

1

SO YOU HAVE TO WRITE A RESEARCH PAPER

Let's be honest. When many students look at a new course syllabus and view the assignments, seeing that the professor has assigned a research paper typically brings one of two reactions. A first possible response is one of horror. Many students dread the assignment because they don't know how to write a research paper. Students with this viewpoint may drop the course because of this requirement, be panicked about it all semester, or just ignore the assignment until the last moment (as if it might somehow go away) and then turn "something" in. An alternative response is, "No problem, I'll just write a *report* on a topic I'm interested in." Neither reaction is productive, nor are the strategies mentioned for dealing with the dreaded assignment appropriate. The goal of this book is to teach you how to write a research paper so that you will (1) not respond in either fashion, (2) realize why the typical reactions are so problematic, (3) turn in a superior effort, and (4) even enjoy yourself (at least at some points) in the research and writing process.

Admittedly, writing a research paper is intimidating for a number of reasons. First—and this point is very important to remember—few secondary schools and institutions of higher learning bother to teach how to write one anymore.¹ Yet many faculty assign research papers, as if knowing how to write one were an innate ability that all college students possess. Research paper writing, however, requires a set of skills that need to be developed. These skills can be taught and learned, as well as used throughout a college career.² Moreover, mastering the ability to conduct research and write the paper will help you in numerous other ways in school and beyond. While this claim might seem far-fetched to you now, generations of students have confirmed that assertion both in written reflections about the experience as well as in their performance in other classes and postgraduate endeavors.

Second, research paper writing is so daunting because the task seems unbounded. Where do you start? What is a good topic? How do you know where to look for information? What does the text of such a paper look like? How do you know when you are done? This concern with boundaries is obviously related to the general ignorance about what constitutes a research paper. But another problem here is recognizing that writing, whether for a research paper or some other assignment, is discipline specific.³ Faculty often forget to make that point explicitly, and students typically conceive of writing skills as consisting of only grammar, usage, and paragraph construction. While those skills are certainly important and ones that this book will also help you hone, they are not the only ones students need to develop in order to write a good political science research paper. Political science has its own conventions (which are similar to those of the other social sciences and in some instances even related to those in the humanities and natural sciences) for paper writing that students must learn. However, just because you earned an A in your required first-year English class does not mean that you are ready to garner an equally excellent mark on your political science research paper. You not only must learn to speak a new language (the vocabulary of political science), but must adopt the conventions, values, and norms of the discipline.⁴ Here again, faculty members have so successfully internalized these norms that they forget that students need instruction. This book addresses that deficiency by teaching you to write a research paper in political science, demystifying the structure and the process. Developing this set of writing skills will be useful to you in a number of ways: not only will it help you to write more effectively in this discipline, but it will allow you to see more easily the conventions that apply to other fields of study. In addition, once you know the style and format for any subject, your reading comprehension skills in that discipline improve, and understanding even the densest academic tome will become easier. Why? Because scholars use this structure themselves, and once you know what to expect from the form of an article or book, you will be better able to distinguish the argument from the evidence, the logic from the information, or the normative claim from the underlying principles.

Third, knowing how to write a research paper is something that will be useful to you throughout your life. You might find that statement funny (or even ridiculous), thinking to yourself that you are writing research papers only to get your degree, but thereafter, you intend to be working in the corporate or non-profit world. (My apologies to those of you out there who see an academic career in your future.) Well, if you were amused by this third claim, you need to stop laughing and recognize that you likely will spend much of your career writing, and a good portion of that writing will be persuasive communication that (1) surveys a number of opinions or studies on a particular problem, (2) assesses logically the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches, and (3) uses evidence from a case or cases of particular interest to you, your boss, and/or your clients to determine what the best approach to this problem is for your purposes. In effect, then, you will be performing the types of analysis involved in writing

research papers for your living, no matter what you do. So why not learn how to do it now and develop the aptitude, so that you will be in a better position in your future?

Some of you might be skeptically reading this introduction, believing that as more advanced students of political science, you have already developed the skills, knowledge, and ability to write an excellent research paper. With no disrespect to your accomplishments, the experiences of scores of faculty from around the country at the best institutions suggest that even the most capable readers of this book have something to learn. Never before have you been asked to put your ideas together in such a systematic way in order to undertake a rigorous assessment of the literature, assert a thesis, create a fair test for evaluating evidence related to your contention, perform systematic analysis, and present your results in a standard fashion. So, even if you think you have little need for this book, I counsel you to read on. You are not the first to have doubts, and virtually all of your predecessors have come away finding value in these pages.

Others of you might simply not want to “waste your time” reading a book about writing, as well as inquiry, structure, and methods. In some ways, this book is like the often-overlooked instructional manual that comes along with your newest electronic device. Most of us prefer to ignore that text and play around with our toy to figure it out on our own. While this approach might work for you to use your new phone adequately, how many of you really want to earn an *adequate* grade? If your professor is assigning this book, she or he wants to see you incorporating its advice in your own writing and will penalize you if you do not. I can guarantee you: while the advice here is presented in an accessible fashion, it is not something that most students “just know” and can figure out on their own. Moreover, an instructor doesn’t make decisions about texts lightly, as faculty recognize your constraints—the amount of money that is appropriate to spend on course resources and the number of pages you can read in a week—and your instructor has decided that this book will help you arrive at the desired end point of writing a high-quality research paper in political science. So, respect your faculty member’s knowledge and assessment of your needs. Besides, the chapters are relatively short and the reading is easy. Your time investment will not be enormous, but the payoff will be great.

Importantly, the returns will not be confined to this particular course, as the book will help you acquire skills that will empower you in multiple ways. By learning how to write the research paper, you develop expertise—skills of reading comprehension, writing, research, and analysis—that will enable you to do well or better in all of your classes. Moreover, these are all techniques you will use in your future career, whether you are an attorney, a CEO, an activist, a public servant, a politician, a businessperson, or an educator. Such professionals are frequently asked to evaluate information and provide recommendations. For instance, imagine you are working at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and are asked to determine the impact of dismantling the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also called Obamacare or the ACA,

on young adults, aged 22 to 26. At the outset, you will need to find the legislation itself and then define what *impact* means for this population of Americans. You also will need to justify your definition and explain from where and why you selected your information to evaluate the effect on this group. How have they benefited over the past years? What assumptions might you have to make about who will go without care in the near future if their coverage is lost? What uncertainties do you have regarding your conjectures? Once you have some data, you must analyze them and then write up your findings in a form that will impress your boss. You will learn all of the skills required to do an excellent job on such a project in this book.

WHAT IS A RESEARCH PAPER? A FEW HELPFUL METAPHORS

Most students think that a research paper in political science is a long, descriptive report of some event, phenomenon, or person. This idea is a dangerous misconception that focuses on determining facts only. True, today, with the frequency of charges of “fake news” and recognition that some groups and individuals seek to confuse and misinform people, “real” facts are more important than ever, and the idea of “good” facts is a highly contentious topic. Scholars of methodology and the philosophy of science explain that true facts are often elusive because researchers interpret what they see or because they report only what they deem important, knowingly or unknowingly, failing to provide a more complete picture.⁵ While we will return later in the text to the topics of data collection and combating our pre-existing inclinations, the problem I seek to underline here is one that characterizes too many papers: conceiving of them as “data dumps” or all the information you can find on a particular topic. Descriptive reporting is only one element of a political science research paper. It is an important part, and having a chance to learn about politically relevant events, persons, or phenomena is probably why you are a political science major. But knowing about politics is not being a political scientist. For political scientists, details are important, but only if they are the “right” ones, related to either the logics or the norms you are exploring or the precise evidence required to sustain or undermine an argument. Facts for the sake of facts can be boring, confusing, or distracting.

So, if a research paper is not a “report” or a lengthy description, what is it? Two metaphors help explain the balance you should seek for your *desired end point* (an excellent paper). The first is that of a court case. In writing your research paper, you are, in essence, presenting your case to the judge and jury (readers of the paper). While you need to acknowledge that there are other possible explanations (e.g., your opposing counsel’s case), your job is to show that both your preferred logic and the evidence supporting it are stronger than any competing perspective’s framework and its sustaining information. Interesting details that have nothing to

do with the particular argument you are constructing can distract a jury, give your opponent an opportunity to undermine your argument, and annoy the judge. Superior lawyers lay out their cases, connecting all the dots and leaving no pieces of evidence hanging. All the information they provide is related to convincing those in judgment that their interpretation is the correct one.

If you find the analogy of the courtroom too adversarial, think of your paper as a painting. The level and extent of detail depend on both the size of the canvas and the subject to be painted. Too few details in a landscape can make it boring and unidentifiable, whereas too many in a portrait can make the subject unattractive or strange. The goal here is to achieve the “Goldilocks” or “just right” outcome.⁶

With respect to the *process* of researching and writing, I will use two additional metaphors throughout this book to help you (1) maintain the appropriate long-term perspective on the project (the marathon) and (2) know exactly what you need to do as you proceed through the paper (the recipe). Like running a marathon, the research paper is the culmination of great efforts. Just as the typical person cannot expect to get up on the morning of a race, go to the starting line, and run for more than twenty-six miles, a student needs to go through preparatory steps before completing a research paper. While runners stretch, train, get the right nutrition and rest, and prepare mentally for sometimes years, months, and days before the big race, students need to practice their writing and develop their theses, create plans for evaluating those contentions, find the right kinds of information, evaluate the data, and work on presenting their claims and the evidence as accurately and effectively as possible. All of these tasks require time and energy. Only with adequate preparation do the marathoner and the student finish the race and the paper successfully.

While not all of us are likely to run a marathon, everyone who reads this book will write a research paper. My point in writing is to show you that if you follow the advice spelled out here, you will not only finish your paper but turn in something of which *you feel proud*. Too often I have seen students rushing at the end just to get their papers done, without really caring about quality. Their feelings are at times understandable. They didn't know how to approach the project, haven't asked for or received any guidance, and are having a totally unsatisfying time working on their research paper. When this is the case, not only is the end result poor, but the exercise itself is actually a failure as an assignment.

To avert such negative outcomes, this text serves as a kind of cookbook, with a recipe (literally) at the end of each chapter that suggests the supplies and steps needed to tackle most effectively that part of the paper. For some of you and in some sections of the text, these recipes might seem a bit simple, as they set out the basics. When that is the case, like any experienced cook, you should feel free to modify, adding the flourishes that might fit your tastes. Don't be too quick, however, to discount your need for the basic framework. Creating a satisfying final product will only result with close attention to the fundamentals; the recipe provides those essentials for you.

In addition, this textbook comes with an online companion site at <https://edge.sagepub.com/baglione4e>, which includes many resources designed to help you master the materials presented so that you can write an excellent paper. Most chapters have corresponding handouts or guides, as well as exercises for practicing the skills that are the subject of the chapter, calendar reminders, and checklists that you can customize (based on the recipes) to serve as rubrics that clearly state exactly what you need to accomplish. Flashcards on the site provide definitions of the key terms appearing in italics throughout the book.

The most important insights of this guide to research paper writing (and ones you would do well to internalize) are that you can have a rewarding and satisfying learning experience if you devote time to the process and recognize that you have something to learn from this book, regardless of how many political science courses you have already taken. Key is conceiving of the research paper as consisting of smaller, definable tasks. Each of those jobs can be accomplished on its own, and the parts can then be assembled and reworked to create a coherent and significant whole. In effect, then, the tasks are like the marathoner's efforts to prepare before a race or a cook's steps to create a delicious multicourse meal. Each performs on the appropriate day but succeeds only after much preparation.

In fact, continuing with the running analogy, I am asking you to internalize the moral of the fable of the tortoise and the hare: slow and steady will win this race. While some people have natural talent (whether as runners or as writers and researchers), individuals finish marathons and write research papers because they are determined, diligent, and skilled. The hare may be the more naturally gifted and the faster runner, but the tortoise industriously persists throughout the course to win the race. Be the tortoise!⁷ Work on your paper slowly but surely throughout the writing period, and you will produce a fine final product.

Finally, I ask you to adopt a mix of humility and efficacy throughout the project. All successful researchers and writers receive an enormous amount of feedback on their projects, and sometimes those reactions mean having to rethink and redo work that the author thought was completed. Such news can be discouraging for some, but a can-do attitude (and the recognition that tough feedback is normal and leads to a better outcome) keeps the researcher moving forward, addressing issues and knowing that the final product will be finer because of those criticisms. Moreover, that feedback is a sign of respect and belief in what your project can be; criticisms are not personal but designed to help you and your research reach their full potential.

WHAT RESEARCH PAPER WRITING ENTAILS

This book seeks to teach you the basics of writing a research paper in political science. Each chapter is devoted to a particular section of that project and the skills you need to develop to make that part a good one. The whole effort can be

broken down into eleven distinct but interrelated tasks,⁸ which map into different sections of the paper as specified in Table 1.1. I also suggest a twelfth—the presentation with an abstract (paragraph description of the project)—because many of you will have to present your project *and* because figuring out how to best share your work with an audience and talking about it prior to your turning it in, in my experience, aids students in producing a higher quality final product. In addition to these tasks, Table 1.1 provides a *relative* timetable because institutions use different-length terms (semesters, trimesters, and quarters), and some students using this book might be writing theses of longer duration. By setting out deadlines now, I am underlining the notion that you cannot write a research paper in a matter of days or hours. Moreover, while I stress that you frequently will be rethinking your drafts, Table 1.1 underlines that you need to put ideas on paper. The deadlines, however, are provisional, and you should look to your instructor’s specific guidelines as you work on your project.

Each of the following chapters will identify precisely what you need to do to write the different sections of a paper. In the text that follows you will find instructions and examples of actual student efforts. At the end of every chapter, I will provide both a practical summary to guide you through accomplishing the goals and a recipe designed to make your tasks crystal clear. Please remember, research paper writing takes time: to develop a question, find appropriate sources, read and understand them, write, think, and plan your research, conduct it, reflect on its significance, and finally, revise and edit it. While the task chart makes the process *appear* to be linear—you work through one task, complete it, and then move on to another—do not be fooled: the quality of your writing improves as the clarity of your ideas do. A better picture of how you proceed is not a straight line but a *spiral* whereby you are constantly looping back, adding insights, information, and sophistication because you have rethought and sharpened what you have understood and written before. A guiding assumption here is that your paper benefits from reconsideration and iteration, and by coiling (picture a spring) back through some ideas while you are also pushing forward, you make progress toward completing your goal. The spiraling back gives you a qualitative bounce forward, as with that spring. To stay in one place to perfect that section might give you a polished early part of your paper, but those efforts won’t lead to a finished product, which is a key goal. So, get started, work steadily, follow the deadlines your professor provides for finishing each section, and do not be ashamed to rethink and change earlier thoughts. Keep thinking of that spiral, and remember, “First thoughts are not best thoughts. They’re just first.”

Essential to springing forward is having some work to reconsider. Thus, this book asks you to begin thinking and writing as soon as possible. This recommendation may seem counterintuitive. “How can I write when I am still learning about a subject?” most students ask. The response is that writing is part of the thinking process, and you cannot make adequate intellectual advances without putting your ideas on paper (or in the cloud) at the outset. By the end of the process, you will have a draft that looks very different from the first

one you wrote, but that final version will be a product of the thinking and learning you did throughout the entire project. This book encourages (and in fact demands) that you write your research paper in pieces, beginning with the first substantive parts of the paper and revising as you proceed. Insisting on writing from the outset makes clear a distinction that most students don't recognize: *revising* and *editing* are different processes. Revising entails rethinking and major rewriting, whereas editing consists of fixing grammatical errors and format mistakes and varying word choice. We all know the importance of correcting those silly errors, but many of us aren't aware of just how important rethinking and reconsidering our ideas are. In fact, ask any researcher and you will find that she or he is constantly drafting, and that the redrafting process is primarily concerned not with editing but with perfecting the argument, sharpening the concepts, amassing better evidence, and adapting the structure to best suit the researcher's purposes. Most of the time writers revise, although

TABLE 1.1 ■ Research Paper: Tasks to Be Accomplished, Sections, and Suggested Calendar

Tasks	Sections/ Assignments	Suggested Calendar
(1) Develop a "good" topic or, more accurately, a good Research Question and find excellent, related scholarly sources.	Annotated Bibliography	At the outset, refine over the first third
(2) Identify, classify, explain, and evaluate the most important scholarly answers to that Research Question, and (3) assert a thesis.	Annotated Bibliography Literature Review	By the end of the first third, add sources, revise ideas throughout the process, having a polished Literature Review with a thesis by the midpoint
(4) Assert a clear Thesis with its constituent claims or develop a Model and Hypothesis that follow directly from the argument.	Thesis or Model and Hypothesis	By the end of the first half of the course, sharpen your argument and assertions throughout
(5) Revise and (6) edit.	All sections	Throughout, with an intense effort in the last phase

<p>(7) Plan the study, with attention to defining and selecting appropriate cases and methods for analysis, creating usable operational definitions of concepts and strategies for their knowing values, identifying data sources, developing instruments for generating data (if necessary), and explaining methodology. In addition, justify this plan and recognize its potential flaws.</p>	<p>Research Design</p>	<p>About midway to two thirds through</p>
<p>(8) Evaluate the thesis or hypothesis across the chosen cases; present evidence in effective ways so that you and the reader can easily follow why you have reached your judgments on the applicability of your argument for your cases.</p>	<p>Analysis and Assessment</p>	<p>Start about two thirds of the way through (earlier if possible)</p>
<p>Write (9) a Conclusion that reminds the reader of the findings, discusses why these results emerged and where else they might be applicable, and suggests paths for future research; (10) an Introduction that introduces the reader to the issue and question inspiring you, asserts a clearly stated thesis that answers that query, and provides an overview of the paper; and (11) a title that conveys your argument and your findings in a brief and inviting way.</p>	<p>Conclusion Introduction Title</p>	<p>Final phase</p>
<p>(12) Create an abstract and presentation. While these two elements are often not required, they can be enormously beneficial. The abstract is a paragraph summary of the whole project that appears on papers or posters presented at conferences. The presentation highlights the research you have done, important choices you have made, and your findings, with special attention to the “packaging.” Both inspire a holistic look at the project, aiding the final revisions.</p>	<p>Abstract Presentation</p>	<p>Final phase</p>

those revisions might be inspired by apparent micro-level problems that mask the bigger conceptual ones. The editing actually comes at the very end when there is little time left to make the draft better in a macro way. Thus, like a researcher, revising throughout the process will be essential for you to create the excellent finished product you seek.

BLUEPRINT OF THE BOOK

In the paragraphs that follow, I will briefly explain the contents of each chapter of the book so that you can have an overview. I recommend that you read this now to gain a better general understanding of the research paper-writing process. If you like, come back to these discussions prior to reading each chapter as a way to help you focus on the main tasks to be accomplished in that section.

In chapter 2, we take up the challenge of determining a good Research Question (RQ). Posing a question that is interesting and important to you, scholars, policy makers, and the average citizen is the key to a good choice. As you will see, coming up with an interesting query is one of the hardest and most important parts of the project. It sets the stage for the whole research paper. As we consider what makes a compelling question, we will note the diversity of kinds of research in which one may be engaged as a political scientist. At this point, you will also meet four students whose interests and research topics will reappear in different places of the book. Excerpts of their efforts included throughout the text give you examples of how others like you have handled the distinct tasks involved in writing a research paper.

After identifying an RQ, you are ready to look at how others, namely scholars, have answered similar queries.¹⁰ In chapter 3, you begin work on the second phase of your project: determining and understanding the academic debate. At this point, you need to discover how experts answer your RQ in both its general and specific forms. You will begin this process by working on the Annotated Bibliography and, if you like, using some source management software to help you keep track of your materials. In chapter 3, you will learn about finding good, scholarly sources—both books and articles—and using these works to lead you to others. In addition, I will introduce you to a variety of citation forms and examine the difference between paraphrasing and plagiarizing, as well as discuss other common problems students have integrating the work of others into their papers. At this early stage, sources are good ones if they provide answers to your RQ and lead you to other researchers or sources of data related to your question; your goal here is to uncover the commonalities and differences in the works of scholars who are interested in your query. By the end, you should be grouping the arguments of your books and articles into schools of thought—common answers to the RQ that are united by a similar approach, such as having a certain perspective on your issue of interest, pointing to a particular factor as the key cause, or sharing a methodology.

Then, in chapter 4, you continue the process of finding, summarizing, and categorizing excellent scholarly arguments by preparing a Literature Review (LR). This is the first section of the paper you actually write; what you have done in the Annotated Bibliography is create the framework, notes, and rough draft for the LR. This section presents the different scholarly answers to your RQ and assesses their strengths and weaknesses. You typically conclude your LR with a *thesis*, your preferred answer to the RQ.

All research benefits from very careful thinking about the concepts being investigated and the argument asserted. Chapter 5 asks you to take a careful look at the thesis and divide it into its constituent parts so that you can be sure that you are making a nontrivial claim. Asserting an argument that is not obvious and debatable can be a challenge, but the experts can point you toward them. That's the reason for the great attention you give to the literature. While carefully considering their argument, some students will note that their contention makes an assertion about the logical connection between developments, policies, and events or asserts a mutually constitutive relationship between factors. In those cases, writers seek to uncover the multiple sub-claims that underpin the thesis. For other types of research, which rests on a *correlational* or *causal* argument, the thesis must be developed further to guide you through the rest of the project. Chapter 5 then helps you translate such an argument into a *model* and a *hypothesis*. A model is a kind of flow diagram that identifies the cause(s)¹¹ and effect(s) as concepts and asserts graphically that $X \rightarrow Y$ (where X leads to Y). While the model helps you focus on the key factors you will need to study, it does not specify exactly how they are related. Does Y increase if X decreases? Because you cannot tell from the model, you need the hypothesis. The hypothesis identifies the ways in which these factors are related and is typically stated as, "the more of X, the less of Y," if you are positing a negative relationship between two continuous variables. (If you were expecting a positive relationship, the sentence would read, "the more of X, the more of Y").¹² Although not all students will have to write the Model and Hypothesis section, they may benefit from the discussion of concepts, theses, sub-claims, models, and hypotheses contained in chapter 5.

Before proceeding further, chapter 6 acknowledges that all good writers take an enormous amount of time to revise and edit their work. You will too. While this placement of a discussion on revising and editing midway through the book might initially seem strange, the timing reflects a typical break in many course-based research projects. You likely have to turn in a literature review and thesis/argument/hypothesis to your professor when your project is still incomplete. Thus, chapter 6 gives you advice at this in-process stage on how to revise and edit, while recognizing that you still need to write, read, think, and research a good deal more and that an excellent final product requires your continual attention. You must check to make sure that each section accomplishes what it should, that the paper is well written and has no silly typographical, grammatical, or spelling errors, and that you have followed all of the formatting instructions your professor has specified. Chapter 6 provides details on revising and editing, and

to be successful, you should return to its advice prior to turning in subsequent drafts. Placing this discussion here ensures that you have already encountered it before the end of the project, when students can be too tired to want to consider seriously what revising and editing entail.

Once you have a sense of what you want to assert and which factors are essential in your argument, you are about halfway through this project, at the equivalent of mile 12 in this marathon. Chapter 7 walks you through writing the Research Design (RD), which is your research plan and your justification for it. In this section, you design your evaluation of your thesis or test of your hypothesis, and this undertaking is multifaceted. Here you determine what information or which set of cases you need to study to conduct a fair assessment of your claim. You also explicitly state how you will translate the concepts into identifiable or sometimes measurable entities. Locating sources and data is important now too, and you will see how the kind of information you need at this stage is very different from what you relied on earlier. Finally, you explain exactly what you will consider to be “good” information and how it will help you evaluate your thesis. In some cases, you may even discuss how you will generate data, for example, by identifying how you will know which values your concepts take on or providing a sample survey if you plan to administer one.

Throughout this section, you acknowledge any weaknesses and profess any compromises you had to make in designing your project, such as difficulties in finding the best case, determining more precise measures for a factor, or obtaining the data you wanted. As you will see, designing a perfect project is virtually impossible. Thus, every researcher must make tough choices and explain both why these decisions are warranted and what their potential effects are. If you have good reasons, you understand the possible drawbacks, and the problems are as limited as possible, your instructor will be willing to allow you to proceed.

In his classic textbook on methodology, W. Phillips Shively noted with tongue in cheek that political science is not rocket science. Natural scientists and engineers have verifiable physical laws that have been shown to hold and describe the situations in which they are interested, as well as instruments that can precisely measure the phenomena they are investigating. In political science, we have few laws, difficulty translating key concepts into measurable entities, and trouble collecting or getting access to good data. Thus, as Shively noted, political science is not rocket science—it’s much harder!¹³

In chapter 8, you learn how to analyze and assess the hypothesis. Using the plan you developed in your RD, you evaluate the values of your concepts across your case(s) to assess how well the logic and/or data support your contention. For noncausal arguments, does the weight of the evidence support your contention? For correlational or causal papers, do the data confirm your hypothesis? How can you best convey your information to show your reader why you have reached your conclusions? This is the part of the paper about which students are most excited; it is also what most students conceive of (prior to learning what a research paper really is) as the only important section. However, as I hope to show throughout

this book, the Analysis and Assessment (of the argument) can't stand alone and wouldn't be as good without this previous work. It makes sense and carries weight only after you have performed the other tasks. Moreover, by surveying the literature, developing a thesis and potentially a Model and Hypothesis, and carefully designing the research, you are in a better position to convince people to engage with your work (because you have explained why it is important and how your paper is contributing to the debate) and write a focused and convincing assessment of the evidence, principles, and/or logic that can sway a reader to hold the same view that you do.

Once you have determined how well your thesis reflects reality, you are ready to wrap up your paper. Using the running analogy, you are at mile 20 here, done with the hard part, and now all you need is the stamina to complete the race. Chapter 9 provides instructions to help you finish the two essential bookends for your project—your Introduction and Conclusion—and assists in revising your title. Perhaps surprisingly, you turn to the Conclusion first, because you need to know what you are concluding when you write the overview in your Introduction. Just like the marathoner, you cannot simply give up in the last few miles, limp to the finish line, and feel satisfied. You need to complete the race/paper strongly, with an effective Conclusion that ties the whole project together, reminds the reader of what you have achieved, explains why these accomplishments are important, considers both the limits of the research and whether this project provides insights that are applicable to other situations, and poses questions for future research. This section is particularly important if you believe that the compromises you had to make in the RD had a negative impact on your findings. If appropriate, you should explain your continuing confidence in your hypothesis, as well as discuss what you have learned about the choices you made and what might be more productive paths to pursue. Remember, regardless of whether your thesis was supported or your hypothesis was confirmed, rejected, or the jury is still out, if you have proceeded in the fashion recommended, you should be pleased with your findings. The whole point is to learn something in the research process, not to be right. That statement is so important that I am going to repeat it: your initial assertion does not have to be correct in order for you to have a successful research paper. Instead, you need to proceed sensibly and carefully through the process and analyze the arguments creatively and the information honestly, while writing clearly. A good process and hard work lead to a terrific final product.

Upon completing the Conclusion, you turn to the Introduction and then to devising an excellent title. A good Introduction communicates the question and thesis of the work and entices people to read the paper. In addition, the Introduction provides the writer and reader a road map or snapshot of the whole work. Academic writing in political science is very different from mystery or even most fiction writing: readers don't like surprise endings. Think for yourself how difficult reading an article is when the author isn't clear about her or his thesis (the point of the piece), let alone vague in specifying the query that inspired the work,

or alternative answers, methodology, cases, and findings. In the Introduction, you express these essentials clearly and effectively, with minimal jargon. In addition, writing the Introduction provides an opportunity for refining the paper's title. A good title will, in a few phrases, convey your question, argument, and cases in a memorable and creative way.

Finally, you have a completed draft. Hooray! A first full draft is occasion to celebrate—but not too much because you are at mile 22; you still need to finish strong. Some students will turn to writing an abstract and preparing a presentation, although I recommend that all of you partake in these activities. Writing a paragraph summary of this mammoth project will help you zero in on what is truly important and will help you fine tune your title, as well as rethink elements of the draft. Learning researchers also suggest that making presentations will have a positive effect, as they tap into students' multiple intelligences.¹⁴ Considering how to present your work—what you will say and what you will show—as well as hearing and answering questions from others are processes that give you new ideas and energy so that you can move forward with the last tasks of perfecting your paper.

With all of the sections and additional portions drafted, you can finally complete this project. Even though you have been spiraling through the process, refining and rethinking as you go along, you need to give that text a last, careful read to make it as good as possible. Remember to consult chapter 6 again so that you can use all the recommendations provided to turn in a polished and beautifully written paper. After you turn in your draft, it's time to celebrate. Not only are you finished, but you have done a great job. Congratulations!

You now have an overview of the research paper and the steps you will take to complete it. Admittedly, the tasks become real and clearer only when you are working through them, but at least you can see that the basics are presented here and the paper has clear boundaries. Whenever you find yourself getting nervous or foggy about the process and the goals, you can (1) turn back to Table 1.1 and (2) remind yourself:

To write this research paper, I have to accomplish eleven tasks (twelve with the presentation), and I have to write six (five if your paper is not hypothesis driven) distinct sections. Each of these sections has a definite purpose and a set of items I can accomplish. After I finish each one, I can check it off as a "completed section draft," realizing that I will continue to think about and improve on each part as I continue.¹⁵ Moreover, in the practical summaries and recipes at the end of the chapters, I have precise recommendations regarding what I have to do to finish each section. I also have additional worksheets, calendars, and checklists available in the Digital Resources. Thus, every part of the paper becomes manageable, particularly if I work on this project over a period of time, as my professor recommends. By following the directions and the advice spelled out here, I can turn in a paper that is compelling to any reader and of which I will be proud. In effect, then, if I am the tortoise and proceed slowly and steadily, I will win the race!

Notes

1. National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, *The Neglected R: The Need for a Writing Revolution* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 2003), http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/writingcom/neglectedr.pdf.
2. Marijke Breuning, Paul Parker, and John T. Ishiyama, "The Last Laugh: Skill Building through a Liberal Arts Political Science Curriculum," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34, no. 3 (2001): 657–61.
3. For an excellent discussion of the peculiarity of writing for each field, see chapter 4, "Writing in Academic Communities," in Thomas Deans, *Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric with Readings* (New York: Longman, 2003). Deans advances the concept of a "discourse community," that is, "a group of people who are unified by similar patterns of language use, shared assumptions, common knowledge, and parallel habits of interpretation" (p. 136). Such a term certainly applies to academic disciplines such as political science.
4. *Ibid.* Throughout this chapter, Deans develops the metaphor of writing in a particular discipline as being a traveler, a visitor to "strange lands." He does so by including two interesting works: an essay by Nancy Sakamoto and an article by Lucille McCarthy. Sakamoto examines the differences in the ways Japanese and Americans conceive of and carry on conversations, while McCarthy explicitly uses the phrase "Stranger in Strange Lands" in the title of her paper examining how one particular college student fared when trying to write across the curriculum during his freshman and sophomore years.
5. To be successful in your research you absolutely must find high-quality and reliable information that comes from reputable sources. Even such facts, however, will not be enough because you must present them within a narrative and an analysis that determines and defends which information is essential for your purposes. Finding excellent sources and situating your facts are part of the process of legitimizing your results. Your goal is to produce research that withstands scrutiny of knowledgeable and skeptical readers. Because numerous texts on the methodology and philosophy of science explain that researchers interpret what they see or report, knowingly or unknowingly, only what they deem important, scholars, journalists, and other analysts know that they must take great care to have their work taken seriously. On the ontological and epistemological concerns, see, for example, Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). Postmodernists will be disappointed in some places with my discussion of the research process, because much of what I ask

students to do will seem consistent with “brute data approaches.” For that terminology, see Charles Taylor’s piece in Rabinow and Sullivan, *Interpretive Social Science*, titled “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man” (pp. 25–71, especially pp. 53–54). I would argue, however, that students need to think clearly about how intersubjective understandings come about and this book asks them to study social reality systematically. I am not advocating solely for a positivist approach (and denying the relevance of interpretivism), but rather am conceiving of these methodologies on a spectrum. Here, Audie Klotz and her colleagues, as well as Rudra Sil and Peter Katzenstein, have had an influence on my thinking. Their works are admittedly far more sophisticated, as their audience is primarily graduate students and scholars. See Klotz and Cecelia Lynch, *Strategies for Research in Constructivist International Relations* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007); Klotz and Deepa Prakash, eds., *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); and Sil and Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms: Analytical Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). My goal is teaching clear and systematic thinking and writing to undergraduates, and I lack the space to explain in detail the ontological and epistemological fine points, and frankly, I am not sure that most of my audience would tolerate or be well served by the discussion. I realize that my solution (and its simplicity) will not please everyone, but I ask those of you who would like more attention to constitutive processes to bear with me to see whether I am able to deliver a guide that works for the kinds of studies you would like to see performed.

6. Of course, some artists have had great success with these extremes that I am calling inadequate. Yes, I am a political scientist and not an art critic.
7. In working on the first edition of this book, I learned that Eviatar Zerubavel, in his well-respected work, also uses Aesop’s famous fable to explain the approach one should take to writing. See his *The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 12.
8. In their first presentation, I advance these tasks in a simplified manner. I will explain and develop the complexities in the ensuing chapters.
9. See Telequest, *Across the Drafts: Students and Teachers Talk about Feedback* (Cambridge, MA: Expository Writing Program, Harvard University, 2005).
10. Some undergraduate papers in political theory may not include literature reviews of secondary sources. Look to your instructor for guidance about whether and how she or he wants you to handle the task of identifying and classifying different perspectives. Other papers might not require a literature review as described here but instead ask for an exploration of

key concepts. Still, the conceptual portion of the paper (basing your ideas on the work of scholars) is important and sets the tone for the quality and nature of the research.

11. Some will take exception to the notion of causation in the social sciences (especially univariate), and others would prefer to consider correlation. Still another set of readers will want attention to noncausal research. In the fourth edition, I am explicitly presenting a noncausal student paper, as well as causal ones. In my personal experience with typical undergraduate majors, students have such a fuzzy notion of the social and political world that correlation and then causal thinking constitute a key first step to increasing their analytical capabilities. As students become more sophisticated methodologically, I encourage them to consider the arguments against causation and for mutual constitution, but at this early stage in their careers, I emphatically believe that thinking about causes can be both useful and appropriate. Still, many students don't write these kinds of papers, and thus I have included a new student and an explanation of her challenges in this edition.
12. The alternative is if the variables are noncontinuous or discrete (also referred to as category variables, which can come in unranked versions called *nominal*—such as sex or religion—or ranked versions called *ordinal*—such as educational achievement of primary, secondary, some college, college graduate, or postgraduate). With discrete variables, the basic hypothesis would read something like the following: “If X is A, then Y is B, but if X is C, then Y is D.” Please note that we will discuss types of data—nominal, ordinal, and interval—in more detail in chapters 5 and 7.
13. W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 17.
14. Howard Gardner, renowned developmental psychologist who is the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, explains to the lay reader that humans have multiple intelligences (MI), not “one central, all-purpose computer.” Keeping with what he admittedly notes is a simplistic analogy, he writes that MI “assumes that we have a number of relatively autonomous computers—one that computes linguistic information, another spatial information, another musical information, another information about other people, and so on. I estimate that human beings have 7 to 10 distinct intelligences.” Because of MI, Gardner recommends that instructors find different ways of teaching the same information and giving students multiple opportunities to work through material. Thus, the presentation takes advantage of more intelligences than the

reading, research, and writing of the paper since in giving one, students develop additional visuals, figure out how to discuss and explain their work, hear others' reactions and suggestions, and answer questions. Of particular interest to those of us who do not follow this field, Gardner, and many other psychologists, reject the idea of learning styles and dislike how the notion of MI has been misused in popular culture and in the education industry (opposing the idea that learners are "visual," "auditory," or "kinesthetic," for instance) to create resources that pigeonhole learners into certain categories. He advocates, instead, for pluralism of teaching strategies and the recognition of the uniqueness of each student. See Valerie Strauss, "Howard Gardner: 'Multiple Intelligences' Are not 'Learning Styles,'" *Washington Post*, October 16, 2013. Accessed March 13, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/16/howard-gardner-multiple-intelligences-are-not-learning-styles/?utm_term=.c923b7d479c0. I have also found that socializing the research paper through the presentation raises the stakes of poor performance for students. While some might not mind if they *privately* earn a weak grade from a faculty member, students want to avoid embarrassing themselves publicly with an inferior presentation. Thus, an end-of-semester conference motivates students to sustain their good effort, when they otherwise might be "running out of gas" and let up because they are discouraged. Then, despite their frustration, they work through the presentation and, in so doing, overcome their discouragement because students ultimately achieve a better sense of the whole project from sharing their work with others and devote additional energy to that final draft.

15. If you are writing these as formal drafts for your instructor to review, you will be receiving excellent feedback to help you write a great paper. Be sure to address and respond to the questions and comments your reader makes, and do not hesitate to consult your professor during the process. In addition, whether you have a faculty reader or not, you can also benefit from the feedback of a friend, classmate, or member of your institution's writing center. Find a reader, and realize that criticism is useful; comments help you sharpen your ideas and improve your skills.