

Writing Political Science Research Papers

Your instructors use this type of assignment as a means of assessing your ability to understand a complex problem in the field, to develop a perspective on this problem, and to make a persuasive argument in favor of your perspective. In order for you to successfully meet this challenge, your research paper should include the following components: (1) an introduction; (2) a problem statement/research question; (3) a literature review; (4) theory (5) a discussion of methodology; (6) a description and evaluation of your research findings; and (7) a summary of your findings. Here's a brief description of each component.

1) In the **introduction** of your research paper, you need to give the reader some basic background information on your topic that suggests why the question you are investigating is interesting and important. You will also need to provide the reader with a statement of the research problem you are attempting to address and a basic outline of your paper as a whole. The **problem statement/research question** presents not only the general research problem you will address but also the hypotheses that you will consider.

2) Before you can develop each of the above components of your research paper, you will need to conduct a **literature review**. A literature review involves reading and analyzing what other researchers have written on your topic before going on to do research of your own. There are some very pragmatic reasons for doing this work. First, as insightful as your ideas may be, someone else may have had similar ideas and have already done research to test them. By reading what they have written on your topic, you can ensure that you don't repeat, but rather learn from, work that has already been done. Second, to demonstrate the soundness of your hypotheses and methodology, you will need to indicate how you have borrowed from and/or improved upon the ideas of others.

3) A **hypothesis** is a tentative statement that proposes a possible explanation to some phenomenon or event. A useful hypothesis is a **testable** statement which may include a prediction. A hypotheses should not be confused with a theory. Theories are general explanations based on a large amount of data. For example, the theory of evolution applies to all living things and is based on wide range of observations. However, there are many things about evolution that are not fully understood such as gaps in the fossil record. Many hypotheses have been proposed and tested.

4) In the **methodology** section, you will explain to the reader the research methods you used to investigate your research topic and to test the hypotheses that you have formulated. For example, did you conduct interviews, use statistical analysis, rely upon previous research studies, or some combination of all of these methodological approaches? Also, you must justify why a particular method is used.

5) By referring to what other researchers have found on your topic, you will have established a frame of reference that enables the reader to understand the full significance of your research results. Thus, once you have conducted your literature review, you will be in a position to present your **research findings**. In presenting these findings, you will need to refer back to your original hypotheses and explain the manner and degree to which your results fit with what you anticipated you would find. If you see strong support for your argument or perhaps some unexpected results that your original hypotheses cannot account for, this section is the place to convey such important information to your reader. At this point, you should also suggest further lines of research that will help refine, clarify inconsistencies with, or provide additional support for your hypotheses. Finally, in the **summary** section of your paper, you should reiterate the significance of your research and

your research findings and speculate upon the path that future research efforts should take.

Other comments:

- Use 12 pt. Times New Roman, or no smaller than 10 pt. Arial.
- Margins: 1 inch all around
- Double spaced
- Style: APSA style (
- **Abstract:** it should be of no more than 150 words, typed on a separate page. The abstract should describe succinctly what research problem you investigated, how you tackled the problem and what findings or conclusions you presented. The abstract should summarize, not introduce your paper.

Tables

Tables are useful, but they should economize space. Often two tables sharing the same row or column headings can be combined. Tables or figures should stand on their own. They should be understandable to the reader who has not yet consulted the text. All columns and rows should be clearly labeled; abbreviations or acronyms should not be used as primary labels. The meanings of numbers should always be clear. Under most circumstances, numbers should not be given beyond two decimal places.

A table or figure in the text of a paper illustrates a trend, finding, or relationship. Tables merely providing information or data--"storage tables"--should be included in an appendix if they must be included.

Include all the information the reader will need to understand your data either in the table itself or in a note (using superscript lowercase letters). If data are drawn from an established source, the reference should be cited at the bottom of the table:

Source: Statistical Abstract of the U.S. 1980, 24-28.

Supply headings for all columns, and make clear whether the data are frequencies, percentages, or specified other statistics. Indicate the number of cases upon which percentages are calculated and whether you are using column, row, or table percentages.

Make sure that, if you are going to include a table, that you make reference to the table in your text. Do not just merely place it there as if it were self-evident.