GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A SHORT RESEARCH PAPER

POL 4256 / REIMANN / FALL 2016

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Topic: The paper topic must deal with a problem or question relating to politics, society and/or economic development in Japan. For a list of general topics and references, see the paper topics and references handout posted in the D2L “Research Paper” module.

Organization: In terms of organization, all papers must include the following:
- An introduction (that briefly states the issue or focus of the paper, your main argument, and a roadmap of the paper)
- A description of the issue you are examining
- A presentation of your argument, including empirical evidence and references supporting your argument. When relevant, also include counterarguments and why your argument is the correct one.
- A conclusion

Length: The paper should be 7-10 pages in length (excluding title page and reference pages), typed doubled-spaced, with one-inch margins, and using a readable 12-point font.

Sources: Final drafts should use and properly cite at least five different sources. At least two of the five sources must be from a book or academic journal. Five is the minimum number of sources required, and students are encouraged to use as many sources as needed to write a high quality and original paper. Although it is fine to use readings from the course syllabus, since this is a research paper, the expectation is that you will look for other sources of information. In addition to books, you may use government documents, journal articles, newspapers and other periodicals, information taken from the web, interviews and statistical data.

Papers will be evaluated and graded against the following criteria:

- Adherence to the basic requirements listed above
- Quality of analysis and argument
- Sufficiency of empirical content
- Grammar and style
- Adequacy and correctness of citation (see below)
WRITING TIPS

ORGANIZING A PAPER

All papers should contain three essential parts: an introduction, the main body of the paper, and the conclusion.

1. **Introduction**

   All good papers (not just for this class but for any class) have an introduction that tells the reader what the paper is about and gets them interested in the subject. Well-written introductions often start with an illustration, a story, or interesting fact that gets the reader’s attention. (This is not required, but it is one way to make an impression.) The three basic parts or elements include:

   1. A presentation of the research question you are interested in and why it is significant. (What is the paper about and why should we care?)
   2. A clear statement of the paper’s argument. (What is the main story or point you will be telling us in the paper?)
   3. A brief outline or roadmap of the rest of the paper. (Let the reader know how the paper is organized and give him/her a quick overview of what is to come.)

   In most introductions, the phrase “this paper” appears (e.g. “This paper is about…,” “This paper examines….” “This paper argues that…”) at least once. Introduction sections do not need to be long – depending how long a paper is, an introduction can be as short as a couple of paragraphs or as long as 2 pages. The introduction is very important, however, since it frames the rest of the paper and potentially makes it a more powerful piece of writing. Papers with poor introductions tend to be hard to follow and uninspiring to read. This is your chance to get the reader excited about your topic – use it!!

2. **The Main Body of the Paper**

   Many papers suffer from a lack of clear organization. Before you begin writing, you should write out an outline of your paper. There should be a logical flow to the outline that is (ideally) related to the main argument expressed in your introduction.

   Depending on what your topic and approach is, your paper could be organized in a variety of ways. Below are some sample approaches and how they might be organized.

   - **An empirical question approach.** Most of you will probably use this approach. With this approach, you pose a question and then focus most of
the paper on your answer. This approach would possibly include the following sections: (1) a presentation of your question and background section describing the issue, (2) a section that presents your explanation (and, if relevant, alternative explanations), (3) a section that presents information, data or references supporting your explanation, and (4) a conclusion section.

- **A theory-testing approach.** This sort of approach takes a theory presented in the literature and tests if it valid or not. A paper using this sort of approach would be divided into the following sections (1) a theory section that describes the theory being tested, (2) a section that presents your view on the theory’s validity and/or counter-theories, (3) a case section that analyzes a case (or cases) you are interested in and shows how it does/doesn’t adhere to the theory; and (4) a final section that lays out the implications of your findings.

- **A policy/strategy approach.** This approach is a more “practitioner” one that focuses on a particular policy issue and comes up with a strategy or policy for a government, business or NGO. This approach would include the following sections: (1) a background section that describes and analyzes the problem, (2) a section outlining past attempts to solve the problem (if any) and the degree to which such attempts have succeeded or failed; (3) a strategy section in which you present a strategy for tackling the problem, and (4) a conclusion section.

Although optional, section headings for various parts of the paper are very useful and help the reader follow the flow of your argument or narrative. By including them, the organization of the paper almost always becomes more obvious.

3. **Conclusion**

You must have a conclusion. Students often skip this step and end their papers abruptly. This leaves a reader hanging and wondering, “That’s it? What exactly was the point of this paper?” The conclusion is there to tie things up and convince the reader for the final time that you have made an interesting argument. Your conclusion should return to the question raised in the introduction and restate (in a new and interesting way) your answers to the question. You can also use this section to raise questions for future inquiry that are related to your topic.

**TRANSITIONS**

Unfortunately, even well-outlined papers can lack a clear and coherent organization. This is usually happens when the author has not made his/her points clear
by using good transition sentences at the ends and beginnings of each major section of the paper. Do not assume that the reader can read your mind about how you see a point is related to your argument. If a point in one paragraph is connected to a point in a previous paragraph, you need to explicitly mention this. Transition sentences, when included, can do wonders for a paper. They are crucial in helping the reader get your points.

QUOTING AND PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense that can result in an “F” for the course. Plagiarism refers to stealing someone else’s intellectual property or ideas. When you learn a fact from a particular source, you have to footnote that source. If you want to borrow a few sentences where an author phrased an idea particularly well, you need to put it in quotes and provide the source. Similarly, if you take a table of data from a source, it needs to be cited.

In order to avoid over-quoting and footnoting every sentence, here are a few tips. Paraphrase instead of quoting whenever possible (but cite your source). You do not need to footnote basic facts like the date of the US Occupation in Japan that are common knowledge. In general, avoid direct quotations unless (1) the author is particularly famous or important to the point you are trying to make and/or (2) the phrasing of the quote is unique and crucially important to the point you are making.

FOOTNOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Both citations and a bibliography are required. For this class, please use the American Political Science Association (APSA) style. Here is a link for the APSA Style Manual 2006: http://www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/APSA%20Files/publications/APSAStyleManual2006.pdf

Please provide in-text parenthetical citation of your information sources. In other words, do not use footnotes for your references; rather, place references in parentheses in the main body of the paper. Guidelines for this are on pages 17-20 in the APSA Style Manual (see above link).

Please provide a bibliography in the form of a list of references at the end of the paper. See pp. 24-33 in the APSA Style Manual for more details (using the above link).

SPELLING, GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Since this is a 4000 level course, most of you should by now know how to spell and write standard English. Your papers should have few, if any, spelling or grammatical mistakes! Use the spellchecker on your computer to catch typos and most misspelled words. Carefully proofread the paper yourself since spellchecker does not catch words
left out of the text or words that are not technically misspelled words but are nonetheless incorrect (e.g. “there” when you meant “their”). Spellcheckers are also not good at catching grammatical errors. If you can, get a friend to proofread your paper as well.

Some common spelling grammatical errors:
- use “1990s”, not “1990’s” or “90s”
- “who” should refer to people, “that” to states and other objects
- use “that” rather than “which” whenever possible
- do not confuse “their” and “there”

In terms of style, there are certain styles of writing that are generally not acceptable in formal college papers. Here are a few main points:
- avoid using colloquial terms and slang
- do not use contractions – e.g., “don’t” should be written out as “do not” and “it’s” should be written out as “it is”
- whenever possible use active verbs rather than passive and “be” verbs
- be careful not to overuse “this” as a noun (sometimes it is unclear to the reader what “this” refers to)

**CHECKLIST**

Here is a checklist to use as you write the paper and are in the final stages of formatting:

- Title page: paper title, your name, course number and/or title, date
- Page numbering
- Citations
- Bibliography
- Section headings (optional but helpful)