

**Research Papers in Political Science:
14 Points**

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1. Clear Statement of Question

- Readers get impatient if you don't tell them what you're doing
 - **Model 1:** Lead with the **question**
- OK to start with story or anecdote that illustrates your question or puzzle
 - **Model 2:** Lead with a **short** historical illustration that motivates your question, then state the question
- Conventional wisdom vs. destabilizing condition
 - **Model 3:** Lead with the **accepted wisdom** on the subject, confront it with a seeming **contradiction**, then pose the **question**

2. Explain Why the Question is Interesting

- Answer the “so-what” question
 - Why does it matter? Who cares?
 - Why will knowing the answer to this question help us understand theory, policy, or history better?
- Less important for a class paper, but in general quite important

3. Define and Explain Your Dependent Variable

- What is it that you are explaining in the paper?
- Go from general to specific
 - From general concept (“civilian victimization”) to the form it takes in your case (“ethnic cleansing”, “rape,” “torture,” etc.)
- Make distinctions – what’s in and what’s out
 - Homicides? Indirect violence? Non-fatal violence? Kidnapping?
- Define any ambiguous terms
 - “intentional”
 - “civilians”
 - “terrorism”
 - “civil war”

4. Existing/Rival Explanations

- What are they?
- What's wrong with them?
- Don't just "review" the literature: there are 48 articles on this subject, here's what they say. No!
- Frame the literature in terms of possible explanations for the DV you're explaining.
- Explain the logic of each, perhaps give an example
- Critique them both theoretically and empirically

5a. What's Your Explanation/Theory?

- Don't have to develop an original theory, although you can
- Can apply theories we've learned in class, alone or in combination
- Can apply theories from other empirical domains
 - Political scientists are great borrowers – psychology, economics, sociology, etc.
 - Or from other subjects within POLSCI or IR

5b. Where do Theories Come From?

- Existing theories – taken off the shelf
 - Often don't fit that well; have to be adapted
- Induction – read a lot about the cases, talk to people, interviews, surveys, historical documents, etc.
- **Lots** of diagrams, comparisons
- A certain amount of creativity/imagination/dumb luck

6. Make Pretty Pictures

- Draw diagrams of how your theory works to clarify your thinking (don't necessarily have to go in the paper)

– Arrow diagrams

$A \rightarrow x \rightarrow y \rightarrow B$

Example: Offensive Realism

Anarchy + Survival + Uncertainty



Fear, Self-Help, Maximize Relative Power



Arms racing, Competition, War

Example: Democratic Peace

Norms



Domestic non-violence



Trust and Respect



Democratic peace

Institutions



Accountability



Dems. fight hard



Democratic peace

7a. Research Design: Large-N Statistical

- Large number of cases (100+)
- Bivariate or multivariate
- Use of statistical estimators (OLS, Logit/Probit, etc.)
- Cross-national data
 - Fearon and Laitin, “Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War”
- Sub-national data
 - Across regions within a state – Kalyvas on Greece
- Identifies **correlation**

7b. Research Design: Single Case Studies

- Testing theories as explanations for a case, or using the case to develop theory which can then be “tested” in other cases
 - **Congruence** (correlation) – is the outcome consistent with theory’s predictions?
 - **Process tracing** – does theory explain the process whereby the case unfolds?
- Exploit variation over time or across space within the case
 - Before/after, regional, etc.
- Usually not definitive by itself, but can be more or less convincing
 - Most likely, least likely, “crucial” cases

7c. Research Design: Multiple Case Studies

- **Method of Agreement** – cases with the same outcome, look for the thing they have in common
 - Can identify necessary conditions: If Y, then X
 - But can't identify sufficient conditions, because it's possible that $X \rightarrow \sim Y$
 - Pape on suicide terrorism
- **Method of Difference** – cases with different outcomes, look for the factor that is present in positive cases and absent in negative cases
 - Can identify sufficient conditions: $X \rightarrow Y$, and $\sim X \rightarrow \sim Y$
 - Egyptian military performance in 1967 vs. 1973 wars: why so bad in the former, so much better in the latter?

7d. Research Design: Within Case Analysis

- Exploit variation inside a single “case” – effectively turns one case into multiple cases
 - Within **Spain**, why did some communities experience large civilian casualties but others suffered few?
 - Balcells example
 - Within **Uganda**, why do some groups use child soldiers or large doses of civilian victimization but others do not?
 - Among **Palestinian** groups, why do some use suicide bombings but others do not?

8a. Empirical Evidence

- Deduce expectations for behavior from theories
 - **Hypotheses**: if-then statements
- If theory X is true, what should I observe? What should I not observe?
- Deduce expectations at different levels:
 - Level of outcomes: Civil war yes/no
 - This is often called a “**congruence**” test: does the outcome of the case match up with the theoretical expectation?
 - Level of individuals: What should people be saying if theory X is true?
 - This is often called “**process tracing**”: evidence that the process by which the outcome occurs is consistent with the theory

8b. Empirical Evidence

- **Case study ≠ general history:** cannot recount everything that happened
 - Obviously need to give a short overview of the case, but don't get carried away
- **Guided by theory:** theories tell you what evidence to look for
 - If your theory is about military culture, you need evidence on the attitudes of the military, what their beliefs were, how these beliefs translated into doctrine and procurement choices, how that led to strategy choice, and how strategy translated into behavior
- **Do actual research!**
 - Books and articles, even primary sources, not just online!

9. Compare Your Theory to Alternatives

- Strengthens your argument to show that it provides better explanation than other theories
- 2-cornered fight vs. 3-cornered fight
 - Your theory vs. evidence
 - Your theory vs. a second theory vs. the evidence

10. Coherent Organization

- Make use of sub-headings
 - Major sections: e.g., introduction, theories, evidence, conclusion
 - Sub-sections within major sections
 - Look at my book or Valentino's book for examples
- Makes the paper easier to read and follow
- Breaks it up into bite-sized chunks!
 - Downes freshman year example: 25-page paper with no headings

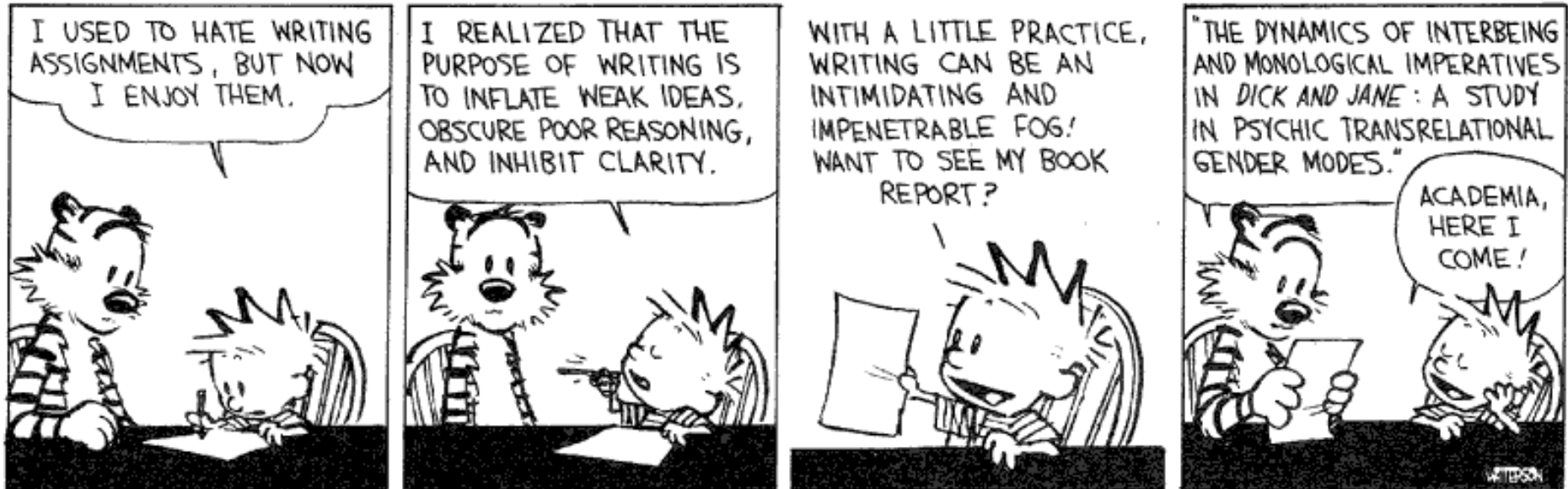
11. Summary Introduction

- Should be your paper in miniature:
 - Question
 - Why it's important
 - Alternatives
 - Your theory
 - Overview of evidence
 - Road Map?

12. Writing is a Process, Not an Event

- Don't do it in one sitting!
- Write drafts, even partial ones
- Clear sentences, no jargon
 - More Hemingway than Foucault
- One point per paragraph
- Follow the KIS (or KISS) principle!
 - Keep it Simple (Stupid)!
- Go to the Writing Studio, <http://www.gwu.edu/~gwriter/>
 - Gelman Library, Suite 103 (also in Eckles and Himmelfarb Libs.)

Clear Writing Style!



13a. Reference Religiously!

- Diligently cite sources of quotes and ideas, including internet sources
 - If it's not yours, and it's not common knowledge, you need to say where you got it



It may seem like evil genius, but it's just evil, not genius

13b. Reference Religiously!

- Diligently cite sources of quotes and ideas, including internet sources
 - If it's not yours, and it's not common knowledge, you need to say where you got it
- Resources:
 - GWU Code of Academic Integrity:
 - <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html>
 - Gelman Library, Citation Style Guide
 - <http://libguides.gwu.edu/styleguide>
 - Gelman Library, Citation and Plagiarism
 - <http://libguides.gwu.edu/content.php?pid=56080&sid=410568>
 - Chicago Manual of Style

13c. Reference Religiously: Footnotes

- Footnotes (do not use endnotes)
- Full citation first time work is referenced, abbreviated citation thereafter
- No need for reference list
 - Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17.
 - First time work is cited
 - Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*, 24.
 - Subsequent citations
 - Alexander B. Downes, “Desperate Times, Desperate Measures: The Causes of Civilian Victimization in War,” *International Security* 30, no. 4 (Spring 2006): 153.
 - First citation
 - Downes, “Desperate Times, Desperate Measures,” 158.
 - Subsequent citations

13d. Reference Religiously: Author/date

- In-text author/date citation (MLA style)
 - “blah blah blah” (Kalyvas 2006, 17).
 - “blah blah blah” (Kalyvas 2006: 17).
 - List of References at end of paper with full cite:
 - Kalyvas, Stathis N. 2006. *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - Note the different format from footnote style: author’s last name goes first, all parentheses eliminated

14. Further Resources

- Joseph Harris, *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*
- Wayne C. Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*
- Charles Lipson, *How to Write a B.A. Thesis, and Doing Honest Work in College*
- Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*
- <http://libguides.gwu.edu/styleguide>
 - Has guides on all the different citation styles
- Talk to Downes