

30:157 Voting Behavior and Elections Paper Guidelines

I. General Requirements

- A. Your basic requirement is to write a research paper. Such a paper should probably be at least 12-15 pages long to do your topic justice. The particular topic is up to you as long as it is related to voting and elections. Some topics used in the past include assessments of the Electoral College and proposals for reform, examining the role of race in determining voting, considering why younger people are less likely to vote, examining research on the role of parents and community in teaching political participation, and so on. Look at the syllabus for ideas for topics or feel free to come see me.
- B. Please note that these papers are to consist of *original thought and research*. They are not simply compilations of existing thought on the topics. You should use existing literature for your sources, but you need to go beyond what you read to draw your own conclusions. In other words, I want this paper to be more than a summary of what others have said. I want you to interpret and analyze the material. References must show the materials you used, and should be cited in the body of your paper. Don't include references that aren't actually cited in the paper, just to pad your references. References include ANY source of information from which you draw quotes or ideas, whether a formal academic publication, or the popular press (newspapers, magazines) or interviews with people involved in the decisions you are writing about.
- C. Make sure that any tables or illustrations are referenced in the body of your paper – so that if you have a “Figure 1” or a “Table 2” you discuss it at some point within your text, and tie it into the paper itself. Please number the pages of your paper and provide a separate title page that includes your name, ID Number, Course Number, and Date.
- D. You must include an Abstract with your paper. An abstract is a brief summary (100-150 words) of the paper. It should indicate what the paper is about, what your findings are, and how you found them. An abstract not only gives the reader a quick summary, but also makes you think about what your paper is really all about. Please note that the Abstract does not replace the first couple paragraphs of your paper, where you introduce the topic and explain what your paper will cover. You can get examples of abstracts from academic papers in any journal (such as the *American Political Science Review*, or the *Journal of Politics*.)
- E. Please staple your paper and don't bother putting it into a plastic cover.

II. Typical Paper Outline (Guidelines only, you will modify as needed.)

- A. Introduction. Here's where you spell out what you are investigating and previewing what will be discussed in your paper. Generally this is a couple paragraphs, and should never be more than a page. Don't forget to make clear what it is your paper will be doing.
- B. The Problem (in general terms). Use a subheading to indicate what you plan to analyze. Remember that your reader may know nothing about the particular area you are discussing so you must provide sufficient background to help the reader understand what the issues are and where your paper is going.
- C. The Problem in Specific Terms. Use another subhead to indicate that you are now going to discuss the details of the topic and then use whatever additional subheads you need to allow the reader to make sense of where you are going. In this section (the largest part of the paper) you will get into the details of your topic, including your analysis of the situation. This must also include references to the literature you have researched which provides the backbone for your own analysis.

- D. Conclusion. Finally, you should summarize the paper – you start by returning to the general topic and summarizing your findings. Then you need to discuss the implications of your findings.
- E. References/Tables/Figures. After the main body of your paper, you should have your references (beginning on a new page) and then any Tables or Figures, each on its own page.

III. Procedures

- A. Writing in political science (or anywhere else for that matter) should NOT be a “write once and done” procedure. It is, instead, a process of thinking, outlining, writing, and revising. Your assignments for this paper will help you do this.
- B. You will first turn in your PAPER PROPOSAL and a list of sources. This should be 2-3 pages, and should include the title, a brief statement of what the topic is about, a general outline of how you plan to present the material, and an initial list of sources you think will be useful. This source list can include books, articles, etc. and must include at least 5 sources, and probably should include more. You do not have to have examined those sources in detail at this point, and it may turn out that your initial sources are replaced with others down the road.
- C. You will then turn in a ROUGH DRAFT of the paper. This draft is to be a finished product in that it is to have all the parts of a complete paper. It must show evidence that you have done the basic research and thinking necessary to complete a good paper. I will read the draft and provide comments both as to the form of the paper and its substance.
- D. Finally, you will turn in the FINAL DRAFT of the paper. The final draft must take into account the feedback provided on your rough draft – that is, I expect the final draft to be a substantially rewritten and improved version of your rough draft. When you turn in the final draft, I expect your original rough draft to be attached with it.

IV. A few other points

- A. Plagiarism. Plagiarism is when you use somebody else’s work and call it your own. When you use verbatim excerpts from books, papers, internet sites, any source at all, you MUST provide a citation, and you must use quotation marks around the verbatim section. Even when you borrow an “idea” without quoting verbatim, you MUST cite the source of the idea. Failure to properly cite sources is academic dishonesty and can result in a range of penalties, including an “F” on the paper or an “F” in the course.
- B. Citations. The citation in your text should generally be the Author’s name and the date of the work, placed in parentheses, e. g. (Redlawsk, 1999). This must tie back to a listing in your References section of a work by that author on that date. Interviews should be referenced in the same way, so that there is a listing of the interview in your References section. Examine some papers in the *American Political Science Review* for appropriate format.
- C. Grammar and spelling COUNT! Please write in appropriate academic style – avoid contractions, use proper grammar, and make sure your spelling is correct. Improper grammar/spelling makes it very difficult for the reader (me) to follow your arguments.