

# Critical Analysis Project: Paper

**DUE: April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 (during final exam period)**

## 1 THE ASSIGNMENT

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Each group must **turn in a fifteen to twenty-five, double spaced paper (including citations, tables, and figures) by at the beginning of our exam period on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020. An electronic copy of the paper should be posted to Sakai.** This paper should be written in the style of a journal article in political science that poses a question or puzzle, answers the question (presents a theory), and then tests that answer. Your paper should include at **least 4 academic sources.**

Papers will be graded according to seven criteria:

1. How original and compelling is the hypothesis being tested?
2. How compelling is the inferential approach? Does it show sound understanding and application of course concepts? Does it competently discuss limitations of the techniques employed? Note that the standard here is not perfection: no analytical approach is perfect.
3. Was the chosen approach competently implemented?
4. Were the results presented in a clear and compelling way?
5. Are the results interpreted correctly?
6. Were the changes requested in previous feedback sessions implemented?
7. Overall, is the paper well written, carefully proofed, and polished?

## 2 HELP ON THIS ASSIGNMENT & THE OVERALL PROJECT

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### 2.1 FINDING (ACADEMIC) SOURCES

If you need help finding academic sources for your paper, there are a number of good search engines to help. The three that I suggest that you use are:

1. Google Scholar (<https://scholar.google.com/>)
2. JSTOR (<http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/action/showAdvancedSearch>)
3. UNC Library (<http://library.unc.edu/>)

### 2.2 COMPONENTS OF A RESEARCH PAPER

These are the basic components of a research paper broken down by what should typically be contained within each section.

1. Introduction (2-4 Paragraphs)
  - a. What is the problem, puzzle, tension, etc. motivating the paper?
  - b. Why is providing an answer to that problem important?

- c. What is the answer to the question, puzzle, etc., you posed above that you are going to test in his paper? Why is this the answer?
  - d. Sketch of how you are going to test your answer – the context of the test.
2. Theory/Literature/Expectations
- a. This section should unpack 1a, 1c, and 1d.
    - i. Further unpack what the problem, puzzle, tension, etc. that is motivating the paper. This should not be the longest subsection of the paper – cut to the core.
    - ii. While you should have teased your theory in the introduction (1c), you need to expand on the articulation of the theory that provides answer to your problem. This is *your* argument for how the reader (me) should understand why the political process you are studying works the way it does. This requires being clear about assumptions, how those assumptions fit together to produce an argument, and in general terms what the expectations/observable predications are.
    - iii. The last chunk that you need to discuss in this section, which should typically have its own subheading, is to unpack 1d. To do this:
      - 1. Discuss the context of the test you will be conducting.
      - 2. Discuss the pros and cons of testing your theory in this context.
      - 3. Translate the theoretical concepts into conceptual variables.
      - 4. Translate your theoretical expectations into specific hypotheses.
  - b. *One General Comment on This Section:* Having an orderly flow to your argument is critical. If you lose people in this section of the paper, your analysis, findings, and conclusions will not make sense to anyone.
3. Data/Model/Methods
- a. You have already discussed the context in which you are testing your theory. Here you need to talk about the specific data you have.
  - b. Operationalize the variables.
 

Every paper needs a table of descriptive statistics for the variables that are used in the analysis. For each variable you will analyze, you should create a well-formatted histogram or other descriptive approach showing its distribution. You should also create a well-formatted table of summary statistics showing, for each variable you examine, its minimum, maximum, mean, 25th, 50th, and 75<sup>th</sup> quartiles.
  - c. Identify the specific the statistical test(s) that will be conducted.
  - d. Acknowledge any problems with your data, measures, or methods. Serious issues should get discussed in the body of the text.
4. Analysis/Findings
- a. Document EVERYTHING you do in an R script file. Write that file from opening the raw data through all coding/recoding, to all measurement choices, to all modeling choices. Fill those files with comments that explain every step along the way. If you cannot hand any person the raw data and a file that works from that raw data to produce every table, figure, and test you conducted and presented in either the paper, an appendix, or in a footnote, you have not properly documented your research.
  - b. Presentation of the main statistical tests.

- i. Include tables (or figures) of the results.
  - ii. Discuss what the tests directly say.
  - iii. Interpret the results of your tests as they relate to your hypotheses and theory.
5. Conclusion
  - a. Do NOT spend a lot of time restating your empirical findings. No more than one paragraph that summarizes the collection of findings is needed, and sometimes not even that.
  - b. Instead, link your findings back to your theoretical expectations at a conceptual level. Is there strong/weak/mixed/no support for your theory?
  - c. Relatedly, what are the implications of your findings for how readers should think about the problem or process under study? Return back to the introduction – did you solve the puzzle? What does this mean for how we might think about other processes? Are their normative implications stemming from your findings? Are there implications for other areas of study (e.g. some studies of voter behavior have implications for candidate strategy)?
  - d. What problems or issues arose in the study that you think are important for readers to consider?

In summary, your paper should have five sections, closely lining up with the steps described above: Introduction (step 1); Theory/Literature/Expectations (step 2); Description of data/Model (step 3); Results (step 4); and Conclusion (also step 4).

## 2.3 BASIC WRITING TIPS

Below is a list of general comments about writing. They're not in any particular order but rather a list to keep in mind when writing. This is not an exhaustive list, though it should cover many of the important questions that arise in doing a unique research assignment.

- DON'T use contractions (insert forced laughter here). For example, don't, won't, and couldn't should be written as do not, will not, and could not. It is not appropriate to use contractions in scholarly writing like your research papers.
- Systematically capitalize words, and check with various writing sources (or me) about proper capitalization. Do not switch between upper- and lower-case lettering if you are unsure what to do. Instead, consult a writing resource such as a reading from class or ask your professor/me about the proper way.
  - *One major point:* Republican and Democrat (or variations of these words) are always capitalized when referring to the political parties. If you were referring to a republican or democratic form of government, then you would not capitalize. It is possible that this distinction will be in your paper, so be aware of it as you write.
- If you want to use an acronym, you must spell out said acronym when you first use it, then note the acronym in parentheses. For example, if you were doing a paper on the National Rifle Association, then the first time you write out the group's name, you will include the acronym directly after it: "The National Rifle Association (NRA)..." Only then can you use the acronym without having to write out the full name throughout the rest of the paper.
- Do not write one or two sentence paragraphs. A paragraph that conveys valuable information will almost always have at least three sentences. Why? Well, a paragraph should have a reason

for being written apart from another paragraph, have some support for the reason, and then generalize what we learn from the previous two (or more) sentences. Therefore, one and two sentence paragraphs are not effective methods for imparting information (for a good paragraph example, see what I just wrote).

- Do not write long-winded paragraphs. If you have a five-page paper, having five or fewer paragraphs is a definite sign that information needs to be split into more digestible segments. Additionally, including paragraphs that are a full page are typically too broad, even if you have more than five paragraphs in your five-page paper. In other words, split up your arguments and do not run information together.
- Follow the assignment directions (like numbering pages). Print out the assignment and ensure that each and every point is handled. One of the issues I hate the most is when students clearly did not put in the effort, wrote a paper that was too short, and either a.) leave it that way or b.) try to fudge the margins around to create the illusion that they wrote enough. To reiterate the opening statement of this point, which can never be restated enough, follow the assignment directions.

### 3 WHEN TO USE CITATIONS, WHAT COUNTS AS PLAGIARISM, AND SO ON...

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The University and I are not fans of plagiarism, which can loosely be defined as taking information, arguments, etc. from an author(s) and NOT recognizing the author(s) for his/her/their work in gathering the information, making an argument, etc. In other words, the information you take from books and articles you read is not your own, yet you try and pass it off as your own.

Even with this definition, it is sometimes hard for students to figure out when to cite, when not to cite, and what is/is not plagiarism. To help with this, I will give an example scenario:

You are writing a paper about the radical anti-gun group, Guns Really Are Yucky (GRAY) and you read back through the McFarland chapter. You come across this excerpt on page 23 and think it might help to support the argument you are putting forward:

*A large number of component units in the pluralist political system exercise power, defined as causing changes in the behavior of other component units. In other words, many component variables are affecting many other component variables much of the time. This is another aspect of pluralism as complex causation.*

Ok, so now what? You want to use the argument put forth by MacFarland, but what is an appropriate way of doing this?

#### **Bad Example #1:**

*GRAY has clearly not been effective at changing policy at the state-level, and this is because a large number of component units in a pluralist political system exercise power. GRAY has not been able to compete against the strong lobbying of the NRA and other pro-gun groups because it does not receive large sums of money from donors and it has very few donors committed to volunteering.*

**The Problem:** MacFarland is never directly cited in the text, and the argument is almost word for word from his writing. This is blatant plagiarism, and if it were repeated throughout a paper, the result could be a zero on the paper and/or a trip to the Honors Court. In fact, just one instance in your paper counts as plagiarism! Professor Gray and I are not fans of this- trust me.

**Bad Example #2:**

*GRAY has clearly not been effective at changing policy at the state-level, and this is because a large number of component units in a pluralist political system exercise power (MacFarland 2000). GRAY has not been able to compete against the strong lobbying of the NRA and other pro-gun groups because it does not receive large sums of money from donors and it has very few donors committed to volunteering.*

**The Problem:** MacFarland is cited for his work, but the text is almost word for word from his writing (the “the” is changed to an “a”). This requires quotations around the text taken from MacFarland, with some notation of the change from “the” to “a” within the quoted section. This is still plagiarism, since you took his argument and his words but only attributed the text to his argument (not the words). With quotes, you would be ok, but as it is now, the writing is still plagiarized.

**Good Example #1:**

*GRAY has clearly not been effective at changing policy at the state-level, and this is because “a large number of component units in a [the] pluralist political system exercise power” (MacFarland 2000, 23). GRAY has not been able to compete against the strong lobbying of the NRA and other pro-gun groups because it does not receive large sums of money from donors and it has very few donors committed to volunteering.*

**Why this is Good:** You credit MacFarland for the argument AND the wording. People can now go to page 23 of this chapter and find that line. It has been properly attributed to the author.

**Good Example #2:**

*GRAY has clearly not been effective at changing policy at the state-level, and this is likely due to the high number of competing groups that are present in a pluralist system (MacFarland 2000). GRAY has not been able to compete against the strong lobbying of the NRA and other pro-gun groups because it does not receive large sums of money from donors and it has very few donors committed to volunteering.*

**Why this is Good:** MacFarland makes this point throughout the chapter, but it caught your attention on page 23. Well, it is ok that you do not mention the page number because the argument has been summarized and presented in your own words. Still, you properly attribute MacFarland as the source of the argument. You could put the page number there, just in case, but I do not think anyone would fault you for leaving it out.

These examples are meant as guides to show you how one piece of text can be presented properly and improperly. The differences are not that large, but in terms of writing, they are critical and of the

utmost importance. Citing is crucial for this process, and any and all information/arguments that you get from other sources need to be cited. Also, the in-text citations go BEFORE the period at the end of the sentence.

Finally, if you are writing a paragraph based on information that comes from one book or article, but is summarizing the arguments/information, here are some guidelines:

- If you quote directly, then individual sentences with these quotes would need citations.
- If you take from multiple sources to develop the paragraph, cite at the end of each sentence if the source of the information changes from sentence to sentence.
- If a sentence covers a point made in multiple sources, use one citation at the end with both cites in parentheses. Example: (MacFarland 2000; Gray 2001).