

Writing Workshop

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POL 201 | Fall 2022

Why are you writing a research paper?

- Apply general course concepts to a specific case in which you are interested
- Learning and improving your written communication skills
- Studying a subject includes learning how to communicate about it, even if you are taking this course for a general education requirement – this is the heart of liberal arts education.
- Note: I understand that English is not a first language for all students. My aim is not to nitpick your grammar. You will be graded on your writing, not just the content of your paper. However, the writing grade will focus on how you effectively communicate the argument in your thesis statement, which we will work on today.

Writing resources

- Read the prompt and assignment instructions on iLearn.
 - Syllabus
 - Assignment instructions folder
 - **Read the instructions, *then* ask questions if you have them.**
- AUS Library for research assistance
- AUS Writing Center for writing assistance
- Ask your professor for help! That's what I'm here for.
 - Read the instructions first.
 - E-mail for short questions – I will not review drafts over e-mail.
 - Office hours for questions that will need discussion.

Discussion

- **What are the important elements of a research paper?**
 - Introduction and **thesis statement**
 - Supporting arguments with evidence
 - Organized paragraphs that structure your argument in a logical way
 - Chronologically
 - General to specific, or specific to general
 - By relevant actor or level of governance
 - Others? The logical structure will depend on your topic.
 - Conclusion that connects your arguments back to the thesis statement

Thesis statements

- 1-2 sentences
- Usually at the end of the first paragraph
- Tells the reader the key argument you will make in the paper
 - In this case, you are making an argument about the **relationship between X political condition and Y outcome for politics or society**.
 - The paragraphs that follow should provide evidence to support this thesis statement.
- Be specific (you may fill in some details as you continue researching and refining the thesis)
 - Who are the key actors or people/institutions affected?
 - What's the timeframe?
 - What's the geographic scope?
 - How are the political condition and outcome related?
- For 5-10 minutes, workshop your thesis with one (1) classmate using the above criteria.

Discussion

- **What are some common writing mistakes that you should avoid when writing your research paper?**
 - Information dump – what is necessary to convey your argument, and what is extraneous?
 - Excessive background information – you do NOT have space in a short paper to provide a detailed history when your subject is a contemporary political issue. Be selective of the *necessary* historical context.
 - Vague statements
 - Often in introductions/conclusions
 - Example: “Since the beginning of time, people have debated what the best form of government is....”
 - Lack of transitions
 - You should have transitions *between* and *within* paragraphs to show *relationships* between ideas.
 - Examples of transition words?

Using sources

- You must cite ideas that you use from sources, *even if you are paraphrasing*.
- Every time you use a new source, you should cite. If you use the same source for multiple sentences in a row, you should cite at least every 2-3 sentences so that it is clear.
- **AVOID DIRECT QUOTES.**
 - I am interested in *your* writing and ideas, not your sources' writing and ideas.
 - This is a short paper, and large quotes that are not your own writing take up too much space.
 - The appropriate reason to use a direct quote is when the specific language of the quote is necessary to convey the meaning of an idea (e.g. analyzing the specific way a politician framed an issue).
- Cite in a footnote (so that it doesn't take up your word count)