

Some advice on writing a substantive research paper:

1. Pick an appropriate topic.

I know this sounds really obvious, but it isn't always. Ask yourself, is this something I can cover in the space allotted? Is it something I'll be able to find information on? Does it relate to the class? And of course, make sure it's something you're actually interested in. Make sure your topic is neither too broad nor too narrow, and that it's appropriate to the course. "Civil military relations in the United States"? Too broad. "The significance of carrier pigeons in civil-military relations in the United States on the third Tuesday in January of 1952?" Too narrow. If you aren't sure about your topic, ask me or Professor Saideman.

2. Have a puzzle.

Something about the topic you've chosen clearly interests you – what is unusual, interesting, or otherwise puzzling about your topic? Your paper should be the answer to a question relating to your topic. This question should, ideally, be a 'why' question. Why did certain events transpire the way they did? Why did a state behave a certain way? Why did a given military take particular action, or do better or worse than we might have expected them to? 'What' or 'how' questions tend to be more descriptive than analytical. We want to see you making an argument. (See #4)

3. Know your variables!

The answer to the puzzle addressed above comes in the form of your thesis statement. This thesis statement should contain both an independent and a dependent variable. In the statement "X caused Y to happen," X is the independent variable, and Y is the dependent variable. The phenomenon you're interested in (a particular military coup, very efficient civil military relations, etc.) should be either the dependent or independent variable; that is, you should be able to explain either what effects it has, or where it comes from. Don't just explain what X is, tell me what it does—how/why is it causing Y.

4. Argue, don't describe.

Your thesis statement should be something that someone, somewhere, might disagree with. You need to be making an argument, as to why you think X, as opposed to anything else, is responsible for producing Y, or why it's an important factor in producing Y, or why you can't have Y without X. There are a number of ways of expressing your argument about the relationship between your variables, but you need to be sure you're making one.

5. Pay attention to structure and organization.

A term paper is not a mystery novel. The ending is not supposed to be a big surprise. Your introduction should explain to the reader what your topic is, what your central question is, what your variables are, and what your argument is, although not necessarily in that order. It's not a bad idea to try writing your introduction last, as you may have a clearer sense of your paper's overall structure and argument after you've finished writing it. Also, beware of tangents – you don't need to include every bit of information you find

in the course of your research. Some of what you find will be interesting, but not necessarily relevant. (If you do find something that's just so cool you have to include it, even though it's not strictly germane...that's what footnotes are for. But footnotes are, by their nature, short.) Every paragraph should have a purpose and fit into the larger argument. If you cannot figure out why the paragraph is where it is, well, then fix it.

6. Edit your work.

After staring at the same paper for three days, it can be easy to miss some very basic stuff, so edit your work (reading it out loud sometimes helps) before turning it in. Have a friend read it (if you have a friend in the class, then you can help each other out). (There's nothing like discovering after turning in a paper that you've left the 'r' out of 'shirt', for instance.) Pay attention to style, grammar, spelling, paragraph breaks, etc.

7. Cite your sources.

It doesn't matter which citation style you use, as long as you use one. Citation style guides are easy to find online. If an idea isn't yours, then cite it. If you aren't sure whether something needs to be cited, cite it. One useful book to consult on citation is *Doing Honest Work in College*, by Charles Lipson. That being said, try to avoid using long quotes from secondary sources – it's appropriate sometimes, but for the most part, we want to hear what YOU think, in YOUR words. (Of course, whether you're quoting directly or not, you need to cite where you found the information you're using.)