GUIDELINES: RESEARCH PAPERS AND PORTFOLIOS
POL 199
SPRING 2006

DUE: BY THE END OF EXAM PERIOD

Content/Substance (adapted from Charles Stewart and Stephen Van Evera)

GENERAL FORMAT

The following general format is often appropriate: "tell them what you're going to tell them; then
tell them; then tell them what you told them."

The sections below should all be written according to the guidelines below from Van Evera
(attached to this document), in terms of both style and content.

I. TITLE PAGE

Include your name, the date, and the title of your project.

II. ABSTRACT

• The first page after your title page should include an abstract that summarizes the
  following:
    o question,
    o analysis, and
    o results of your paper.
  • It should be no more than 250 words and should NOT use first person.
  • See the example in Gay’s article “Spirals of Trust” or check out more examples from
    JSTOR articles.

III. INTRODUCTION

Begin your paper with a short summary introduction. This summary introduction should answer
up to five (5) questions:

1. What question or questions do you address?
2. Why do these questions arise? From what literature or real-world events? Offer
   background that clarifies your questions and puts them in context.
3. What answer or answers do you offer? Summarize your bottom line in a few sentences.
4. How will you reach your answers? Say a few words about your sources and methods.
5. What comes next? Provide a roadmap to the rest of the paper: "Section I explains how I
   began my life of crime; Section II details my early arrests; Section III describes my trip to
deeh row; Section IV offers general theoretical conclusions and policy implications."
   Something of that sort.

#1 ("What is your question?")#, #2 ("Why does this question arise?"), and #3 ("What is your
answer?") are essential: make sure you cover them. #4-#5 are optional.
Summary introductions of this sort help readers grasp your argument. They also help you diagnose problems with your paper. A summary introduction can be hard to write. A possible reason: gaps or contradictions in your arguments or evidence, which summary exposes. Solution: rethink and reorganize your paper.

IV. ARGUMENTATION

The logic of exposition in your research paper should roughly parallel your presentation. But, while you could take shortcuts and hit only the highlights in your presentation, you will have to unpack the segments of your logic, piece by piece, in your paper.

As you build your argument, four injunctions on argumentation should be kept in mind.

1. Use empirical evidence _facts, numbers, history_ to support your argument. Purely deductive argument is sometimes appropriate, but argument backed by evidence is always more persuasive.
2. Clearly frame the general point(s) that your evidence supports. Don't ask facts to speak for themselves.
3. "Argue against yourself." After laying out your argument, acknowledge questions or objections that a skeptical reader might raise, and briefly address them. This shows readers that you have been thoughtful and thorough _that you are aware of possible counter-arguments or alternate interpretations, and have given these due consideration.
4. Often, of course, the skeptic would have a good point, and you should grant it. Don't claim too much for your theories or evidence!
5. Use citation to document all sources and statements of fact.

Below is a list of things that must be included in your paper. The order and exposition of the argument will obviously vary from person to person, but you should at some point be sure to have all of the following information included. Journal articles in political science (which is the model your write-up should follow) often follow this outline:

1) Literature Review
   a) What do we know?
   b) What do we need to know?
   c) Your theory
      i) What is it?
      ii) What is the basis of it? (On what grounds did you develop it?)
      iii) Be sure the specify the MECHANISMS of _why or how_ you think something happens

2) Data
   a) What is your sample?
   b) Is your sample representative of the population you are studying? Why or why not?
   c) Data source
   d) Any questions about the quality of your data?

3) Model Specification
   a) What are the variables
   b) Why are they included (this is important to include for all of your control variables).
      You should draw on previous literature to justify your choice of control variables.
   c) How are they measured
   d) What is your hypothesis for each one?
4) Results
   a) Preliminary Results (simple relationships and a first cut at multivariate analysis)
      i) NOTE: In providing your results to your reader, it is not enough to just say “See Table 1” or something like that. You have to interpret the tables for your reader—tell them what it means.
   b) Sensitivity analysis and other searches for anomalies: Are there any unusual results?
      Any things that are hard to explain?
   c) Re-estimation, further analysis

5) Discussion of results from a substantive perspective

V. CONCLUSION FORMAT

You should probably recapitulate your argument in your conclusion. However, a good summary introduction often makes a full summary conclusion redundant. If so, recapitulate quickly, and then use most of your conclusion to explore the implications of your argument. What policy prescriptions follow from your analysis? What general arguments does it call into question, and which does it reinforce? What further research projects does it suggest?

VI. TABLES AND FIGURES

Append any tables and figures that are not embedded in the text to the end of the paper. Make sure that each table and figure is self-explanatory—your reader should be able to understand the table and/or figure without looking at the text. Try showing each of your tables/figures to someone else to see if they can understand them without reading your paper. Follow the style guidelines in formatting tables and figures.

It is very important that you explicitly refer to each table and/or figure in the text of your paper.

VII. WORKS CITED

Properly formatted according to citation guidelines below.
**Style**

Don’t shirk this. You will be graded on style.

*Length:* The paper should be about 20 pages long (not including title page, abstract, and bibliography), including graphs, figures, and bibliography. There is no hard and fast page limit, however.

Write succinctly. Edit.

Hone. Eschew verbiage. Make the text flow. If there’s a particularly long, involved methodological problem that you attend to, consider moving it to an appendix and only make reference to it in the body of the paper.

There are also some mechanical issues that you must attend to in writing this paper. (Indeed, you should always attend to these issues when writing for the social sciences).

- Double-space everything, except footnotes and tables.
- Use footnotes, not endnotes.
- Use the author-date form of citation (see below).
- Properly number the pages (page 1 is the first text page).
- Include figures and tables at the end of your paper, consecutively numbered. (Include all the figures first, then the tables.) Make explicit reference to each table and figure in the body of the text.
- Proper font.
  - Either 11pt or 12pt.
  - Times New Roman
- Use a constant 1” margin on each page.
- Tables and figures should be self-explanatory (i.e. I should be able to read them without reading the text).
- Staple the paper in the upper left-hand corner. Don’t use a report cover.

**VI. VETTING**

Ask a friend or two to give your paper a look before you turn it in; and return the favor for them when they have a paper underway. Two heads are better than one, and giving and receiving comments are important skills.

**VIII. HOW TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TO WRITE PAPERS**

Re-read articles you or others admire, and imitate their better aspects.
Good writing is essential to clear thinking and effective communication. So bear the following points in mind:

1. Your paper should make a single point or a handful of related points, and should follow a simple organization. Avoid cluttering it with extra points. If you developed an argument that later became ancillary as you rethought your paper, drop the argument from the paper. This is painful ("I sweated hours on that idea!") but extraneous arguments drain power from your main argument.

2. Break your paper into sections and subsections. More sections is better than fewer. Sections help readers see the structure of your argument. Label sections with vivid section headings that convey the main message of the section. I recommend the following structure for sections/subsections:
   a. Your argument;
   b. Your supporting evidence;
   c. Counter-arguments, qualifications, and limiting conditions of your argument.

3. Start each section with several sentences summarizing the argument presented in the section. You may cut these summaries from your final draft if they seem redundant with your summary introduction; but you should include them in your first drafts, to see how they look. Writing such summaries is also a good way to force yourself to decide what you are and are not doing in each section, and to force yourself to confront contradictions or shortcomings in your argument. Often these section summaries are best written after you write the section, but don't forget to add them at some point.

4. Start each paragraph with a topic sentence that distills the point of the paragraph. Subsequent sentences should offer supporting material that explains or elaborates the point of the topic sentence. Qualifications or refutation to counter-arguments should then follow. In short, paragraphs should exhibit the same structure as whole sections.

   A reader should be able to grasp the thrust of your argument by reading only the first sentence of every paragraph.

5. Write short, declarative sentences. Avoid the passive voice. (Passive voice: "the kulaks were murdered"--but who did it? Active voice: "Stalin murdered the kulaks.")

6. Always write from an outline. Outlines are major aids to coherence and readability.