

Introduction to International Relations

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Your research papers are due **December 17** and must be submitted by e-mail, no later than 2:00pm.

All research papers **MUST** be typed and double spaced and include:

- A relevant **title**
- Introduction/explanation of the research question: establishing basic facts/introduction of basic arguments upon which your research question is built (3-5 sentences)
- A research **question** (1-3 sentences)
- A clearly identifiable **argument/hypothesis** (1-4 sentences)
- An explanation of the **significance** of your project (3-6 sentences)
- Discussion of your **case selection** (1-2 paragraphs)
- **Literature review** (2-3 paragraphs)
- **Alternative explanations**
- **Evidence**
- **Conclusion**

By **November 12**, you must submit your research paper proposals. The proposals have to include the following components:

- 1: Proposed title
- 2: Introduction/explanation of the research question: establishing basic facts/introduction of basic arguments upon which your research question is built (3-5 sentences)
- 3: Research question (1-2 sentences)
- 4: Research argument/hypothesis (3-5 sentences)
- 5: Significance of your question/argument/findings/research (3-5 sentences)

Remember: your paper **MUST** incorporate a discussion or application of at least one IR theory from the Theories and Approaches section of the course and at least one topic from the Debates and Concepts section of the course.

Before you begin writing your paper, you need to decide what you want to write about. What **topic** are you interested in? What would you like to read/learn more about?

Some questions that you may want to consider while researching your **topic** and developing your argument are:

Once you have identified a **topic** you are interested in, you will have to begin to research your **topic**, finding and reading as many relevant sources as you can. You will have to continue this research process after you complete your research proposal; however, without a sufficient amount of research beforehand, your research question will be vague and you will be unable to generate a clear argument, so be sure to do at least some initial research before you begin writing your paper.

Please note: finding a topic is only the first step in this process. Do not confuse your paper topic with a research question or an argument/thesis.

Researching your topic will help you refine and narrow down your **topic** and, most importantly, will help you find and develop a **research question** or a set of questions that will drive the rest of your research.

A: Avoid posing questions that beg for descriptions in place of testable/falsifiable hypotheses. For example, avoid these kinds of questions: What is international relations? What happened in Rwanda during democratization process? What effect did global financial crisis have on the Greek working class? What is liberalism?

Remember, you are not writing a Wikipedia entry. As a rule of thumb, avoid posing a question that begins with a “how.”

B: Do not confuse a question with an argument. An argument is an answer to a research question; it cannot take place of a research question. Similarly, avoid research questions that contain assumptions that must first be shown to be true. For example, these are not appropriate research questions: Why did economic stagnation and popular protests lead to the Soviet collapse? Why did the IMF exacerbate ethnic conflict in ethnically heterogeneous developing countries? How did neoliberalism contribute to socioeconomic inequality?

C: Avoid questions that are too vague/general/unclear, and/or difficult to answer in a 15-page paper. For example: Does the logic of capitalism promote international abuse and is nationalist thought a remedy?

Good research questions should be addressing the already-established patterns and asking why these patterns exist. For example: Why don't democracies go to war with each other? You can also try to find several cases that seem the same (same region, institutions, ethnic composition, socioeconomic development, etc.) and try to point to and explain different outcomes. For example, why was Georgia's central state involved in armed conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia but not with Ajaria? You may also develop your research question based on the existing

disagreement/gap in the literature. For example: The literature on corruption provides mixed evidence regarding the relationship between corruption and government size. Therefore, I will ask: do strong welfare states lead to greater corruption than their liberal/weak welfare state counterparts? Finally, you may seek to understand the relationship between variables (events, phenomena, processes, etc.), especially if some relationships are already assumed to exist/to not exist by the general public or in the academic literature. For example, you may ask: what is the relationship between terrorism and religiosity/socioeconomic inequality/ethnic heterogeneity/? In most of these cases, you need to introduce the question. For example, before asking why don't democracies go to war with each other, you must first establish introduce data and/or arguments that demonstrate that your question is not based on false or poorly substantiated premise. Similarly, if you would like to examine the relationship between terrorism and religiosity, for example, you first need to show that arguments/general assumptions about this relationship already exist, thus your question is not without merit/not arbitrary.

Once you have a research question, develop a clear and specific **argument**. Your **argument** will be your answer to the **question** or questions that your research raises. It should ideally contain two parts:

- 1: The first part of your argument should include a clearly stated answer to your research question. Ideally, this part should identify the variables or factors you believe provide the best possible answer to your research question.
- 2: The causal relationship between the factors you've identified and the question you are trying to answer. For example, the first part of your argument may make the claim that: "economic development leads to democratization." This is good, but only a start. You must then explain why this relationship exists. For example: "BECAUSE it produces a more tolerant, educated middle class." In other words, don't just say that X leads to or explains Y. After stating that X explains Y also say how. Without this second part, your argument will be too general and vague.

Example of a successfully research question/argument combo:

Why are some democracies more stable than others? I will argue that unequal distribution of resources is responsible for instability of democratic regimes BECAUSE economic inequality threatens legitimacy of the state/regime, is associated with higher levels of violent protests, and creation of anti-systemic parties and movements.

Don't forget to explain **significance** of your project. In other words, why should we care about your topic, your question, and your argument? How does it change the way we think about your topic? What is your contribution? Why is it important? Do not make the significance part

personal: it's not about why you want to write this paper. It's about why others should want to read it.

The research question, argument, and significance should all be included in your introductory section (1-2 paragraphs).

In most cases, **literature review** – which shows your knowledge of the existing literature/ research (existing arguments, debates, findings, etc.) on your subject and helps to situate your argument within the existing literature – should follow directly after your introduction. This web site provides a good explanation about what literature review is: <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/literature-reviews/>

In terms of your literature review's structure, I find this paragraph (from the above-mentioned site) especially useful: "A literature review, like a term paper, is usually organized around ideas, not the sources themselves as an annotated bibliography would be organized. This means that you will not just simply list your sources and go into detail about each one of them, one at a time. No. As you read widely but selectively in your topic area, consider instead what themes or issues connect your sources together. Do they present one or different solutions? Is there an aspect of the field that is missing? How well do they present the material and do they portray it according to an appropriate theory? Do they reveal a trend in the field? A raging debate? Pick one of these themes to focus the organization of your review."

Finally, proceed to test your own argument. Provide and discuss your **evidence** and discuss **alternative explanations**.

Grading Rubric for the Research Paper

A: Content and paper structure

1: Clearly identifiable question

2: Clearly stated and falsifiable thesis/argument

3: Discussion of the relevant literature (literature review): demonstrate your knowledge of the existing scholarly literature on your topic and situate yourself within that body of literature

4: Use of evidence to support your thesis (anecdotal evidence, such as references to personal experiences or experiences of one's friends and relatives, is not allowed)

B: Writing

1: Clear and concise sentences (avoid run-off sentences, use active voice, use complete sentences (all sentences must have a main verb and subject), etc.). Good writing is always clear. Unclear writing is not a sign of sophistication; it only shows that you are still confused about what you want to say.

2: Grammar (do not forget to proof-read your work!). If you need help with your writing, please take advantage of the writing center.

C: Citing your sources

1: You must use either footnotes or in-text citations whenever you quote or paraphrase someone else's work or make use of someone else's ideas or findings. Remember, failing to cite your sources and presenting someone else's research as one's own, whether it is done throughout the whole paper or only in one paragraph, is plagiarism. All plagiarized research papers will receive a grade of zero. Also, you may NOT use the same paper for more than one class without consulting with each instructor first.

You may find the following site helpful:

<http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism/>

2: Your research paper must include bibliography. Please use the Chicago citation style. You may find the following site helpful:

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

3: You should have AT LEAST 8 academic sources. Your sources should be related to your topic. Also, while you may find internet resources useful while looking for empirical evidence, such as electoral data, economic indicators, etc., you should primarily depend on academic books and journal articles (in other words, peer-reviewed academic sources).