



Contemporary Issues in International Relations

Research Paper

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A 10-page research paper concerning any contemporary issue in international relations is a requirement for this course. You are responsible for choosing your own issue based on your own interests. The final aim for this research project is for you to increase your ability to reason logically, to argue coherently, and to write correctly. This paper can also serve as a writing sample for graduate school and/or law school applications, should the need arise.

Components

The research paper that you write will cover the history of the issue (of your choosing), the positions held by each of the sides (ideological and/or territorial), prognosis for an end to the conflict, and your own assessment of appropriate steps to take to resolve the issue.

These are the bare requirements for content. Of course, you will naturally go above and beyond these to make the paper more fully yours, especially since it will get you a higher grade.

Due Dates

Topic: January 22

Identify the issue you will be examining. Write approximately a half of a page describing the issue and its history thus far.

Outline: February 9

The outline is a checkpoint that allows both of us to know if your project is 'on track' or if it got 'derailed at the station.' It also helps ensure that there is a logic underlying the final product.

First Draft: March 5

We all know the purpose of a first draft. It is to make sure you are not procrastinating on the project and that you have ample opportunity to modify your project before time pressures become intense.

Final Draft: April 16

Everyone's paper is due on April 16. There are several things I am looking for in the final product.

- Are all of the required issues addressed? Do you do merely what is required, or do you go above and beyond with your research and writing?
- Is there an underlying logic to how you present your paper? Every paper that has a point (as this one does) has an argument attempting to compel the reader to that point.
- Have you defined the concepts central to your paper? Do you tell me what you are going to examine as precursors and why one should look at *those* factors instead of others?
- Did you overlook a major argument or a major section of the literature?

- ❑ Did you keep to the logic of your argument; that is, did you stay focused?
- ❑ Did you use a sufficient number of sources/citations to help avoid bias in your results? Do you use academic sources? Are your sources reputable?
- ❑ Did you *avoid* general-purpose reference books? Did you cite and reference everything correctly?
- ❑ Does the paper actually say what you want it to say?
- ❑ Is the paper *at least* 10 pages (not counting the reference list)?

Suggestions:

The following are some suggestions to help create a better final product. Of course these are not hard and fast rules, but they do tend to work as good guidelines. If you have no clue what to do, the best thing to do is to stop in and chat with me.

1. Pick an issue that interests you. Since you are going to work on this for the entire semester, you might as well pick something you enjoy.
2. Read, read, and read some more! Start with the general history of your issue and progress to the more specific. These histories should provide you with the vast majority of the facts that you need. Make sure you find several sources for your facts, as each source will tell a slightly different story. Stuck on getting good sources? Look at the reference lists, as they serve as indicators of what sources and people are most important in your chosen topic.
3. The most important part in any research project is structure of the paper. Once that structure is created, everything else should flow. Of course, allow for that structure to change should the need arise. A research paper is an organic thing; it grows and changes with the level of knowledge you have.
4. Proofread your paper. Have someone else proofread it—your parents, maybe. Pay special attention to whether or not what you wrote makes sense. I do not care what you meant to write; I only care what you actually wrote.
5. I will deal severely with any instance of plagiarism. With that in mind, make sure you cite and reference your sources properly. If you define a word, that definition needs to be cited. If you use a fact that is not common knowledge, it needs to be cited. What is common knowledge? Ask your server at Sunspot. If he/she knows it, then it is common knowledge (Katie and Jennifer do not count, since they are in graduate school here).