Writing a Political Science Research Paper

POLSCI 110
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Making a convincing argument

- In an analytical paper or research proposal the overall goal is to make a convincing argument supported by evidence

- In an analytical paper:
  - Provide convincing evidence in support of thesis statement

- In a research proposal:
  - Provide evidence demonstrating that your research question is important and that your research plan is feasible/logical
Introduction Section

- State your thesis statement or research question
- Explain why your research is important
  - The “so what?” section
- Provide a brief outline of what follows in your paper
Literature Review

• An examination and interpretation of the existing scholarly literature on a particular topic

• What are the major themes in the existing research on your topic?

• Are there any debates in the literature?
  • Scholars that take opposing sides in their research

• Are there any gaps in the extant literature?
  • Questions that are not sufficiently answered
Focus on concepts and ideas rather than individual books, articles, or authors

- Weave all of the sources together in a conceptual road map
- Try to avoid the “boxcar method” (i.e. one paragraph with a summary of each source you collect)

A synthesis, not a summary of the existing research

- What is the state of the research on this topic and how does it all fit together?
Components of Literature Review

- **Introduction**: Gives a quick idea of the topic of the literature review, such as the central theme or organizational pattern.
- **Body**: Contains your discussion of sources and is organized either chronologically, thematically, or methodologically.
- **Conclusions/Recommendations**: Discuss what you have drawn from reviewing literature so far. Where might the discussion proceed?

Note: Material from the Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill, http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/specific-writing-assignments/literature-reviews
For more information on how to write a literature review:


- http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/specific-writing-assignments/literature-reviews

Evidence

- Present evidence to support your thesis statement

- Examples of evidence:
  - Case studies that demonstrate your main point
    - e.g., provide an in-depth discussion of two cases that offer both similarities and differences that you can analyze
  - Statistics
    - e.g., public opinion polls, survey data, election data, etc.
  - Documents
    - e.g., party platforms, candidate speeches, legislation, letters and diaries
  - Analysis and findings from previous research
Discussion & Conclusion

- Summarize your arguments
- Explain how your arguments fit in with the broader political science literature that you discussed in the literature review
- Implications of your research for our understanding of the American party system or the future of American party politics
- Important questions that political scientists may want to study, based on your research