

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Practice Makes Perfect

While most political science courses deal with government, issues, and politics, research methods is an important component of political science training that helps students better understand coursework and has practical applications. Most political arguments raise claims of fact, as when someone says, “We *should* reform Medicare because it will *decrease* health spending.” The first part of the statement takes a normative position (something ought to be done), whereas the second makes a factual claim; it states that one thing leads to another, whether or not anyone wants this to be the case. The goal of our textbook, *Political Science Research Methods*, is to show you how those two types of assertions can be separated and how the latter can be demonstrated empirically. The goal of this workbook is to help you apply those skills.

At first sight, achieving these objectives may seem easy. And it is! But it also requires a degree of thought and care. Moreover, the best way to acquire the necessary skills is to practice actively and then practice some more. After all, no sports team would prepare for a game simply by reading a scouting report. But I believe if you make an honest effort, the process of verification can be fascinating as well as informative.

Most of the exercises in this workbook ask you to think before writing. The thought process is typically straightforward and certainly does not require a strong mathematical aptitude. A thorough reading of the text, attention to class notes, and a dose of common sense should be adequate.

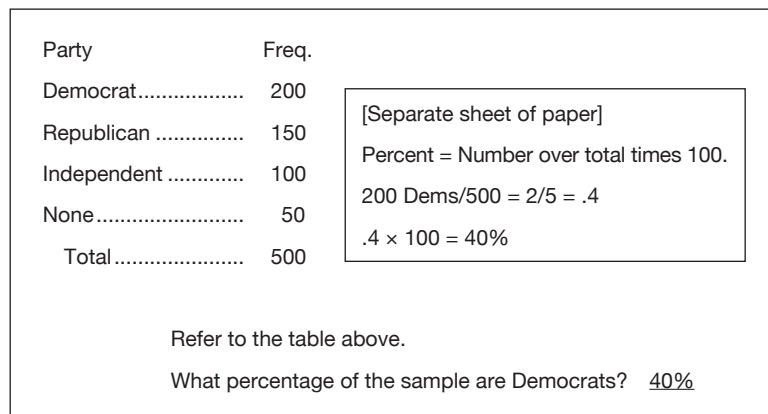
Note also that many questions call for judgment and explanation; they do not necessarily have one “correct” answer. Unless a question is based on a straightforward calculation or reading of a table, you will often be asked to think about a possible solution and to defend your choice.

The chapters in this workbook follow the chapters in the main text. That is, there are exercises for each chapter except the first and last. It is important to read the chapter in the text *before* starting to do an assignment. Many questions require you to integrate a chapter’s different elements. Hence, you cannot just try to look up something without grasping the subject matter as a whole.

An orderly, step-by-step approach is the best way to work through the exercises in this workbook; it will help you avoid errors and make the important concepts relayed in the text clearer. If you are asked to make any calculations, you should do them neatly on a separate piece of paper that you can, with instructor approval, turn in along with your answers. Here’s a tip: Your intermediate calculations or scrap work should be written in such a way that someone can reconstruct your thought processes. Figure 1-1 provides a simple example. It shows that the respondent first clarified the requested information and then performed the computation on a separate sheet of paper.

Figure 1-2 gives an example of someone using the workbook itself as a scratch pad and the ensuing confusion that often comes from sloppy writing and thinking. Note that some of the numbers were copied incorrectly and that the arithmetical operations are out of order. (The correct answer, by the way, is \$28,650, not \$24,150.)

**FIGURE 1-1 ■ Be Organized and Neat**



**FIGURE 1-2 ■ Sloppiness Leads to Errors**

What is the mean, or average, per capita income of the following six countries? 24,150

|               |          |                   |                          |
|---------------|----------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Luxembourg    | \$32,700 | 144,900           |                          |
| United States | 31,500   | <u>        </u>   | = 24,150                 |
| Bermuda       | 30,000   | 5                 | 6                        |
| Switzerland   | 26,400   | <del>32,500</del> | 32,700                   |
| Singapore     | 26,300   | 31,500            |                          |
| Hong Kong     | 25,000   | 3,000             |                          |
|               |          | 26,400            |                          |
|               |          | 26,300            |                          |
|               |          | <u>25,500</u>     | <del>25,800</del> 25,000 |
|               |          | 1,414,900         |                          |

All the data you need to do the exercises in this workbook are included in the workbook or textbook or can be downloaded from the student Web site at <https://edge.sagepub.com/johnson9e>. When you are looking for a specific data set on the student Web site, simply click on the appropriate folder on the site. For instance, if you are looking for the states data set for use with exercises in chapter 11, open the folder called “States Data” and you will find multiple versions of the file in different file formats. Once you learn how to use a program it is easy to explore a variety of hypotheses and problems. Besides being intrinsically interesting, knowledge of research methods provides skills that will help you in other courses and in many professions.

Have fun!

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