

Research Paper Assignment
Political Science 103
Spring 2011

General Guidelines

The first consideration should be that you select something that you find interesting. While you have a great deal of leeway in choosing a topic, your choice of a topic should be related to and informed by the materials we have analyzed in class. You can choose one of these, or come up with your own “yes/no” question. Previous research paper topics include:

- Is the United Nations fundamentally flawed?
- Should the rich countries forgive the debt of the poor countries?
- Was war with Iraq justified?
- Is Iran a threat to the international community?
- Is Russia heading towards authoritarianism?
- Should nuclear weapons be banned?
- Can China democratize?
- Can the U.S. win in Afghanistan?
- Is there a military solution to terrorism?
- Should the United States build a fence along the Mexican border?

Of course, these are just a few examples of potential topics. When doing the readings, you should always be looking for other potential topics.

Notice that each of these questions has the potential to generate different responses. You might argue that war with Iraq was justified - or that it was not. You will find books and articles on Iraq that examine the data from different perspectives. Your task is to choose a “yes/no” question (one that can support divergent responses) that you will address in your research paper.

Thesis Statements:

You must offer a thesis in the introduction of your paper. After researching your material, you will answer your research question. The answer to your research question will form the basis of your thesis. The thesis is the argument that you will make in your paper. Presenting your answer to the research question is the reason why you write the paper. You write the paper to convince your reader that your answer is correct. You must provide the reader with evidence you discovered in your research to persuade the reader that your answer is correct. You must anticipate alternative answers to your question and refute them. You must explain why your answer is better. Papers lacking such a sentence receive a grade of C or lower.

The Documented Research Paper:

- **Introduction** - provide a context for the question under discussion - capture the reader's attention by explaining why the question needs to be addressed.

- **Development/ "Body"** - represent and document the diverse perspectives that inform the question. In a neutral voice, represent what leading authorities in the field are arguing both for and against the issue being raised in your question.
- **Conclusion** - the essay concludes with the carefully considered opinion of the writer. Draw upon the arguments you have used (pro and con) in the body of the essay and explain how you have reached your conclusion.
- **Format:** 6-8 pages, typed - font size 12, double-spaced, and spell-checked
- Use **MLA style documentation** and a **Bibliography** to show the relevance of all the sources you have used in your paper. "In-text" citations are necessary for direct quotations and for paraphrased versions of published sources.
- Use a minimum of 6 secondary sources. At least 4 of these must be from an online database like Proquest or print material.

Wikipedia Warning:

Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>) is a popular source of information, but it will not be accepted in this class as a valid source in research projects. Despite their efforts, the contents are not always accurate, true, or updated, as they are posted by anyone in the world. Information on Wikipedia has not undergone peer-review and editing like a standard publication. You may use Wikipedia for insights and information to your own benefit, but (1) it cannot be cited as a source, and (2) it should not be treated as unassailable fact. As with all research, be aware of source bias, and triangulate your research with other sources.

Additional Guidelines

1) The paper is due at the start of class on May 5th. I also should note that I would be more than happy to receive papers prior to this deadline!

2) The paper should be approximately 6-8 pages long. Please keep in mind, however, that a longer paper is not necessarily a better paper.

3) Details:

-- Papers should be typed on white, 8.5" x 11" paper

-- Pages should be numbered

-- Papers should be double-spaced, have standard margins, and use a standard size font (e.g., Times New Roman 11 or 12 point font)

-- Papers should have a title page

-- Papers should have a bibliography

-- Papers must be stapled, not paper-clipped or placed in plastic folders

4) Be sure to proofread your paper before handing it in! Even if you use a spell-checker, you still need to make sure you have not made non-spelling mistakes (e.g., used "their"

instead of "there"). Mistakes in grammar and spelling cannot help but detract from what otherwise might be an excellent paper.

5) Footnotes can be used to provide additional information. If you have some information that you want to include but that disrupts the flow of the paper, put this information in a footnote.

7) Some of my personal preferences and pet peeves include:

-- Avoid colloquialisms (e.g., "his opponent trashed him").

-- Avoid using contractions in the text of a formal paper (e.g., write "do not" instead of "don't")

-- Abbreviations such as "etc.," "e.g.," and "i.e." should appear in footnotes only

-- Be sure to capitalize the names of political institutions, such as Congress, or the Senate.

The paper will be graded as satisfactory or unsatisfactory based on the following: use of source materials and citations = 20%; style (grammar, spelling, syntax, etc.) = 10%; organization and presentation of material = 10%; research = 20%; content = 40%. For missing cover page, page numbers, or bibliography, or less than 6 full pages of text, points will be deducted.