
Final Paper Guidelines

Political Economy of Armed Conflict

Winter Session, 2014
Binghamton University

(Due: Jan. 24 [5:00pm EST])

1 INTRODUCTION

In order to receive credit for the course, students will be required to submit a final paper. The topic of the paper will be determined by the student. However, I reserve the right, after reading paper proposals, to object any topic on the basis of feasibility, appropriateness, etc.

Students must have a clear research question or puzzle that drives their paper, and are expected to produce a causal argument that results in clear, testable hypotheses. **This is not a “research paper,”** rather, you are expected to follow the scientific method of building a theory and deriving hypotheses from your own argument.

2 WHAT SHOULD I WRITE ABOUT?

You are free to write about any topic related to the course, so long as the topic fits with the theme of the class—the political and economic factors that shape armed conflict. The paper doesn’t have to be specifically about why wars begin; instead, it can be about the political and economic consequences of war. At the end of the day, you have the opportunity to write about whatever topic you like, as long as it generally fits within the parameters of the course. Feel free to run a paper topic/idea by me if you’re in doubt. Some possible ideas can come from the topics we’re covering in class, so the syllabus is a good place to start looking for a paper idea.

3 WHAT SHOULD THE PAPER LOOK LIKE?

You should start the paper by outlining your research question. Essentially, tell the reader why your research question is interesting; why should they continue reading your paper? Why is your paper important for the study of **[fill in the blank]**. This is how you pitch your paper, and how you write the first paragraphs of the assignment. You should end this part by introducing what you are arguing. Similar to the critical review papers, you should say something like: “In this paper, I will argue that **[Again, you fill in the blank]**.”

After the introduction, you are expected to survey some of the literature on your research topic. What do others say about the topic and argument you are working on. Citations are expected (see below for citation guideline). There’s no set number of sources you will need to refer to in the paper. Since the course duration is short, it’s a good idea to talk about anywhere between 3 to 5 outside sources. I don’t want you to focus exclusively on what others have said, specifically because this is a hypothesis paper, rather than a review or summary of topic **[Insert topic here]**.

Following this, you will need to lay out your argument. Tell me a causal story between two variables, where one affects the other. As an example, suppose you are writing about the relationship between military strength and war involvement. Here, military strength (**X**) affects conflict involvement (**Y**). Perhaps being militarily stronger makes you more likely to be involved in wars; tell me why, and be very elaborate about this. This should be the bulk of your paper.

While students are not expected to collect data and conduct some empirical test of their argument, they are expected to write their paper while keeping in mind whether their theory will hold up in the real world. The discipline of political science is interested in following the scientific method as a framework for research, and you will be expected to write your paper in a way that will suggest testable hypotheses. If you've taken, for example, Introduction to World Politics, chances are that you've encountered a *hypothesis* paper. Again, while you will not be expected to collect and interpret data, you will be expected to show at least **2 hypotheses** that can be derived from your theory. For the convenience of the reader, I require that you do something similar to the following for each hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 *I expect that . . .*

I want you to clearly denote your hypotheses visually in the paper. Your hypotheses should not come at the beginning of the paper; they should be at the end of your argument section.

Finally, while you are not expected to collect your own data and conduct a test of your hypotheses—the semester is far too short for this—you are expected to have a section of your paper on what data you will need if you were to actually go about evaluating your theory. In the example above about capabilities and war involvement, I would discuss how I need to collect data on military strength. For one, I need to be really clear about what I mean by “military strength.” For simplicity, I define military strength as a state’s probability of victory in war—more military strength meaning a higher probability of winning a war, all else equal. Therefore, I would discuss how I need to find data on military strength that will affect how likely a state is to win, should they find themselves involved in a war. So, I would do some research for indicators of military strength; one of the best indicators comes from the National Military Capability data from the [Correlates of War](#) Project. So, I would go to the data source and describe the data provided by that particular source. You would do the exact same thing for the other variable (war). Essentially, you would look for a variable that measures war involvement. Again, another good source for this is the [Correlates of War](#). I want you to be very descriptive of your data. Basically, I want you to do everything up until actually collecting and interpreting data.

One way to think about this assignment is by looking to the scholarly literature we’re discussing in this class. In most of the readings, you will see a clear introduction that tells the reader why this research question is important, a literature summary of what others have said about the topic, and an elaborate argument about how **X** causes **Y**.

I expect that you will be able to complete this assignment in less than 10 pages. There’s no clear page minimum, but you will be expected to have the following in your paper to

fulfill the requirements of the assignment:

- A clear statement of how some variable (**X**) causes some other variable (**Y**).
- A clear description of some of the existing literature on the topic. What do we know about the topic from what others have argued.
- A clear and elaborate argument about why the relationship between **X** and **Y** exists.
- **2** clear, testable hypotheses that follow from your argument.
- A clear description of the data you will need to collect to adequately assess your hypotheses—how the data are measured, where you would get data from.
- A short description of the test you would run if you had collected the data you just described.
- A brief conclusion of what you argued, and the intellectual merit of the research project. Essentially, tell me why your research is important for what we know about your topic.

4 GRADING SCALE

Letter grades on the final paper will correspond with the following numeric final grade points:

A (350)	A– (326)	B+ (312)	B (298)	B– (287)
C+ (277)	C (263)	C– (252)	D (235)	F (175)

5 ROUGH DRAFTS

I am happy to read drafts of the final paper. In fact, it is encouraged that you send a draft of your paper to me. I will tell you my thoughts, and give you suggestions/advice. This is a habit that I suggest you become accustomed to doing in this class and in the future. I do have 2, and only 2, requirements that you must do before sending me a draft.

1. Read over your paper first before sending it to me.
2. Do not send a draft to me within 72 hours of the final paper due date.

6 CITATIONS

Students will be expected to cite sources when taking material from other readings. Plagiarism will receive severe punishments, and will result in *at least* a grade of **0** for the paper, if not worse (see the syllabus). You will be expected to use in-text citations and have a reference page that follows the style described below. I will give examples for articles, books, and chapters in what follows (please ask me for further citation styles if necessary):

6.1 In-Text Citation

- **Article:** (Fearon 1995) or Fearon (1995)
- **Book:** (Reiter 2009) or Reiter (2009)
- **Chapter in Edited Book:** (Frieden & Lake 2000) or Frieden & Lake (2000)

REFERENCES

Fearon, James D. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for War." *International Organization* 49(3):379–414.

Frieden, Jeffrey A. & David A. Lake. 2000. "Introduction: International Politics and International Economics." In *International Political Economy: Perspectives on Global Power*, ed. Jeffrey A. Frieden & David A. Lake. 4th ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Company Chapter 1, pp. 1–16.

Reiter, Dan. 2009. *How Wars End*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.