

The research report

Research Methods for Political Science

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- Does the report clearly specify the main **research question**?
- Does the report state the **value and significance** of the research questions and indicate how his research findings will contribute to scientific knowledge about his topic?

- Does the report review the **relevant** literature?
- Is the review organized around key themes related to his research question?
- Does the report clarify how the report contributes to the existing literature/fills a gap?

- Does the report propose clear explanations for the political phenomena to be explained?
- Does the report discuss any alternative explanations?

Hypotheses

- What are the hypotheses? Are they empirical, general, and plausible? Are they clearly defined?
- Are the independent and dependent variables identified? Do they *vary*?
- Are the concepts in the hypotheses clearly defined?
- Are the **operational** definitions given for the variables valid and reasonable?

- What is the level of measurement for each of the variables?
Are the variables properly described?
- What method of data collection is used?
- If a sample is used, what type of sample is it? Does the type of sample used seriously affect the conclusions that can be drawn from the research?

- What is the unit of analysis?
- What type of research design is used? Does the research design adequately test the hypothesized relationships?
- Are alternative or control variables considered? If so, what are they?
- Does the research design address the possible challenges to causation (see below)?

- Are the statistics used appropriate for the level of measurement of the variables?
- Are the statistics correctly interpreted?

- Are the research findings presented and discussed clearly? Is the basis for deciding whether a hypothesis is supported or refuted clearly specified?
- Does the report make good use of tables and/or graphs to display the results?
- **NB: null results are perfectly fine!**

- What have we learned?
- Does the conclusion acknowledge limitations?

Annotated research report

See Johnson, ch. 15

**Remember the challenges to
causation**

Five hurdles

1. A credible causal mechanism
2. Does x cause y , or y cause x ?
3. Do x and y covary?
4. Confounding variables: spurious relationships
5. Selection bias

Citations

Harvard.

In text: “Johnson (2010, p. 25) finds that. . .”

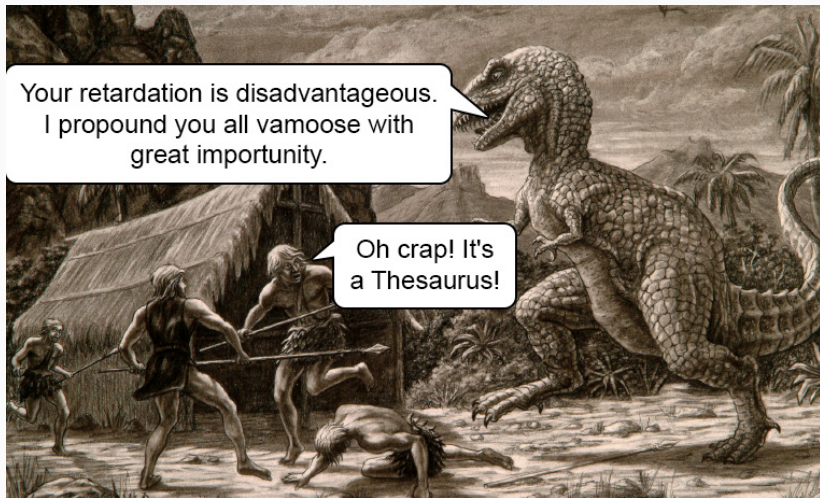
In bibliography: Johnson, C 2010, *The complete guide to finding stuff*, Obscure University Press, New York.

Clarity matters

Pay attention to

- words
- sentences
- paragraphs
- structure

Clarity matters



Presentation is
not just
about fonts

The big picture

The big picture

- Learning skills
- It's not all about grades