

Political Science Writing

A good paper reads like a polished paper—intellectually sophisticated. It is clear, succinct, and demonstrates an understanding of the material. Furthermore, it demonstrates thought about the topic.

There are three sections to a political science paper: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion.

The Introduction

- Introduce the main question
- Talks about the salience of the topic (why is this topic important)
- State main argument—the answer to the main question

The Body

- Can be in multiple subsections
- Briefly describe background information
- Define key concepts used in the paper
 - Example: if you're talking about democracy in your argument, you need to define democracy in terms of knowledge from class and readings
- Give alternative explanations—how have others answered the main question, and why is your answer more adequate
- Develop main argument, using logic and empirical evidence
 - Logic: show how your answer to the main question works better than the alternatives
 - Empirical evidence: use cases to support your argument

Conclusion

- Restate argument (succinctly)
- State implications of argument—if the argument is correct, what is the connection to larger issues
- Optional: related questions you'd recommend exploring in the future
 - Helpful for papers written in higher level classes where you choose your own research question/topic

The writing is succinct and clear, so that even people who aren't in the discipline can read and understand. Thus, tutors from other disciplines helping students with political science is helpful, because we can point out places we don't understand.

Writing a political science paper is in of itself a struggle with concepts, so talking through ideas with others is vital.