts much stronger if they understand what good conclusions do: tie the paper together by restating the thesis and where the weight of the evidence falls, remind the reader why this question and case(s) are important to study and what the findings mean for different audiences, and muse on the versatility of the thesis, considering whether it could reasonably apply to other cases. In addition, in the conclusion students should return to some of those "best decisions" that they made in their research design to consider the ways in which their choices affected their findings. When the results are surprising or disappointing, thinking about whether and how measurement strategies, case selection, or methods affected the outcomes is especially critical. Finally, a good conclusion points the direction for future research. Upon completing a research paper, a frustrated student sometimes thinks, "I'm never studying this again!" Hiding that irritation and mapping out a direction for continuing research are much more mature and professional approaches. Moreover, moving forward with the project in another course can lead to greater satisfaction, as a student has started becoming an expert in an area and can likely ask a more refined question and design a better strategy the next time.

As any professional knows, a first draft is an enormous achievement, but it is far from a polished, final product (Zerubavel 1999). Kim Cooper, a writing instructor at Harvard University aptly summarizes the limitation of this initial draft: "First thoughts are not best thoughts; they're just first" (Sommers 2005). Thus, virtually all writers engage in extensive revising and editing before

they consider a piece completed. Revising is a process that occurs on the macro-level and entails the rethinking of the ideas and structure of the paper. In general, the more complicated the initial essay, the more involved will be the task of revising it. When revising, students need to ask themselves: is the thesis written precisely enough to capture exactly what I mean and what I evaluated? Does the logical structure of the sections and paragraphs effectively make my argument? In addition, if students have been writing their papers in drafts, they will have comments from their instructors, probing them with questions that should inspire revisions. Amazingly, many students ignore graders' comments and have to be "encouraged" to respond. While there are many coercive ways to compel reactions, another approach to help them engage the comments is to bring in students for discussions of their drafts. For some, such conferences are painful, as they neither understand the concept of constructive criticism nor truly comprehend the close interconnection between writing and thinking. To help students overcome such feelings, the 18-minute DVD, *Across the Drafts: Students and Teachers Talk about Feedback*, is a great resource, showing Harvard University undergraduates writing, reacting to comments, and interacting with their writing instructors and classmates (Sommers 2005). Another method is to ask students to be peer reviewers. Because they perceive their own motives as helpful and dislike being ignored, becoming the commentator can help students learn the value of a reader's reactions. Moreover, peer reviewing helps them to develop distance from their own writing so that they can more effectively revise their own papers.

Editing is another important process that students need to make habitual. I am frequently astonished at how few students run the spell- and grammar-check function of their word processing programs or ignore my corrections on their papers. Paying attention to what some might consider small details has big payoffs on the research paper and all other forms of writing. Inform students that graduate and law schools as well as employers often use mistakes on cover letters, essays, or resumes as a means of sorting applications. Since their futures could ride on a misspelling or silly grammatical error, they would be well-served to learn how to edit carefully. In addition to careful reading and computer-aided help, reading out loud, bringing the text to the campus writing center, and asking a well-skilled friend to look over a final draft are other useful methods for editing.

**Table 1**  
**Writing the Research Paper: Tasks to Be Accomplished, Sections, and Installments**

| Tasks                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Sections                                  | Installment<br>(First Attempt) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (1) Finding a "good" topic or, more accurately, a good <b>research question</b>                                                                                                                                                                  | Introduction                              | Installment 2                  |
| (2) <b>Identifying, classifying, and explaining</b> the most important <b>scholarly answers</b> to that question                                                                                                                                 | Literature Review<br>Model and Hypothesis | Installment 1                  |
| (3) Carefully <b>planning</b> the study by defining and operationalizing the <b>concepts</b> , selecting the <b>cases</b> , identifying the <b>data sources</b> , and, if necessary, providing the <b>Instruments</b> for generating information | Research Design                           | Installment 2                  |
| (4) <b>Evaluating</b> the appropriateness of one or more of these <b>answers</b> for a set of cases                                                                                                                                              | Analysis & Assessment                     | Installment 3                  |
| (5) <b>Providing a conclusion</b> that reminds the reader of the findings, discusses why these results emerged, and suggests paths for future research                                                                                           | Conclusion                                | Installment 4                  |
| (6) <b>Revising</b> and (7) <b>Editing</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                       | All sections                              | Installment 1                  |

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Once students know what the parts of the research paper are and what each is supposed to accomplish they are better prepared for writing one. Developing an understanding of the introduction, literature review, model and hypothesis, research design, analysis and assessment, and conclusion helps students proceed more successfully with the task of research and writing. In addition, many students do not understand why revisions are important. Instead, young people often perceive that the need to rethink their original texts reveals their inherent weaknesses as writers. Experience with revising, as well as editing, not only enhances their skills and the quality of their work, but also helps students understand through experience that writing and thinking are interconnected processes. Finally, the tasks of revising and editing help reinforce the idea that improving any skill requires attention and practice over a period of time.

### Teaching Research Paper Writing, Encouraging Revision and Editing, and Providing Clear Expectations: Suggestions for Incorporating this Approach into One Semester

To encourage students to learn how to write a political science research paper and begin to internalize good writing habits, I teach a one-semester introductory methodology course for sophomore majors. It walks the student through the parts of the paper and their individual research projects, while also giving them

an introduction to social science methodology and some classics in political science. The class is linked to a larger curricular program of developing substantive knowledge and methodological, analytic, and writing skills in the discipline.<sup>23</sup> I break up the challenge of writing the research paper into seven major tasks that map into the sections of the paper (Table 1). Working through the project and the semester, students write their papers in four installments. Each time they submit something new they are also required to hand in their previous work so that I can see how they have responded to suggestions and whether they have proposed any new ideas.

To demystify the process and my expectations, I also provide students with a checklist that they must attach to each draft. This document shows students exactly what they need to do to complete the new installment, as well as how they should revise and edit the previous draft. For some students, such instructions are unnecessary, but many others benefit from this precise guidance. Figure 1 is an example of a checklist for the second installment.

The idea behind this course is to give students a guided experience with the research-paper writing and revision process early on in their academic careers. The hope is that majors will internalize appropriate writing habits and will develop the vocabulary and basic methodological skills for both reading and producing political science research. Upper division courses will reinforce the habits, vocabulary, and skills when they ask students to engage in parts or all of the thinking, research, and writing

process to which they have been exposed.

### The Importance of Teaching Research-Paper Writing

Although few faculty can likely remember a time when they did not know how to write a research paper, many of today's students do not come to college with the requisite skills necessary to undertake such a project. While neither writing nor most political science courses explicitly teach students what these papers should look like, helping students strengthen these skills should not be too hard. They can be incorporated into most classes, particularly if faculty make clear what such a paper entails by identifying its sections and explaining what each one should contain. Over the course of the major, as students are learning about politics, theories, and methodologies, these skills can be integrated as professors explain what good introductions, literature reviews, models and hypotheses, analyses and assessments, and conclusions do. Acquaintance with the parts of papers, along with experience writing, revising, and editing them, will enable students to develop their research-paper-writing abilities. Having such skills is essential to their success as students and professionals, as well as democratic citizens. Helping students to acquire these skills, especially for faculty at less prestigious institutions, allows political scientists to maintain their standards, enhance their engagement with the profession, and increase their job satisfaction, as they will be talking to students as if they were colleagues and receiving better quality work in return.

## Figure 1 Checklist for Installment 2

Below is a checklist to consult while you are writing and before you turn in the second installment of your research paper. Fill it out accurately, and any time you cannot check off an item, you need to go back and address the problem. If you have proceeded as recommended, at this point you are writing a first draft of your introduction, title, and research design and are revising your literature review and model and hypothesis sections based on the comments you have received or ideas that have emerged as you have continued working on the project. When you submit this installment, the sections should appear in their proper order: title (actually, title page), introduction, literature review, model and hypothesis, and research design. As before, the checklist identifies the essential elements of the new sections and indicates that you should have gone back and tackled any issues that you or your reader(s) identified with earlier sections of your paper.

### *Substantive Concerns for the Introduction and Title:*

1. Does your introduction communicate your research question succinctly, clearly, and in an interesting way? Is the puzzle easily identifiable? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you effectively explained why this question is interesting and important to political scientists, policy makers, and ordinary citizens? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you provided a road map for your paper, providing a sentence or two summary of each of the sections? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Does your title communicate the puzzle, cases, and argument in as clear and as memorable a way as possible? Would you look at something with that title and say enthusiastically, "I'd like to read *this*!" \_\_\_\_\_
5. If your title is catchy, is it still appropriate for a formal writing assignment? Is its meaning clear to the average reader? \_\_\_\_\_

### *Substantive Concerns for the Research Design:*

6. Have you written introductory and concluding paragraphs for the research design section? Have you developed and included an appropriate heading (title) for this section? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Does your section introduction "introduce" by explaining the purpose of the section and providing the reader with a road map to this section? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Have you developed an actual plan for operationalizing your concepts (i.e., conceiving of/measuring your variables)? (This plan explains exactly what steps you will take to know the value of your variables.) Does your plan seem reasonable and workable? Have you included a discussion in the text about the validity and reliability of your measures? (Have you really thought through this discussion? Explain.) \_\_\_\_\_
9. Are you looking at the universe of cases or a sample? What type of a research design have you employed? Why? Why is your selection of cases a good one? (e.g., have you picked cases that allow you to evaluate your hypothesis by maximizing the variance in either your dependent or independent variable? How? Have you tried to control for other explanations? How? Have you included a discussion in your research design section that explains why you've made the choices you have?) \_\_\_\_\_
10. Have you identified your data sources? Are they primary sources? Have you discussed any bias that you might introduce from these sources? Why are these sources the best? \_\_\_\_\_
11. If you are generating data by coming up with a plan for content analysis, writing a survey, or conducting interviews, have you attached in an appendix the actual plan, survey, or interview questions? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Does your section conclusion "conclude" by explaining why the choices you made are the best ones for your purposes? \_\_\_\_\_

### *Fixing Installment 1:*

13. Have you addressed all of the comments and issues that I have raised on the first installment? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Have you addressed all of the concerns that you have about the first installment? \_\_\_\_\_

### *Writing and Format Concerns:*

15. Have you properly cited the sources of your ideas? Have you avoided plagiarism? Do all your citations conform to the appropriate format? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Because the introduction is a place to establish your own voice, have you avoided long quotes there and in the research design? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Have you run the spell- and grammar-check, remembering that these functions are not foolproof? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Have you numbered your pages, but not the title page? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Have you included a bibliography that conforms to the format specified? \_\_\_\_\_
20. Recognizing the limits of spell- and grammar-check, have you edited your paper? \_\_\_\_\_
21. Add your own personal writing concerns, e.g., (by now you should have a very specific personal list): \_\_\_\_\_
  - split infinitives \_\_\_\_\_
  - sentence fragments \_\_\_\_\_
  - run-on sentences \_\_\_\_\_
  - good transitions \_\_\_\_\_
  - word choice/overuse of words \_\_\_\_\_
  - homonym confusion \_\_\_\_\_
  - overuse of pronouns \_\_\_\_\_
  - passive voice \_\_\_\_\_
  - length of paragraphs (more than a sentence, less than a page) \_\_\_\_\_
  - other \_\_\_\_\_
  - other \_\_\_\_\_

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## Notes

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1. Some other observers have been concerned about the lack of integration, knowledge cumulation, and skill development in political science curricula and have suggested changes to remedy these deficiencies. Teaching research-paper writing, as I suggest, can be part of the project that the Wahlke Report and others advocate (Wahlke 1991; Breuning, Parker, and Ishiyama 2001; Ishiyama 2005a; Ishiyama 2005b).
2. Faculty might prefer different names or include or exclude some sections from my list. My point, however, is to engage in an explicit program of teaching students about the research paper, its parts, and their purposes, as that faculty member determines.
3. Dissatisfaction with student writing is a longstanding complaint (Scholes 1998, 5; Russell 2002, 6; Daniels 1983).
4. Four years earlier, the same organization found that 21% of twelfth graders were proficient and 1% advanced. The increase in those rates advanced, from 1% to 2%, is statistically significant.
5. Comparing this data with student self-perceptions is interesting. According to the 2000 survey of the Higher Education Research Institute, 45.9% of entering college students in a nation-wide sample of almost 270,000 respondents attending four-year institutions rated their writing ability as "above average or in the highest ten percent" (Kellogg 2001).
6. Russell contends that recent empirical research shows that "when students were given tasks differing significantly from the standard knowledge-transmission purpose of the schools, writing helped students learn" (2002, 327).
7. Russell discusses the great political, disciplinary, and institutional pressures that prevent instructors throughout the educational system from devoting more time to teaching writing (2002, 295), as does the NCWASC (2003, 20–21).
8. In *The Neglected R*, the authors write, "above all, armed with new strengths in analysis

and logic, Americans will be better equipped to observe, think, and make judgments about the many complex and demanding issues that come before the citizenry in a democracy" (NCWASC 2003, 18). This Commission advocates that far more students become not just proficient writers, but advanced ones (10–11).

9. Some faculty might consider the naming of a paper an afterthought. The title of a work, however, as Robert Scholes suggests, provides writers with a destination (1998, 88), and many students need the direction that a self-generated map, the title, provides. Thus, the exercise of naming, both their whole papers as well as its sections, is very important for keeping undergraduates focused and organized.

10. An important companion in teaching writing is a good handbook that will help students with usage and style issues, provide citation information, discuss plagiarism, and even include information on the research process. I recommend Hacker (2004) although there are many excellent ones.

11. One of the first was Kegley and Wittkopf (2004), but there are notable others now. In comparative politics, see Lim (2006).

12. The re-centering of the SAT in the mid 1990s was a response to the persistent decline in scores, from the 1960s on. Only recently have the decreases halted (Applebome 1997; Schemo 2003; De Witt 1993), but whether this improvement is a long-term trend is unclear (De Witt 1993).

13. While many introductory students can handle writing their own literature reviews from in-class readings, finding and reading their own sources and then composing the essay would be extremely difficult for an average student.

14. McCabe, Treviño, and Butterfield found high levels of cheating among American undergraduates. In 1993, 66% of those surveyed admitted to "serious cheating" on written work, which included those "who have engaged in plagiarism, fabricated or falsified a bibliography, turned in work done by someone else, or copied a few sentences of material without footnoting them in a paper" (2001, 223). They also suggested that robust honor codes or a culture of honesty at an institution made a difference in the amount of dishonesty (2001, 220–2). In a smaller study at one state university, Hard, Conway, and Moran (2006) argue that faculty and department-level commitments to combating cheating are important deterrents.

15. While my example suggests empirical work, students writing normative papers also need to assert a thesis, identify the key concepts, and determine the veracity of their claims.

16. Others may prefer having their students write abstracts and may feel this is a superior

exercise because brevity forces precision. I ask students to write an introduction that includes many elements of the abstract.

17. I usually ask students to avoid posing a direct query in their texts; however when a student is blocked, asking a question can be a useful means for proceeding.

18. Good titles are frequently surprising, provocative, evocative, alliterative, and/or suggestive of another famous work or well-known phrase. Highlighting for students a few examples of such titles is helpful. For this purpose, I use Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Gerald Rosenberg's *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?*, and Eviatar Zerubavel's *The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books*.

19. Detailed discussions of research design and data analysis are beyond the scope of this paper. Excellent texts for this purpose include Shively (2002), Johnson and Joslyn (2005), and Neuman (2003).

20. Typically, students are unaware that they must receive permission and show that they are treating individuals appropriately when conducting research. Faculty, therefore, need to inform them that each institution has a board that reviews proposals and that the committee's approval process can be time consuming.

21. Discussions about data invariably raise additional questions about sources. Many students do not realize where to find information and what types of information are appropriate. When I teach about data collection, I typically engage in a discussion about primary and secondary sources. We discuss the use of memoirs, interviews, speeches, newspaper articles, histories, and various internet sources. I also show students how to find numerical information, such as census data, campaign donations, GDP levels, and "freedom" and "corruption" rankings, among others.

22. In his well-known methodology text, W. Phillips Shively aptly noted that political science is not rocket science—it's much harder (Shively 2002).

23. In this relatively new project, the department hopes that by making this time commitment to teaching research-paper writing relatively early on in students' careers and linking the content of this class to introductory, upper division, and seminar courses, much less time will need to be devoted to writing instruction in advanced classes, and writing expectations (both in terms of the amount assigned and quality of the product) can increase.

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