Writing a Research Paper in Political Science

A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods

Third Edition

Lisa A. Baglione

Saint Joseph's University

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About the Author

Dr. Lisa A. Baglione is professor and chair of the political science department at Saint Joseph's University. Her major fields of study are international relations and comparative politics. Dr. Baglione has published works exploring post-settlement peace building; the arms control decision-making process in the United States, the Soviet Union, and Russia; and the research paper–writing process and has coauthored articles on the transformation of the Russian polity and economy in the early postcommunist period. Currently, she is researching the determinants of contemporary Russian foreign policy. At Saint Joseph's, Dr. Baglione teaches two courses—Writing in International Relations and Sophomore Seminar in Political Science—in which she develops and tests the ideas, advice, and techniques offered in this work.

To Jack Moran
The consummate teacher-researcher-friend

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Preface

As I write this preface, I am preparing to speak at a memorial service for my dear friend, Jack Moran, the long-time head tutor at Cornell-in-Washington's (CIW) internship and public policy program for undergraduates. My commitment to the importance of teaching research paper writing and this book originated in my experiences there and are very much a result of my interactions with Jack. For those of you who notice that the dedication of this edition is different from the previous one, the reason is not related to any change in my status but as a way to honor my friend, who taught me so much as a graduate student and who, over the ensuing two-plus decades, engaged in numerous conversations with me about teaching research methods and how to engage students in the research process. I was not an early believer that requiring political science undergraduates to undertake a journal-style research article was a good idea. The instructors who are picking up this book likely have heard these criticisms and more: such an endeavor puts students under too much pressure, is too specialized when a liberal arts education is not intended to produce academics, and is too much work for faculty and students alike. In my time at Cornell and then with even more fervor as a faculty member at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, I became a convert, and Jack was central to helping me arrive at that transformation. I firmly believe that learning how to conduct research and effectively communicate ideas in the form of an academic paper not only teaches students invaluable writing, research, logical, and analytic skills but, perhaps most compelling, *empowers* them to become critical consumers of information and, therefore, better citizens in a democracy. Today Americans and people in liberal polities the world over must assess arguments, weigh evidence, and consider the appropriateness of cases, data, and comparisons as they decide whose policy positions appear best suited to contemporary challenges and whose inclinations and worldviews seem capable of handling unforeseen opportunities and dangers.[1]

Jack Moran was the consummate teacher, who knew how to expertly guide students through the research process and, over his career, oversaw more than a thousand undergraduate public policy theses, ranging in length from about 60 to 100 pages. Weekly, he would meet individually with his students after having read their drafts, intellectually poking and prodding them to sharpen their ideas, encouraging, laughing, and challenging them to do their best. He shaped so many students and gave them an unbelievable experience that was more than an intellectual one, because Jack was not just a teacher but a mentor. He lived in the CIW complex with these students, and he gave them his all. Also remarkable about Jack was how much time and energy he spent on the graduate students who were teaching at CIW. For this program to

succeed, the Cornell Center needed a group of tutors to work with the undergrads, but most of the time, graduate students—despite being in the early stages of writing their own dissertations—had had very little training in the research process. And the majority certainly didn't know much about teaching research paper writing. Jack took the tutors under his wing, helped them master the art of teaching at CIW, and encouraged them through their own theses, often giving useful advice on how to overcome methodological challenges and writing blocks, and aiding countless tutors in finishing so that they could move on to their faculty appointments. The puzzle of Jack for some of us was that he never completed his own dissertation, when he certainly could have; thankfully, he was not regretful. The joy of his interaction with students and colleagues, his wonderful life filled with friends, politics, art, music, culture, and great food, and living in Washington, D.C., with ample time for travel, was enough. Why wouldn't it be? Most of us look at his life and say, indeed, it was a life *very* well lived. Jack was a remarkable individual who changed lives and was such a good friend to so many.

Thus, I dedicate this book to Jack Moran. Future generations of Cornell undergraduate and graduate students are much deprived by his loss, and CIW will never be the same without him. I will miss his laugh, his friendship, and his willingness to discuss research challenges and design issues. This dedication is a small token of my appreciation of him as a mentor to those embarking on policy and political research, as well as an effort to mark the enormous contributions he has made to the development of discerning citizens through his service at Cornell's Washington Center.

In addition to honoring Jack, I want to thank some people for their help, encouragement, and generosity as I have worked on this book. First and foremost, I must give an enormous thank you to my students at Saint Joseph's University, who constantly challenge me to find better ways to teach about the research paper writing process and who, every semester, are willing to go along for the research paper ride (or marathon) with me. I hope they know how much I appreciate their hard work and that I do realize how much effort, concentration, and pure determination their research papers take. Second, I'd like to express my gratitude to my colleagues, who have humored me over the years and accepted my belief in the importance of research paper writing. While not all of them are as convinced as I, they have supported the course as a major requirement for almost fifteen years. I want to single out Graham Lee, who undertook this effort with me at the outset; Kaz Fukuoka, for his commitment to the research paper in the senior seminars; Becki Scola, for her devotion to data analysis and empiricism that always keeps me on my toes; Rick Gioioso, for his ability to question "old ways"; and Susan Liebell, for her discerning mind and overall commitment to student learning and writing. You have all influenced this book in multiple ways, and I am grateful to have you as colleagues. Third, I want to thank friends who have been supportive and provided me with excellent feedback over the years. I especially appreciate Marissa

Martino Golden of Bryn Mawr College for her ideas and friendship and for leading me to one of my student contributors. Mary Malone at the University of New Hampshire has again been enormously positive and someone whose instinct and judgment on research and teaching I always seek. And, of course, my husband Steve McGovern, at Haverford College, is the greatest sounding board and the person who helps me—the comparativist and international relations specialist—be confident that I am doing a decent job when I make a foray into American politics.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the students who have allowed me to share their work with you in this book and on the Web site. Yes, Zoe Colman is a real (and highly impressive) person who recently graduated from Bryn Mawr College. Not only do I greatly admire her senior thesis, but I am extremely thankful that she has allowed me to share it with you in segments in this book and in full on the Web site. Mary Korchak of Saint Joseph's University has also given me permission to provide her semester-long paper, written as a sophomore, on the Web site. Finally, two other students, Kevin Black and Rachel Sellers, are the composite of "Kevin" in my text, with Kevin inspiring the discussions about being torn between case studies and statistical analysis in studying the 2011 Arab uprisings and Rachel providing the research question and some of the actual text for the example of qualitative analysis. Thanks so much to all of you for your generosity in sharing your work with me and future students.

I am also very grateful to Dr. Kim Logio of the Saint Joseph's Sociology Department, who has had numerous conversations with me in the past about teaching research methods and using SPSS with students and helped bail me out at a crucial time when a computer crash rendered my software unusable.

The team at SAGE/CQ Press has been just great, again. I was thrilled when Charisse Kiino asked me to move forward with the third edition a year ahead of schedule, and Sarah Calabi and Nancy Matuszak have been fabulous to work with. At key times during the revising process, they provided me with valuable guidance to help make this edition a great product. They also found me fifteen anonymous reviewers, who deserve my thanks for the time and effort they put into the feedback that makes this book not only more current but better, serving student and faculty needs more appropriately. To the reviewers, thank you for the positive comments, recommendations, and criticisms. I hope that you can see your influence on this third edition, and I apologize here for those ideas I left behind. Please know that I did not ignore them, but rather considered what I could do in the space allotted with my purpose and talents. Jim Kelly is an extraordinary copyeditor, unbelievably organized, patient, and with a great sense of humor. Thank you, Jim! Finally, I extend my gratitude to Libby Larson who moved the work expertly through production, and to Allison Hughes for all her efforts on the web resources. I am very lucky to have had such a great staff helping me every step of the way.

As usual, the remaining flaws are all my own, and I hope there are far fewer in this edition, so that this book can be worthy of my friend, Jack Moran. Dear Jack, already you are sorely missed, and you will never be forgotten. You touched so many, many people in such meaningful ways.

NOTE

1. My colleague Susan P. Liebell has made an excellent case for the importance of teaching science to prepare a democratic people. See *Democracy, Intelligent Design, and Evolution: Science for Citizenship* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

chapter 1

So You Have to Write a Research Paper

Let's be honest. When many students look at a new course syllabus and view the assignments, seeing that the professor has assigned a research paper typically brings one of two reactions. A first possible response is one of horror. Many students dread the assignment because they don't know how to write a research paper. Students with this viewpoint may drop the course because of this requirement, be panicked about it all semester, or just ignore the assignment until the last moment (as if it might somehow go away) and then turn "something" in. An alternative response is, "No problem, I'll just write a *report* on something I'm interested in." Neither reaction is productive, nor are the strategies mentioned for dealing with the dreaded assignment fortunate. The goal of this book is to teach you how to write a research paper so that you (1) won't respond in either fashion and (2) will realize why the typical reactions are so problematic.

First, a research paper can be intimidating because—and this point is very important to remember—few secondary schools and institutions of higher learning bother to teach how to write one anymore.[1] Yet many faculty assign research papers, as if knowing how to write one were an innate ability that all college students possess. Research paper writing, however, is a set of skills that needs to be developed. These skills can be taught and learned, as well as used throughout a college career.[2]

Second, research paper writing is so daunting because the task seems unbounded. Where do you start? What is a good topic? How do you know where to look for information? What does the text of such a paper look like? How do you know when you're done? This concern with boundaries is obviously related to the general ignorance about what constitutes a research paper. But another problem here is recognizing that writing, whether for a research paper or some other assignment, is discipline specific.[3] Faculty often forget to make that point explicitly, and students typically conceive of writing skills as consisting of only grammar, usage, and paragraph construction. While those skills are certainly important, they are not the only ones students need to develop for writing good research papers, particularly in political science.

Political science has its own conventions (which are similar to those of the other social sciences and in some instances even related to those in the natural sciences) for paper writing that students must learn. Just because you earned an A in freshman English does not mean that you are ready to garner an equally excellent mark on your political science research paper. You not only must learn to speak a new language (the vocabulary of political science) but must adopt the conventions, values, and norms of the discipline.[4] Here again, faculty have so successfully internalized these norms that they forget that students need instruction. This book, however, will teach you to write a research paper in political science, demystifying the structure and the process. Developing this set of writing skills will be useful to you in a number of ways: not only will it help you write more effectively in this discipline, but it will allow you to see more easily the conventions that apply to other fields of study. In addition, once you know the style and format for any subject, your reading comprehension skills in that discipline improve, and understanding even the densest academic tome will become easier. Why? Because scholars use this structure themselves, and once you know what to expect from the form of an article or book, you will be better able to distinguish the argument from the evidence, the logic from the information, or the normative claim from the underlying principles.

Third, knowing how to write a research paper is something that will be useful to you throughout your life. You might find that statement funny, thinking to yourself that you are writing research papers only to get your degree, but thereafter, you intend to be working in the corporate or nonprofit world. (My apologies to those of you out there who see an academic career in your future.) Well, if you were amused, you need to stop laughing and recognize that you likely will spend much of your career writing, and a good portion of that writing will be persuasive communication that (1) surveys a number of opinions or studies on a particular problem, (2) assesses logically the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches, and (3) uses evidence from a case or cases of particular interest to you, your boss, and/or your clients to determine what the best approach to this problem is for your purposes. In effect, then, you will be performing the types of analysis involved in writing research papers for your living, no matter what you do. So why not learn how to do it now and develop the aptitude, so that you will be in a better position in your future?

Some of you might be skeptically reading this introduction, believing that as a more advanced student of political science, you have already developed the skills, knowledge, and ability to write an excellent research paper. With no disrespect to your accomplishments, experiences of scores of faculty from around the country, at the best institutions, suggest that even the most capable readers of this book have something to learn, because you have never before been asked to put your ideas together in such a systematic way to perform a rigorous assessment of the literature, assert a thesis, create a fair test for evaluating evidence related to your contention, perform systematic analysis, and

present your results in a standard fashion. So, even if you think you have little need for this book, I counsel you to read on. You are not the first to have doubts, and virtually all of your predecessors have come away finding value in these pages.

Others of you might simply not want to "waste your time" reading a book about writing, as well as inquiry, structure, and methods. In some ways, this book is like the oft-overlooked instructional manual that comes along with your newest electronic device. Most of us prefer to ignore that text and play around with our new toy to figure it out on our own. Your professor, however, does not want the trial-and-error approach here and believes that you will benefit enormously from this book. An instructor doesn't make decisions about texts lightly, as faculty recognize your constraints—the amount of money that is appropriate to spend on course resources and the number of pages you can read in a week—and yours has decided that this book will help you arrive at the desired end point of writing a high-quality research paper in political science. So, respect your faculty member's knowledge and assessment of your needs. Besides, the chapters are relatively short and the reading is easy. Your time investment will not be enormous, but the pay off will be great.

Importantly, the return will not be confined to this particular course, as the book will help you acquire skills that will empower you in multiple ways. By learning how to write that research paper, you acquire expertise—skills of reading comprehension, writing, research, and analysis—that will enable you to do well in all of your classes. Moreover, these are all talents you will use in your future career, whether you are an attorney, a CEO, an activist, a public servant, a politician, a businessperson, or an educator. Such professionals are frequently asked to evaluate information and provide recommendations. For instance, imagine you are working at the Department of Health and Human Services and are asked to determine the impact of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. At the outset, you will to need to find the legislation itself and then define what *impact* means. You also will need to justify your definition and explain from where and why you selected your information. Once you have some data, you must analyze them and then write up your findings in a form that will impress your boss. You will learn all of the skills required to do an excellent job on such a project in this book.

WHAT IS A RESEARCH PAPER? A FEW HELPFUL METAPHORS

Most students think that a research paper in political science is a long, descriptive report of some event, phenomenon, or person. This is a dangerous misconception that focuses on determining facts. Numerous texts on the methodology and philosophy of science explain that true facts are often elusive because researchers interpret what they see or because they report only what they deem important, knowingly or unknowingly, failing to provide a more complete

picture.[5] While we will return to the topic of data collection later in the text, the problem I am raising here is the one that characterizes so many papers: conceiving of them as "data dumps," or all the information you can find on a particular topic. Descriptive reporting is only one element of a political science research paper. It is an important part, and having a chance to learn about politically relevant events, persons, or phenomena is probably why you are a political science major. But knowing about politics is not being a political scientist. For political scientists, details are important, but only if they are the right ones, related to either the logics or the norms you are exploring or the precise evidence required to sustain or undermine an argument. Facts for the sake of facts can be boring and distracting.

Two metaphors help explain the balance you should seek. The first is that of a court case. In writing your research paper, you are, in essence, presenting your case to the judge and jury (readers of the paper). While you need to acknowledge that there are other possible explanations (e.g., your opposing counsel's case), your job is to show that both your preferred logic and the evidence supporting it are stronger than any competing perspective's framework and its sustaining information. Interesting details that have nothing to do with the particular argument you are constructing can distract a jury and annoy the judge. Good lawyers lay out their cases, connecting all the dots and leaving no pieces of evidence hanging. All the information they provide is related to convincing those in judgment that their interpretation is the correct one.

If you find the analogy of the courtroom too adversarial, think of your paper as a painting. The level and extent of detail depends on both the size of the canvas and the subject to be painted. Too few details in a landscape can make it boring and unidentifiable, whereas too many in a portrait can make the subject unattractive or strange. The goal here is to achieve the "Goldilocks" or "just right" outcome.[6]

I will use two other metaphors throughout this book to help you (1) maintain the appropriate long-term perspective on the project (the marathon) and (2) know exactly what you need to do as you proceed through the paper (the recipe). Like running a marathon, the research paper is the culmination of great efforts. Just as the typical person cannot expect to get up on the morning of a race, go to the starting line, and run for more than twenty-six miles, a student needs to go through preparatory steps before completing a research paper. While runners stretch, train, get the right nutrition and rest, and prepare mentally for years, months, and days before the big race, students need to practice their writing and develop their theses, create plans for evaluating those contentions, find the right kinds of information, evaluate the data, and work on presenting their claims and the evidence as accurately and effectively as possible. All of these tasks require time and energy. Only with adequate preparation do the marathoner and the student finish the race and the paper successfully.

While few of us are likely to run a marathon, everyone who reads this book will write a research paper. My point in writing is to show you that if you

follow the advice spelled out here, you will not only finish your paper but turn in something of which you feel proud. Too often I have seen students rushing at the end just to get their papers done, without really caring about quality. Their feelings are at times understandable. They didn't know how to approach the project, haven't asked for or received any guidance, and are having a totally unsatisfying time working on their research papers. When this is the case, not only is the end result poor, but the exercise itself is a failure as an assignment.

To avert such negative outcomes, this text serves as a kind of cookbook, with a recipe at the end of each chapter that suggests the supplies and steps to take to write an excellent paper. For some of you and in some sections of the text, these recipes might seem a bit simple, as they set out the basics. When that is the case, like any experienced cook, you should free to modify, adding the spices and flourishes that might fit your tastes. But your final product won't be satisfying if you ignore the basics, and thus the recipe provides those essentials for you.

In addition, this textbook comes with a companion Web site, http://study.sagepub.com/baglione3e, that includes many resources designed to help you master the materials presented so that you can write an excellent paper. Most chapters have corresponding handouts or guides, as well as exercises for practicing the skills that are the subject of the chapter, calendar reminders, and checklists that you can customize (based on the recipes) designed to serve as rubrics that clearly state exactly what you need to accomplish. Flashcards on the site provide definitions to the key terms appearing in italics throughout the book.

The most important insights of this guide to research paper writing (and ones you would do well to internalize) are that you can have a rewarding and satisfying learning experience if you devote time to the process, recognize that you have something to learn from this book, regardless of how many political science courses you have already taken, and conceive of the research paper as consisting of smaller, definable tasks. Each piece can be accomplished on its own, and the parts can then be assembled and reworked to create a coherent and significant whole. In effect, then, the tasks are like the marathoner's efforts to prepare before a race or a cook's steps to create a delicious multicourse meal. Each performs on the appropriate day but succeeds only after days and weeks of preparation.

In fact, continuing with the running analogy, I am asking you to consider the fable of the tortoise and the hare: slow and steady will win this race. While some people have natural talent (whether as runners or as writers and researchers), individuals finish marathons and write research papers because they are determined, diligent, and skilled. The hare may be the more naturally gifted and the faster runner, but the tortoise industriously persists throughout the course to win the race. Be the tortoise![7] Work on your paper slowly but surely throughout the writing period, and you will produce a fine final product.

WHAT RESEARCH PAPER WRITING ENTAILS

This book seeks to teach you the basics of writing a research paper in political science. Each chapter is devoted to a particular section of that thinking and writing process and the skills you need to develop to make that part a good one. The whole effort can be broken down into eleven distinct but interrelated tasks,[8] which map into different sections of the paper as specified in Table 1.1. Because institutions use different-length terms (semesters, trimesters, and quarters), and some students using this book might even be writing theses of longer duration, I'm providing a suggested calendar in relative terms. By setting out deadlines along the way, I am underlining the notion that you cannot write a research paper in a matter of days or hours. Moreover, while I stress that you frequently will be rethinking your drafts, you do need to put ideas on paper—thus the suggested deadlines. The timing here, however, is provisional, and you should look to your instructor's guidelines as you work on your project.

Each of the following chapters will identify precisely what you need to do to write the different sections of a paper. In the text that follows you will find instructions and examples of actual student efforts. At the end of every chapter, I will provide a practical summary to guide you through accomplishing the goals and a recipe designed to make your tasks crystal clear. Please remember, research paper writing takes time: to develop a question, find appropriate sources, read and understand them, write, think, plan your research, conduct it, reflect on its significance, and finally, revise and edit it. While the task chart makes the process appear to be linear—you work through one task, complete it, and then move on to another—do not be fooled: the quality of your writing improves as the clarity of your ideas does. A better picture of how you proceed is not a straight line but a spiral whereby you are constantly looping back, adding insights, information, and sophistication because you have rethought and sharpened what you have understood and written before. A guiding assumption here is that your paper benefits from reconsideration and iteration, and by coiling (picture a spring) back through some ideas while you are also pushing forward, you make progress on completing your goal. To stay in one place to perfect that section might give you a brilliant and polished early part of your paper but won't lead to a finished product, which is a key goal. So, get started, work steadily, follow the deadlines your professor provides for finishing each section, and do not be ashamed to rethink and change earlier thoughts. Keep thinking of that spiral, and remember, "First thoughts are not best thoughts. They're just first."[9]

Essential to springing forward is having some work to reconsider. Thus, this book asks you to begin thinking and writing as soon as possible. This recommendation may seem counterintuitive. "How can I write when I am still learning about a subject?" most students ask. The response is that writing is part of the thinking process, and you cannot make adequate intellectual

advances without putting your ideas on paper at the outset. By the end of the process, you will have a draft that looks very different from the first one you wrote, but that final version that you put forth is a product of the thinking and learning you did throughout the entire project. This book encourages (and in fact demands) that you write your research paper in pieces, beginning with the first substantive parts of the paper and revising as you proceed. Insisting on writing from the outset makes clear a distinction that most students don't recognize: *revising* and *editing* are different processes. Revising entails rethinking and major rewriting, whereas editing consists of fixing grammatical errors and format mistakes and varying word choice. We all know the importance of correcting those silly errors, but many of us aren't aware of just how important rethinking and reconsidering our early ideas are. In fact, ask any researcher and you will find that she or he is constantly drafting, and that the redrafting process is primarily concerned not with editing but with perfecting the argument, sharpening the concepts, amassing better evidence, and adapting the structure to best suit the researcher's purposes. Thus, like a researcher, revising will be essential for you to create the excellent finished product you seek.

BLUEPRINT OF THE BOOK

In the paragraphs that follow, I will briefly explain the contents of each chapter of the book. I recommend that you read this now to gain a better general understanding of the research paper–writing process. If you like, come back to these discussions prior to reading each chapter as a way to help you focus on the main tasks to be accomplished in that section.

In chapter 2, we take up the challenge of determining a good Research Question (RQ). Posing a question that is interesting and important to you, scholars, policy makers, and the average citizen is the key to a good choice. As you will see, coming up with an interesting query is one of the hardest and most important parts of the project. It sets the stage for the whole research paper. As we consider what makes a compelling question, we will note the diversity of kinds of research in which one may be engaged as a political scientist. And you will meet four students whose interests and research topics will reappear at different points in the book. You will even see excerpts of some of these students' efforts to give you examples of how others like you have handled the distinct tasks involved in writing a research paper.

After identifying an RQ, you are ready to look at how others, namely scholars, have answered similar queries.[10] In chapter 3, you begin work on the second phase of your project: determining and understanding the academic debate. At this point, you need to discover how experts answer your RQ in both its general and specific forms. You will begin this process by working on the Annotated Bibliography and, if you like, using some source management software to help you keep track of your materials. In chapter 3, you will learn about finding good, scholarly sources—both books and articles—and using these

Table 1.1 Research Paper: Tasks to Be Accomplished, Sections, and Suggested Calendar

Tasks	Sections/ Assignment	Suggested Calendar
(1) Develop a "good" topic or, more accurately, a good Research Question and find excellent, related scholarly sources.	Annotated Bibliography	At the outset, refine over the first third
(2) Identify, classify, explain, and evaluate the most important scholarly answers to that Research Question, and (3) assert a thesis.	Annotated Bibliography Literature Review	By the end of the first third, add sources, revise ideas throughout the process, having a polished Literature Review by the midpoint
(4) Develop a Model and Hypothesis (if necessary, given your Research Question) that follow directly from the thesis.	Model and Hypothesis	By the end of the first half of the course, sharpen your argument and assertions throughout
(5) Revise and (6) edit.	All sections	Throughout, with an intense effort in the last phase
(7) Plan the study, with attention to defining and selecting appropriate cases for analysis, creating usable operational definitions of concepts and strategies for their knowing values, identifying data sources, developing instruments for generating- - data (if necessary), and explaining methodology. In addition, justify this plan and recognize its potential flaws.	Research Design	About midway to two thirds through
(8) Evaluate the hypothesis or thesis across the chosen cases; present evidence in effective ways so that you and the reader can easily follow why you have reached your judgments on the applicability of your argument for your cases.	Analysis and Assessment	Start about two thirds of the way through (earlier if possible)
(9) Write a Conclusion that reminds the reader of the findings, discusses why these results emerged and where else they might be applicable, and suggests paths for future research; (10) an Introduction, with the thesis clearly stated, that both explains why this question is interesting and important to multiple audiences and provides an overview of the paper; and (11) a title that conveys your argument and your findings in a brief and inviting way.	Conclusion Introduction Title	Final phase

works to lead you to others. In addition, I will introduce you to a variety of citation forms and discuss the difference between paraphrasing and plagiarizing. Sources are good ones if they provide answers to your RQ; your goal here is to uncover the commonalities and differences in the works of scholars. By the end, you should be grouping the arguments of your books and articles into schools of thought—common answers to the RQ that are united by a similar approach, such as pointing to a particular factor as the key cause or sharing a methodology.

Then, in chapter 4, you continue the process of finding, summarizing, and categorizing excellent scholarly arguments by preparing a Literature Review (LR). This is the first section you actually write; in essence the Annotated Bibliography provides you with the notes and framework for the LR. This section presents the different answers to your RQ and assesses their strengths and weaknesses. You conclude your LR with a *thesis*, your preferred answer to the RQ.

For certain types of empirical research, this thesis must be developed further to guide you through the rest of the project. Chapter 5 then helps you translate this thesis into a *model* and a *hypothesis*. A model is a kind of flow diagram that identifies the cause(s)[11] and effect(s) as concepts and asserts graphically that X → Y (where X leads to Y). While the model helps you focus on the key factors you will need to study, it does not specify exactly how they are related. Does Y increase if X decreases? Because you cannot tell from the model, you need the hypothesis. The hypothesis identifies the ways in which these factors are related and is typically stated as, "the more of X, the less of Y," if you are positing a negative relationship between two continuous variables. (If you were expecting a positive relationship, the sentence would read, "the more of X, the more of Y").[12]

Before proceeding further, the text acknowledges that all good writers take an enormous amount of time to revise and edit their work. You will too. At this stage, in chapter 6, you focus on how to revise and edit, as your paper is satisfactorily done only when it is polished. Producing an excellent final work requires you to check to make sure that each section accomplishes what it should; that the paper is well written and has no silly typographical, grammatical, or spelling errors; and that you have followed all of the formatting instructions your professor has specified. Chapter 6 provides details on the revising and editing process, and to be successful, you should return to its advice every time you have drafted something and think you are about ready to turn it in.

Once you have a sense of what you want to assert and which factors are essential in your argument, you are about halfway through this project, at the equivalent of mile 13 in this marathon. Chapter 7 walks you through writing the Research Design (RD), which is your research plan and your justifications for it. In this section, you design your evaluation or test of your hypothesis, and this undertaking is multifaceted. Here you determine which set of cases you need to study to conduct a fair assessment. You also explicitly state how you will translate the concepts into identifiable or measurable entities. Locating

sources and data is important now too, and you will see how the kind of information you need at this stage is very different from what you relied on earlier. Finally, you explain exactly how you will generate your information, for example, identifying how you will know which values your variables take on or providing a sample survey if you plan to administer one.

Throughout this section, you acknowledge any weaknesses and profess any compromises you had to make in designing your project because of difficulties in finding the best case, determining more precise measures for a concept, or obtaining the data you wanted. As you will see, designing a perfect project is often impossible. Thus, every researcher must make tough choices and explain both why these decisions are warranted and what their potential effects are. If you have good reasons, you understand the possible drawbacks, and the problems are as limited as possible, your instructor will be willing to allow you to proceed.

In his classic textbook on methodology, W. Phillips Shively noted with tongue in cheek that political science is not rocket science. Natural scientists and engineers have verifiable physical laws that have been shown to hold and describe the situations in which they are interested, as well as instruments that can precisely measure the phenomena they are investigating. In political science, we have few laws, difficulty translating key concepts into measurable entities, and trouble collecting or getting access to good data. Thus, as Shively noted, political science is not rocket science—it's much harder![13]

In chapter 8, you learn how to analyze and assess the hypothesis. Using the plan you developed in your RD, you analyze the values of your concepts across your cases to assess how well the data support your contention. Does the evidence confirm your hypothesis? How can you best convey your information to show your reader why you have reached your conclusions? This is the part of the paper about which students are most excited; it is also what most students conceive of (prior to learning what a research paper really is) as the only important part of the paper. However, as I hope to show throughout this book, the Analysis and Assessment section of the paper cannot stand alone. It makes sense and carries weight only after you have performed the other tasks. Moreover, by surveying the literature, developing a thesis and then a Model and Hypothesis, and carefully designing the research, you are in a better position to write a focused and convincing assessment of the evidence, principles, and/or logic that can sway a reader to hold the same view that you do.

Once you have determined how well your hypothesis reflects reality, you are ready to wrap up your paper. Using the running analogy, you are at mile 22 here, done with the hard part, and now all you need is the stamina to complete the race. Chapter 9 provides instructions to help you finish the two essential bookends for your project—your Introduction and Conclusion—and assists in revising your title. Perhaps surprisingly, you turn to the Conclusion first, because you need to know what you are concluding when you write the overview in your Introduction. Just like the marathoner, you cannot simply give up

in the last few miles, limp to the finish line, and feel satisfied. You need to complete the race/paper strongly, with an effective Conclusion that ties the whole project together, reminds the reader of what you have achieved, explains why these accomplishments are important, considers both the limits of the research and whether this project provides insights that are applicable to other situations, and poses questions for future research. This section is particularly important if you believe that the compromises you had to make in the RD had a negative impact on your findings. If appropriate, you should explain your continuing confidence in your hypothesis, as well as discuss what you have learned about the choices you made and what might be more productive paths to pursue. Remember, regardless of whether your hypothesis was confirmed or rejected or the jury is still out, if you have proceeded in the fashion recommended, you should be pleased with your findings. The whole point is to learn something in the research process, not to be right.

Upon completing the Conclusion, you turn to the Introduction and then to devising an excellent title. A good Introduction communicates the question and thesis of the work and entices people to read the paper. In addition, the Introduction provides the writer and reader a road map or snapshot of the whole work. Academic writing in political science is very different from mystery or even most fiction writing: readers don't like surprise endings. Think for yourself how difficult reading an article is when the author isn't clear about her or his query, thesis, or how that contention is linked to the literature, methodology, cases, and findings. Each of these essentials should be communicated clearly and effectively, with minimal jargon. In addition, writing the Introduction provides an opportunity for refining the paper's title. A good title will, in a few phrases, convey your question, argument, and cases.

Finally, you have a completed draft. Hooray! A first full draft is occasion to celebrate—but not too much. Even though you have been spiraling through this process, refining and rethinking as you go along, spending the time at the end to consider the whole work is especially important. Remember to consult chapter 6 again so that you can use all the recommendations provided to turn in a polished and beautifully written paper.

Now that I have specified the tasks to be completed and the parts of the research paper to be written, what is involved in writing this work should be much clearer. Whenever you find yourself getting foggy about the process and the goals, you can (1) turn back to Table 1.1 and (2) remind yourself,

> To write this research paper, I have to accomplish eleven tasks, and I have to write six distinct sections. Each of these sections has a definite purpose and a set of tasks I can accomplish. And after I finish each one, I can check it off as a "completed section draft," realizing that I will continue to think about and improve on each part as I continue.[14] Moreover, in the practical summaries and recipes at the end of the chapters, I have precise recommendations regarding what

I have to do to finish each section. I also have additional worksheets, calendars, and checklists available at the companion Web site. Thus, every part of the paper becomes manageable, particularly if I work on this project over a period of time. By following the directions and the advice spelled out here, I can turn in a paper that is compelling to any reader and of which I will be proud. In effect, then, if I am the tortoise and proceed slowly and steadily, I will win the race!

NOTES

1. National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, *The Neglected R: The Need for a Writing Revolution* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 2003), http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/writingcom/neglectedr.pdf.
2. Marijke Breuning, Paul Parker, and John T. Ishiyama, "The Last Laugh: Skill Building through a Liberal Arts Political Science Curriculum," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34, no. 3 (2001): 657–61.
3. For an excellent discussion of the peculiarity of writing for each field, see chapter 4, "Writing in Academic Communities," in Thomas Deans, *Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric with Readings* (New York: Longman, 2003). Deans advances the concept of a "discourse community"—"a group of people who are unified by similar patterns of language use, shared assumptions, common knowledge, and parallel habits of interpretation" (p. 136). Such a term certainly applies to academic disciplines such as political science.
4. Ibid. Throughout this chapter, Deans develops the metaphor of writing in a particular discipline as being a traveler, a visitor to "strange lands." He does so by including two interesting works: an essay by Nancy Sakamoto and an article by Lucille McCarthy. Sakamoto examines the differences in the ways Japanese and Americans conceive of and carry on conversations, while McCarthy explicitly uses the phrase "Stranger in Strange Lands" in the title of her paper examining how one particular student fared when trying to write across the curriculum during his freshman and sophomore years.
5. Some works question whether any true facts actually exist. See, for example, Paul Rabinow and William M. Sullivan, eds., *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). Postmodernists will be disappointed with my discussion of the research process, because much of what I ask students to do will seem consistent with "brute data approaches." For that terminology, see Charles Taylor's piece in Rabinow and Sullivan, *Interpretive Social Science*, titled "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man," (pp. 25–71, especially pp. 53–54). I would argue, however, that the process of how intersubjective understandings come about can be modeled, that we need ways of putting forth contentions about social reality that are systematic, and that one's conclusions can be evaluated by others. Thus, I ask those of you who are skeptical of social scientific methodology because of its inattention to constitutive processes to bear with me to see whether

I am able to deliver a guide that works for the kinds of studies you would like to see performed.

6. Of course, some artists have had great success with these extremes that I am calling inadequate. Yes, I am a political scientist and not an art critic.
7. In working on this book, I learned that Eviatar Zerubavel, in his well-respected work, also uses Aesop's famous fable to explain the approach one should take to writing. See his *The Clockwork Muse: A Practical Guide to Writing Theses, Dissertations, and Books* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 12.
8. In their first presentation, these tasks are put forth in a simplified manner. I will explain and develop the complexities in the ensuing chapters.
9. See Telequest, *Across the Drafts: Students and Teachers Talk about Feedback* (Cambridge, MA: Expository Writing Program, Harvard University, 2005).
10. Some undergraduate papers in political theory may not include literature reviews of secondary sources. Look to your instructor for guidance about whether and how she or he wants you to handle the task of identifying and classifying different perspectives.
11. Some will take exception to the notion of causation in the social sciences (especially univariate), and others would prefer to consider correlation. I assert that for certain types of arguments, encouraging students to think in terms of causation or driving forces helps them consider more clearly the processes they are investigating. As students become more sophisticated methodologically, I encourage them to consider the arguments against causation, but at this early stage in their careers, I emphatically believe that thinking about causes is both useful and appropriate.
12. The alternative is if the variables are noncontinuous or discrete (also referred to as category variables, which can come in unranked versions called *nominal*—such as sex or religion—or ranked versions called *ordinal*—such as educational achievement of primary, secondary, some college, college graduate, or postgraduate). With discrete variables, the basic hypothesis would read something like the following: "If X is A, then Y is B, but if X is C, then Y is D." Please note that we will discuss types of data—nominal, ordinal, and interval—in more detail in chapters 5 and 7.
13. W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 17.
14. If you are writing these as formal drafts for your instructor to review, you will be receiving excellent feedback to help you write a great paper. Be sure to address and respond to the questions and comments your reader makes, and don't hesitate to consult your professor during the process. In addition, whether you have a faculty reader or not, you can also benefit from the feedback of a friend, classmate, or member of your institution's writing center. Find a reader, and realize that criticism is useful; comments help you sharpen your ideas and improve your skills.

chapter 2

Getting Started

Finding a Research Question

Starting a research project is truly a formidable task. It is challenging because good research topics are usually very specific and, in fact, not topics but rather questions or puzzles. In this chapter, I will define the characteristics of a good research question and walk you through a variety of ways of finding one.

Some of you may wonder why you need a question at all, given that there are many interesting topics to investigate. There are three main reasons for locating a query. First, topics are too broad and contain within them many subissues. For instance, to acquaint yourself with everything related to either campaigns and elections in the United States or democratization around the world is a huge undertaking. You want a manageable challenge! Second, a question links you to a controversy and allows you to become engaged in the scholarly and/or policy debate by both interacting with the ideas being contested and examining some information to evaluate the veracity of those claims. Thus, a good question gives you focus and puts you in the thick of one controversy (not many). Moreover, it allows you the opportunity to develop your analytic skills as you weigh both theoretical perspectives and evidence that relate to the arguments. Third, a question gives you a reason to write: you must provide an answer. Having a question therefore helps propel you forward to the response and gives you a clearer indication of when you're done—when you have offered and evaluated an answer.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD QUESTION

All great research questions share five qualities, and you can use these criteria to help you generate a topic and then transform it into a question for study. Research questions are *interesting* and *important* to you, scholars, the public policy community, and, ideally, ordinary citizens. A good question is also *short* and *direct*: if you need multiple lines or sentences to state your query, then you still have some work to do to refine it into one that captures people's attention and concisely identifies a question. Finally, your research must be

doable. In other words, you need to pick a question you can actually answer with the resources available to you. As we will see in chapter 7, there are many creative ways to find evidence and perform studies, but you will want to keep in mind some potential informational limits (a strange thought, but a real one, in our connected world) and consider adjusting your question accordingly.

There is a sixth criterion—that the question be puzzling. Political scientists love these types of queries because they investigate the counterintuitive and promote our understanding of theory. Finding a puzzling question is not always possible, although sometimes you can pick instances to study that will make your query a puzzle. Typically, however, your professor will agree that an interesting and important question that is concise, direct, and doable is fine.

FIND SOMETHING INTERESTING

OK, great, I've given you criteria, but now how do you satisfy them? You need to recognize from the outset that finding a good research topic and question takes effort. The right ones won't simply pop into your head, and often, when students hastily choose, they end up dissatisfied later on in the process. Unfortunately, by then they have already committed too much time and too many resources to change. Thus, you want to work at the outset on satisfying that first criterion: start by asking what is interesting to you. Some students are really excited about a topic, and for them, picking a general area of research is relatively easy, but not effortless. For others, this task is more of a challenge, but here are some strategies to help. A first method is to write down what motivated you to become a political science major. In addition, thinking about your career aspirations and extracurricular activities can be inspirational.

Let's use the experiences of some students to illustrate these approaches. The first is Gabriela, who became interested in politics as a girl watching the 2008 election. The seeming "star power" of both Barack Obama and Sarah Palin attracted her, and by 2011, she was volunteering on local campaigns, which made her believe that politics was her calling and political science should be her major. A Latina from California, Gabriela was interested in immigration and even spent the fall 2013 semester interning on Capitol Hill. There, the polarization and seeming incivility in American politics made her job extremely frustrating and gave her pause. Despite the need to deal with big issues like immigration reform, politicians shut the government down and Senate Democrats infuriated their Republican colleagues by voting to end the use of the filibuster on executive and judicial branch (excluding the Supreme Court) nominees. Gabriela wondered why and when politics became so nasty and whether American political elites will ever find ways to address the issues of citizen concern. She also began to question whether politics was the career for her and began considering law school instead. At least a jury or judge ultimately solves legal bickering; Gabriela wasn't sure she could survive the petty

infighting and lack of accomplishment in contemporary politics. Perhaps she could work to advance political causes as an attorney instead?

Another student, Kevin, chose political science because he is a political news junky who is fascinated by the coverage and loves to write. Given his interests, he got involved in the school newspaper to hone his journalistic skills. Coming of age in an era when social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter have become such important political tools, Kevin was already predisposed to see their value in politics. And then, in an introductory political science class, his professor played the PBS video *Revolution in Cairo*. Kevin vaguely remembered hearing about the so-called Arab spring in 2011, when citizens in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa revolted against their authoritarian leaders. This film made the argument that new media played an important role in allowing citizens of repressive regimes to organize, propagate and hone their messages, and challenge these regimes. Kevin was intrigued. He had previously thought of new media as a political and social tool in the United States only, but this video opened up many ideas and possibilities about the role of Facebook, Twitter, and other sites in different contexts around the world. While journalism still remained appealing to him as a potential field, he began considering varied career options (both in substantive and geographic terms) in the media, communications, and public relations and their links to politics.

Last in this set is Max, who came to his major because he was always interested in the world. At a very young age, he started poring over maps, examining flags of the world's nations, and learning about different regions. Max was also an excellent athlete, and he enjoyed watching the Olympic Games, when he would see his two interests—countries of the world and sports—come together. Moreover, he loved hearing stories from his parents about how the Olympics were such political *and* sporting events during the cold war. Max was also fascinated by the various elements of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry. Not surprisingly, then, his favorite tales were about the Soviet men's basketball victory in 1972 and the U.S. men's hockey gold medal in 1980. Surprising as it might sound, Max missed the cold war and its effects on athletic competition and wished for something like the U.S.-Soviet rivalry again on the rinks, fields, and courses of the Olympics. In the lead up to the winter 2014 competition, Max remembered how spectacular China's 2008 "show" was and also recalled that there had been some sort of international incident during those games. Didn't Russia and Georgia have a small war then? These remembrances and the concerns about the 2014 games—Would there be a terrorist attack on the Olympic spectators or athletes? How would Russia respond to lesbian, gay, transgender, or bisexual (LGBT) activists if they demonstrated or just visited Sochi? Why was Russia seemingly provoking Ukraine?—filled his mind. Clearly, politics remained in the Olympics after all, and perhaps these reflections on the games could help him find something to research in political science. He could consider the politics of the games, or

he could look more deeply into Russian foreign policy. Why was President Putin doing what he was doing? These thoughts gave Max something to ponder for the purposes of his course. His ideas weren't necessarily going to inspire his career (which he did hope would be related to sports, and he could also imagine being a social studies teacher and a coach), but he was happy for the purposes of his class paper to be homing in on issues that interested him.

Using academic and political passions, extracurricular activities, and interests and aspirations, our three hypothetical students might create the lists provided in Table 2.1.

A fourth way of picking a topic is to think about which courses you enjoyed or which segments of your favorite courses you liked best. We've already seen that strategy affect Kevin a bit, as a course video piqued his interest. Locate your syllabi, books, and notes from those classes[1]; if you don't have them, you've made a mistake, because you should always keep the materials from your major courses. A syllabus is more than a schedule with assignments; it sets out the logic, topics, and questions (and often competing arguments) for

Table 2.1 Finding a Topic: Students with Clear Passions, Activities, Interests, or Aspirations

	Gabriela	**Kevin**	**Max**
Why the major	Fascination with charismatic politicians Volunteering on campaigns	News junky	Early geography buff Cold war rivalry, superpower conflict
Career aspirations	Elected official (?) Attorney	Media or communications professional	Sports management Teaching, coaching
Extracurricular activities	Partisan politics Service (working with immigrants)	School newspaper Debate	Athletics[a]
Interesting topics	Polarization in American politics Immigration reform	Media and elections in the United States New media in the United States and around the world Arab spring	International sporting events Pride and identity in world politics Russian domestic and foreign policy

a. Being involved in organizations or activities often brings politics or political issues to the fore. No matter what they are, they can be good sources for questions, so tap into any and all of your experiences to find topics of interest to you.

the course, and you can benefit greatly from thinking carefully about what your professor assigned and why. Regarding books, I know the refund is tempting, but often you get relatively little money when you sell your books back, and these are excellent resources for the rest of your academic career. Hold on to your notes as well. Your faculty members use their time to provide you with the information they believe is essential for mastering a subject. Do not just throw this wisdom away at the end of the term. Remember, particularly in your major, you are supposed to be accumulating knowledge and skills throughout your college career—expanding on what you have learned before—and your books and notes are the foundations from which you build. If you were a foreign language major, you could not survive a literature class without first achieving language proficiency. So too, you should think about your own field of study as a cumulative endeavor. Your political science courses are building on one another; you are not simply learning a set of discrete facts about different countries, institutions, time periods, public policies, political philosophies, or interstate interactions. So keep your books to consult as you take advanced courses in the major. If you have no textbooks now, however, go to your library and check one out (or as a last resort, go to your professor and see if you can borrow one). Textbooks and readers are extremely useful sources not only for question generation but for the next stage of the research process: determining how different scholars have studied your puzzle. At this stage, use the table of contents, photos, illustrations, and tables to point you in the direction of interesting topics. After you've narrowed your interests by rereading the text in places, use the source lists and recommendations for further readings to help you find out more about your potential topic.

Now let's turn to our final student, Zoe. As long as she can remember, she's been interested in female political leaders and was intrigued as a girl by Hillary Clinton's 2008 campaign for president and surprised by the treatment Hillary received in the media and from the public. Not surprisingly, Zoe greatly enjoyed her Introduction to American Government and her Gender and Politics in the U.S. classes. In both, she was particularly interested in representation, both how elected officials should represent their constituents and who (with respect to gender, class, and race) were these elected officials. She especially remembered pictures and tables in her books that showed how male, wealthy, and white our national legislative bodies have been, and she was interested in both why that was and whether the gender composition in particular made a difference in terms of representation. Did the policy outcomes reflect the desires of all citizens or simply some? Do racial or religious minorities and white women—when they are elected to office—represent their constituents and "their" issues (i.e., minorities' and white women's) differently? Using these ideas, Zoe filled in the worksheet shown in Table 2.2.

Another way to find inspiration for a topic is to think about something that is important to you personally; as many activists and scholars have

Table 2.2 Finding a Topic: Using a Favorite Course

Interest	Zoe
Favorite course	Introduction to American Government
	Gender and Politics in the U.S.
Favorite part of courses	Congress
	Representation
Links to current events	Gender and politics
	Women as political leaders
Interesting topics	Which theory of representation best accounts for the way legislators act and vote
	How race or gender affects the way legislators legislate

learned, the personal is political! We have seen that strategy with each of our students, actually. Gabriela knows many people in her community who have relatives who are still undocumented immigrants, Kevin's interest in and enjoyment of social media are pointing him in a research direction, Max's fascination with sports stimulated his thinking about topics, and Zoe, too, is pursuing a long-standing interest in gender and politics. For those of you who are still looking for inspiration, recent issues of newspapers, journals of opinion, and radio, TV, or online news coverage can be great as sources, and they can also sharpen your focus. You might be able to use insight gleaned from reading newspapers as a jumping-off point for studying an incident. Perhaps what is most useful about contemporary media is that high-quality outlets will identify the "big stories," and from there you can think about more general issues. For instance, the recent coverage of the problems between Israel and Palestine brings to mind broader concepts such as "conflict," "terrorism," "occupation," "conflict management," or general topics related to this violence that you might find compelling. In consulting news sources, try to use the best. If you're interested in international or national news, examine recent issues of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, or *Wall Street Journal*. You will want to look at not only the main news articles but also the editorial pages, where you can see what the papers' editors think about controversial issues as well as read what outsiders (typically scholars, practitioners, and other important people) have to say in the op-ed ("opposite the editorials") essays. Also consult the Web versions of BBC News, National Public Radio, PBS, and CNN; and, of course, there is a plethora of great political sites that exist wholly online, the most popular of which you can find listed at http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/political-websites. These sources, unlike news sites, often explicitly assert political positions, as do talk radio, shows on Fox News, MSNBC, and Comedy

Central (if you consume this news source, realize that it is comedy!), and journals of opinion—publications, typically in magazine format, that have a clear political bent to their articles. Some of the best ones are, on the right, the *National Review* and *Weekly Standard*; in the center, the *New Republic*; and on the left, *The Nation* and *American Prospect*. When consulting sources that have ideological positions, what seems to help students most is to access ones with which they are *least* likely to agree. That strategy tends to increase motivations to explore and debunk the contentions advanced and can help excite you about a research project.

Not all good topics are about national or global issues; in fact, particularly for original empirical work, there are many excellent questions to pursue that hit close to home. To explore local issues, pick the most important relevant paper and consult its metro section; also, look for free papers, sites, and blogs from your chosen place. If you're interested in San Francisco or the Bay Area, start with the *San Francisco Chronicle*; if it's Philadelphia policy and politics, check out the *Philadelphia Inquirer* or *Philadelphia Daily News*. Look for the papers and places where local issues are most knowledgeably covered.

Some of you might be wondering why, in thinking about topics, I am encouraging you to explore news sources that reflect on and explore primarily contemporary events and controversies. I have three reasons. First, in my experience, students, particularly those who do not have specific issues in mind, do not have much detailed knowledge of the past. Therefore, to sift through history to find something compelling is very hard. Second, one of my goals for you is to inspire you to perform some original empirical work. That means I want you to investigate a political issue or policy as no one has done before. Now, doing an original study does not mean that you must work on contemporary topics. In fact, excellent research is always being done in history, political science, and sociology (and other disciplines) that reexamines the past. However, I have found that when *students* choose a research paper topic about something in the past (typically that they know a lot about), they fall into what I call the "report trap." Students then seek to describe everything they have learned from others' research. Usually, they also split the difference between the two prominent competing explanations, arguing that the best way to understand their issue is to somehow combine the main existing views. This approach is flawed methodologically and is not a reflection or exercise of your analytic or intellectual capacity. Finally, I want your research to ask a question for which you *need* to know the answer (and you have not already settled on an explanation because of a past course you've taken, reading you've done, and what you "just know"). Being compelled not by your professor but by some internal spark is a great motivator. Finding contemporary debates, then, and entering into them is my way of encouraging students to identify the kinds of topics that are interesting, important, and even puzzling: those good-question criteria. Of course, sometimes those contemporary debates lead us to reconsider issues of the past. But now you understand that if you do reexamine an event or issue, you will be

doing original research and not, for instance, finding two good books and combining their arguments in some way. No, in the research paper–writing process, you will learn to be the scholar or policy analyst and assess your argument with information that you interpret. Don't worry; you aren't going to do this alone. In chapter 7, on research design, you will learn how and when to lean on the work of others and the conditions under which you can generate your own information. But these issues are a much later concern, and I must ask you to trust me and your instructor that if you follow this method, your paper and study will be successful and compelling.

In sum, while there are many ways to get you started finding a research topic, nowhere will you find a flashing neon light that says, "Here's a great topic; take it!" Instead, you need to follow any or all of the methods described here—considering (1) why you chose your major, (2) what your extracurricular activities are and how they might be related to politics and political issues, (3) your career aspirations, (4) your favorite classes, (5) your personal concerns, and (6) current events and debates.

There's one last exercise I'm going to ask you to engage in: you should acknowledge explicitly why these topics are interesting to you. In addition, consider why a topic might be interesting to *scholars*, *policy makers*, and *citizens*. Each of these three groups has different priorities. Scholars tend to be most interested in explaining or interpreting events in light of larger academic debates. Often they seek to show that their argument or theory is better at explaining or predicting politics or behavior than others. In your early political science courses, you have probably been best exposed to these debates in your Introduction to Global Politics class, where you can see the "dueling paradigms," with adherents of realism, liberalism, and constructivism—among others—arguing about the best way to account for global developments. All of the subfields have similar overarching debates (though perhaps not as prominent as the one in international relations), and no matter what question you pick, you can be sure that scholars will be on opposing sides of your query and thus would find your exploration interesting. While academics are interested in explaining the real world, for policy makers—politicians, bureaucrats, and practitioners—solutions are all important. They want to fix the problems they identify in society; thus, their interests tend to be practical and applied in nature. Some will also be interested in ideology and the philosophical underpinnings of policies. Finally, although citizens are sometimes also policy professionals and scholars, we often imagine ordinary people to care about how issues directly affect their lives. So ask yourself, How might my topics affect people's pocketbooks, their ability to plan for the future and go places, and even their moral sensibilities? How does my research speak to citizens' concerns?

As you start the research process and begin to identify a topic, I recommend that you engage in self-reflection and fill out the "Finding a Topic" chart (on the next page and on the Web). You don't have to fill in every space, but the more you do now, the more certain you will be of your choice. You'll notice that I ask you

Table 2.3 Finding a Topic: Using Various Techniques to Find a Topic That Is Interesting to Multiple Audiences

Technique	Your Answer
Why did you choose your major?	
What are your career aspirations and why?	
What are your extracurricular activities and why do you enjoy them?	
What was your favorite course and why?	
What was your favorite part of that course and why?	
Which current events are most interesting to you? Why?	
What are your personal concerns about politics?	
What political debates or issues do you like to read about? How, if at all, are any of these relevant to your interests, activities, career hopes, and concerns?	
What issues have you identified as interesting to you by searching through various sources (newspapers, news Web sites, journals of opinion, and others)?	
Why are these topics interesting to you?	
Why are these topics interesting to scholars, policy makers, and citizens? To which concepts and theoretical or ideological debates do they relate?	

not only to offer a question but to start thinking about its appeal. On one hand, basic self-reflection is important to dig deep into your intellectual interests, but it is also extremely helpful to think hard about what you already know from previous political science classes as you analyze your responses. Can you link your answers to concepts or theoretical and policy debates you have studied before? At this point, seek to have a few (no more than three) candidate topics. In the next stage, we'll start to translate topics into research questions and then give you criteria for choosing the best query. Because each topic can lead to multiple questions, you are OK with even one subject that you are enthusiastic about. But don't simply settle on the first idea that pops into your head, or you may regret it in the future.

DETERMINING WHY YOUR TOPIC IS IMPORTANT

Along with being interesting, your Research Question should be important to you and a larger community of scholars, policy makers, and citizens. You may doubt that your particular interest—Facebook as a political tool for Kevin or the Olympics for Max—could be important, but you will be pleasantly surprised to learn that many people share your curiosity. To identify the level of scholarly interest, your tendency might be to "Google" or search in another Web browser your issue. Although we can find an enormous amount of information by looking directly on the Internet (and I will encourage you to search this way at another stage in the research), look first in an *online database* of academic articles. Why? If you Google a term, you might find articles to which you don't seem to have free access or for which you can't be sure of their quality. Library databases, available through your institution's login, provide access to millions of scholarly pieces, all free of charge. In addition, if works are available in these sources, then you know that they have gone through a review process to be selected for publication in a journal. Some excellent databases for your purposes include Academic Search Premier (from EBSCOhost's research databases); Journal Storage: The Scholarly Archive, more popularly known as JSTOR; Project MUSE; and ProQuest Research Library. There are certainly others, and they are also useful. These main ones can help you locate articles in the premier journals in political science as well as related fields such as economics, history, sociology, and various area studies.

As you start your investigation of your research topic, you may want to begin by reading several book reviews or article abstracts to get a better sense of why academics find this subject important. These activities also help you see what the big controversies are and the many ways academics think about your issue. Once you have found a good source in your search, note the subject terms associated with this article or book. Use these to search for more; alternatively, in several of the databases, you have the option to find "more articles like these" with a click.[2] Take advantage of this shortcut.

Students are too willing these days to rely exclusively on sources they can read on or print from their computers. While digital materials are wonderful, there's a wealth of knowledge you can acquire in the library. First of all, books are extremely important repositories of knowledge, and you typically cannot get access to full-length scholarly works online free of charge. In addition, older and sometimes more recent issues of some journals might not be available electronically. JSTOR, in particular, can have a relatively long lag time before a publication is posted. Moreover, databases index different subsets of journals. You may have chosen a database to search that doesn't include one of the most important journals for your topic. So be sure to use your library's online catalog to find books and the major journals concerned with your topic. In addition, go to the library, and actually poke around. If you find a good book or journal, chances are that shelved near that source you will find several other

interesting and useful ones. And of course, you should let the first sources you identify lead you to other ones. Look at what the authors cite as key works and be sure to read those books and articles too. I can't tell you how many times students fail to take advantage of the information they have. The articles they find can lead them to often even more important works they should consider. Learning to use your sources to find new ones is an important skill; identifying who the "big voices" are in the field is also essential. These are the authors whom various works discuss. When you see a scholar being cited by many others, you must read her or his most relevant works, too. Your sources will tell you what these important pieces are, if you only look at the citations!

For some help determining whether and why your topic is significant to ordinary people, you can brainstorm and come up with reasons on your own. You can also consult news articles and opinion pieces on these subjects. While scholarly sources are much more important later on, these popular pieces give you a useful perspective at this very early stage. Journalists write with the general reader in mind and explain the importance of the news to members of the community. Editorial writers and columnists also make the case for the larger significance of events or policies. How do you find these types of articles? Here you can search using LexisNexis (a legal resources and news database) as well as Academic Search Premier or ProQuest Research Library. Notice that in any of these databases, you can often specify the magazine, journal of opinion, newspaper or type of paper, and type of article (news, editorial, op-ed) along with the subject you are searching. When using these news sources, be aware of both the audience for whom the authors are writing and any ideological leanings. For instance, you will find different political perspectives in the *Weekly Standard*, *New Republic*, *American Prospect*, and *Economist*. You will also find varied coverage from newspapers that see themselves as national—that is, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, or *Wall Street Journal*—versus local—the *Columbus Dispatch* (Ohio) or *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans). All kinds of sources are valid for discovering the significance of your topic, but you need to be mindful of the intended audience and ideological leanings of the publication.

After you have done some research on why your issue is important, add what you have discovered to the "Finding a Topic" chart you started (see Table 2.3). If you are taking an idea from another writer, be sure that you note all the bibliographic information you will need to cite the source of that point, in case you use it in your paper.[3] Moreover, the more work you do, the more likely it is that you will be able to start narrowing in on one particular issue. While I don't want you to make that decision too quickly, you also need to realize that time is limited and you need to start deciding exactly what you will study. Typically, your professor will define a process for approving your topic and then question. Particularly if there is no formal process and you are unsure, go in and have a conversation with your instructor about how you are proceeding. In ten minutes of talking, you can resolve issues that on your own might seem impenetrable.

IF POSSIBLE, IDENTIFYING A PUZZLE

So let's imagine you have found a topic that is interesting to you and that you know is important to others. At the outset, I mentioned that you also may be able to find something puzzling, and puzzles are especially good questions from the perspective of theory building. But what could be puzzling about politics, or what is a puzzle in political science? I'm not talking about a jigsaw puzzle or Rubik's cube but rather an event or development that doesn't seem to make sense *given what we know*. Another way of thinking about this kind of intellectual dilemma is that either it lacks obvious answers, or the conventional wisdom appears to be incorrect. Finding a puzzle typically means linking something *empirical* (something that has occurred and is observable) with your issue or concept of interest. Sometimes, identifying a real puzzle can be very hard and is closely related to your decisions about which cases (e.g., events, years, people, policies) you will study.

Again, locating a puzzle means that what has happened is surprising given our current theories. So perhaps for Gabriela, the increasing polarization and hardening of the American party system is surprising, because citizens seem so evenly divided, and many of them tell pollsters that they hold moderate views.[4] In particular, immigration reform has support among voters at large, Republican voters, and many important Republican-leaning interest groups (like the Chamber of Commerce), yet even with a crisis on the U.S. southern border in the summer of 2014, with children from Central America showing up alone and in great numbers, Congress has been unable to pass a bill the president will sign.[5] Why is immigration reform being held up when majorities support it? Why has this become such a partisan issue when support for a solution seems widespread? One of our other students, Kevin, wonders why Tunisia, of all the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), has had more success with its transformation away from authoritarianism and why attempts at seemingly liberal political change in Egypt have seemed instead to harden its antidemocratic politics. Both of those thoughts also reflect potential puzzles, as few scholars would have predicted, with what they know about democratization, that Tunisia would be best suited for liberal political change. Regarding Egypt, scholars might have been more sanguine about the possibility of an uprising there, but knowledgeable insiders and policy makers are still somewhat surprised by the course of events. Thus, both of these queries lead Kevin in good and "puzzling" directions.

STARTING WORDS FOR QUESTIONS

Sometimes you know enough about theory to inspire a puzzling question, but even if you don't, your current topic, while compelling, is likely too broad. You need to narrow it down further, and in this process, you will find a question. My recommendation to narrow your scope likely seems strange. Typically,

students are worried about finding enough information for their papers, so they think they need an expansive subject for which they can gather lots of facts. Here again, the misconception that the paper is purely a descriptive report is misleading students. Your paper is not a story about the *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when* of politics; your paper is an analytic effort that (usually) answers questions of *why*, *how*, *to what extent*, or *under what conditions*. *What* can work, as long as you aren't interested in simply *what happened* but, in addition, what that development means or tells us about politics or *what was really going on*; in other words, we might think we know the story about some issue, but in fact, events unfolded differently or mean something different from the standard interpretation, and you will explain *why*. Remember, the goal is to engage in research that enlightens not just you but many others. So, while you might not know, for instance, in which MENA regimes there were uprisings in 2011, this information is easily knowable with a few searches. However, your interest in this topic could lead you to ask a question about why these uprisings occurred, how the responses of state leaders affected the course of the challenges, and to what extent (if any) these revolts succeeded in achieving the goals their initiators hoped to attain. In answering any of those questions (and note the "good" interrogatory words at the outset), you will learn what happened, but additionally, you will be investigating and understanding so much more.

Selecting the right starting word for your question is actually quite important. Sometimes if you force yourself to ask queries you would like to answer, you can derive a good question. For instance, students often want to pose and then respond to questions that begin with "should," "ought," or "what should or ought." Gabriela, in fact, might start out by asking, "Shouldn't Congress do something about immigration given that the majority of American voters say they support its reform?" or "What should immigration reform in the United States entail?" Questions that start this way are excellent ones for identifying the issue(s) you find compelling. Their answers, however, are likely not to be settled on the basis of empirical evidence but rather on ethical, ideological, or even political arguments. In addition, they are in some ways speculative, and for your research paper, I ask you to avoid seeking to predict the future. Instead, for this project, you must (1) use some theoretical or conceptual material to develop a claim and then (2) evaluate it on the basis of evidence. Both parts—the theory, primarily the concern of the Literature Review and Model and Hypothesis sections—and the evidence—planned and justified in the Research Design section and presented and evaluated in the Analysis and Assessment section—are equally important to the success of the paper. So if Gabriela goes back to my recommendation about beginning question words ("why," "how," "to what extent") and her issues (polarization and immigration reform), she might come up with these questions: Why is the United States so polarized now compared with other times? What are the policy consequences of that polarization? Why is immigration reform so hard to achieve in the

United States in 2014, when it hasn't been at other times? (This last question is more specifically focused.)

In addition to starting the question off well, keeping your preferred answer out of the query is important from the outset. So for Gabriela, in the second variant, she puts her answer, "polarization," into the first question. Because one of the next steps in writing the paper will be to uncover multiple responses, it's best not to include an answer in your question. Perhaps polarization isn't that important to immigration reform; then, Gabriela would have posed a less-than-desirable question. Better to ask the question generally and then see what answers emerge from your research. Similarly, Kevin might want to ask, "How did social media affect the revolutions in MENA in 2011?" Here again the question, in a sense, asserts the best response, but scholars and others have posited many other possible answers, too. Thus, you can use your hunch or your interest to pose a first question, as Gabriela and Kevin did, but ultimately shift your focus at this point from your preferred answer to the big concept at stake. For Gabriela, the issue might be either polarization itself or the policy of immigration reform (she still has to decide), and for Kevin, this concept is revolution. Asking generally why (or how or to what extent) will lead to all kinds of great sources on this subject and help you have a broad and excellent understanding of the phenomenon of interest. It will lead you to multiple ways of thinking about your subject and answering your question, and ultimately, you may believe that your first insight is right. But your early research will show you that there are other plausible arguments out there. So the *why* question leads you to specific and different answers. For instance, why has polarization become worse? Well, you might not know, but you can bet that scholars and analysts provide multiple responses. Similarly, if Kevin examines how social media affected the 2011 uprisings, he is assuming at the outset that they did have an effect, which he will then trace. But what if he is pursuing an argument few people think is plausible? As an insurance policy for high-quality research, you are better off taking your answer out of your question initially. You may come back to it and focus on that factor (polarization making immigration difficult or the reason for polarization for Gabriela, social media enabling revolution for Kevin), but taking the step back and rephrasing the question helps you distinguish between the concept at stake and the explanation you want to assert. Understanding the difference between the two is very important as you proceed through the project.

Another way students often want to start their questions is by asking what will happen. For instance, Max might ask, "What will Putin do next?" or "Will Putin annex eastern Ukraine or other parts of the former Soviet Union?" These questions are ones you can see answered in the op-ed pages of major newspapers as well as in quality blogs or journals of opinion, but they are not appropriate for your research paper. In asking those questions, Max is trying to understand what motivates contemporary Russian foreign policy, particularly toward the post-Soviet states. So, without focusing on predicting the

future—which is something that he can't do, because he can't subject his assertions to validation based on evidence—Max can ask, "What seems to be the most important factor motivating Russian foreign policy in the Putin era?" or "Why does Russia act as it does toward the former Soviet states?" Max might even wonder, "Is Putin's foreign policy different from that of Yeltsin?" and in asking that question, he is asserting that there is something different about the leader or era that might affect Russian external behavior. In investigating the two earlier and more general questions, Max might have insight into why the policies of the 1990s were different from more contemporary ones, but I would counsel him to wait to determine whether to focus his question in that way. And of course, what Max finds—that power or opportunity drive Russian behavior, that domestic political concerns are most important, or that leaders have particular visions of Russia's role in world politics that they enact in their policy—will help him make some predictions about future actions. Forecasting the future is handled very briefly in the Conclusion of your paper, once you have some confidence that you have appropriately understood your concept and can use your logic and research to assert that you understand how the future (in a limited sense) will unfold.

In sum then, a research paper in the form I'm suggesting needs to be both theoretical and empirical (observable, factual) in nature. Your work may have *normative* implications—in other words, it might provide insight into behaviors or policies that are morally superior—but this is work in political science, not ethics. For this reason, I discourage students from asking "should," "ought," or "what should or ought" questions, because they tend to focus on the normative side only and instead push students to use these normative queries as inspiration for formulating new ones that can fulfill the requirements of being both theoretical and empirical. Second, your answer can provide insight into future behavior as part of your concluding comments. Thus, Gabriela might use her findings to predict when immigration reform might be more propitious, Kevin might be poised to assert under what conditions successful revolutions will occur again, and Max might be able to tell Russia watchers what to expect from that country in the near future and why. But each of these speculative discussions is brief, found in the Conclusion, and couched in circumspect language, such as "Given that these findings are valid and that conditions in the future do not deviate greatly from what is apparent now, Russia is likely to. . . " Still, recognizing that your research is designed to give you power to understand the future or provide insight into similar cases is important and is something I will stress later as you write your Conclusion. Important to remember here is that you may be able to find inspiration from thinking about what will happen next. Last, a good research question has a particular form: It starts with the "right" kind of word, and it omits the answer or preferred approach from that query. In doing so, the goal is focusing on some big concept in political science (and not your answer). The reason for this focus will become clearer in chapter 3, but trust me for now: if you can ultimately determine a phenomenon

you're interested in—polarization, congressional action, revolution, Russian foreign policy—you will have an easier time than if you focus on the factor you want to pursue—polarization (for the immigration question),[6] social media, Putin. Moreover, you may say to your instructor, no, actually I am more interested in what you're calling "my specific," for instance "polarization" or "social media" or even "Putin." So perhaps you do want to "bump" this aspect up to the key status in your question, and you do want to ask why U.S. politics is so polarized in 2014 (and the immigration debate starkly highlighted the importance of polarization), or you might want to investigate which social media strategies are more successful than others in mobilizing people to participate in political action or why Putin has seemingly been able to dominate the international agenda in 2013 and 2014. These are also valuable questions, and you need to choose which conceptual focus is right for you.

TYPES OF RESEARCH AND QUESTIONS

Clearly, the question you ask has a big impact on what type of research you do, and we can divide research into three kinds: *theory advancing*, *public policy*, and *conceptual*.[7] Each of these types is both theoretical and empirical. Theory helps the researcher frame the answer in the first place, but the test of that theory—the ultimate judgment—results from holding up its contentions to the real world. Three factors distinguish the kind of research: (1) whether there's a posited underlying causal relationship or correlation, (2) the extent to which the research helps solve a particular problem, and (3) the nature of the evidence. Theory-advancing research and public policy research typically are based on an insight that asserts that some effect varies with some other factor. These elements could change simultaneously, that is, be *correlated* without any direct connection, or they could be *causally* linked, meaning that changes in the first lead to modifications in the second. Theory-advancing and public policy research differ, however, according to how applied they are. Applied research is intended to solve real problems, such as how to design a "good" political system in a certain cultural setting or how to create a "good" city school system in the United States. Public policy research is applied, and it typically asserts that "better ways" exist to solve problems. Thus, there is a normative link here, and public policy researchers often set out their values—how they are determining that one outcome is better than another—at the outset. So for one set of applied researchers, a good political system guarantees an improving economy, while for others it could be one that protects individual rights. Regarding school success, one might be perceived to be more successful because graduation rates are higher, while another plan might seek to ensure that a larger percentage of its students go on to additional training or education after graduation. Public policy questions can be ways of transforming normative questions into empirically researchable questions. Theory-advancing work seeks to move our conceptual understandings of a particular concept forward,

identifying weaknesses and strengths in existing approaches. It explores why politics is the way it is and often tries to take a stand in a debate between scholars—which answer is better or best on the basis of logic and evidence. Similarly, conceptual research is not applied but aims to arrive at better knowledge of fundamental concepts. While there may be practical applications for theory-advancing or conceptual research, the ultimate policy spin-offs are not what motivate these inquiries.[8]

Finally, regarding evidence, theory-advancing and public policy research find their empirics in real-world phenomena, such as election outcomes, effects of state-run health care systems, preconditions for democracy, the impact of micro-financing, or causes of war, to name a few. In contrast, conceptual papers investigate the meanings and implications of the works of great political thinkers or of theoretical positions by engaging the ideas and looking to texts for clarification. Examples here might be investigating whether Thomas Hobbes was actually a forefather of liberalism or determining what peace actually means.[9] While events often inspire this work, the real-world content is neither as substantial nor as logically important to the project. Instead, ideas, clarifying concepts, and improving understandings of theories or theorists are central. The data here are the words or writings of those involved in the discussion, and claims about the meanings or definitions are evaluated on the basis of logic and texts.

So as you work to transform your topic and your questions into doable ones, remember that your preferred type of query will vary depending on the course for which you are writing this paper or the purpose of the research. For most empirical courses, you will be encouraged to write theory-advancing or public policy research papers, and for theory classes, you will engage in conceptual research.[10] As you ask your question—with the appropriate starting word—remember that you need to strike a balance (depending on the type of research) between theory and evidence. Typically, you should avoid a broad theoretical question (How do we account for the nature of the international system?). Instead, you're looking for what Robert Merton dubbed "middle-range" questions[11]: in other words, questions inspired by phenomena of importance in the real world that require you to use theory and evidence to answer them. I have been guiding you toward these types of questions throughout this chapter, so if you follow the advice, you should develop appropriate ones.

USING THE ADVICE TO GENERATE QUESTIONS

Table 2.4 shows how Gabriela and Kevin are proceeding with their searches for a question.

As you look at Gabriela's and Kevin's early questions, there are a few important points to acknowledge. First, their normative instincts helped them get under way. Second, they used the appropriate starting words. Third, they did

Table 2.4 Generating Questions and Identifying Their Type

Self-Consciously Transforming Topics into Different Types of Questions	Gabriela	Kevin
Interesting topics	Polarization/incivility Immigration reform	Media and elections in the United States New media in the United States and around the world Arab spring
Why interesting to multiple audiences?	Political scientists debate whether the country is polarized, how uncivil we are, and what are the impacts of polarization and incivility. Policy professionals wonder if anything can be accomplished in a time of great problems. Citizens may be disillusioned with politics, and this dissatisfaction is arguably impeding the quality of democracy, as fewer citizens seek to participate in politics, and American lack respect for political leaders of all stripes. In 2014, the United States was arguably facing an immigration crisis on its southern border because of the difference between the way non-Mexican child immigrants are handled versus all adults and Mexicans. A policy fix seems in order, but it is not happening. Scholars of public policy would be interested in understanding this failure, practitioners are all trying to find a way to use these developments to their advantage in the upcoming elections, and citizens have a variety of concerns that include doing what's right, job prospects, costs of U.S. policies, and the nature of American society.	With respect to the American context, scholars debate the importance of the media in suppressing turnout and mobilizing the base. Because of the importance of money in elections, perhaps the new media—which are free in some regards—can help level the playing field. Scholars and policy makers would be interested in understanding that balance, as scholars seek to explain and campaign professionals hope to win their races. Most American citizens dislike the negative nature of advertising, and yet it has seemed to work on them, and they have tuned to outlets in line with their views. Regarding the Arab spring, are the new media the big difference? Did having these communication systems allow citizens to circumvent the power of the authorities, organize, and overcome the fear that regime opponents had that they were alone in their disgust with the system? For theorists, these questions illuminate fundamental questions about why revolts happen and how citizens mobilize. Activists and authoritarians want to know what works to bring people out to challenge a regime so that they can promote such behavior or thwart it. Finally, citizens of these countries are likely wondering how it all happened (and how things could be so different now), and people around the

Self-Consciously Transforming Topics into Different Types of Questions	Gabriela	Kevin
		world love their devices and connections and may be interested in thinking more deeply about their potential.
Why important to multiple audiences?	Again, for these topics—polarization and immigration reform—there are both big scholarly debates and issues to resolve, so the theory and policy professional find these topics appealing. Many citizens are angry at our politicians for not being able to compromise and worried about conditions in this country. If nothing is accomplished, what impact will that have on the future and U.S. democracy?	These lines of research suggest new ways of affecting politics, getting certain people elected (U.S.), and removing others from office (Arab spring). These topics are interesting to scholars of campaigns and elections in the United States as well as to specialists on authoritarianism, social movements, and political change around the world. They are especially important to scholars of the media. For citizens, thinking about the potential political impact of their phones and social networks might be fascinating.
Public policy questions	Why has immigration reform not passed, when the majority of voters favor it and many powerful interest groups do too? Why was immigration reform possible in 2008, when it seems impossible in 2014? What are the policy consequences of polarization?	What types of social media strategies have succeeded in unseating incumbents in U.S. elections? How did activists learn from past protesters and activists around the world as the events of 2011 were unfolding?
Theory-advancing questions	Why is U.S. politics so polarized now? To what extent is U.S. politics more polarized now than it was in the past? Given polarization, how did President Obama achieve some key legislative successes in his first two years, and why have these been so hard to come by in the first years of his second term?	Under what conditions do challengers win congressional seats in contemporary politics? Why did the Arab spring occur in 2011? Why was Algeria, which had suffered significant unrest and opposition to its authoritarian regime throughout the 1990s, relatively calm during the 2011 uprisings, while its neighbors were not? Why has Tunisia's revolution been more successful then Egypt's?

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Self-Consciously Transforming Topics into Different Types of Questions	Gabriela	Kevin
Puzzling?	The first two public policy questions are puzzles. In the first case, the big factors that affect congressional behavior—voters' attitudes and the positions of powerful interest group—seem to be arrayed in favor. In fact, most observers also say that Republicans need to do something to court Latinos if they are ever going to win the White House again. So why aren't they acting? And why would the Republicans have been able to act in 2008 with an unpopular and lame-duck President at the helm and facing a tough election bout? Why was the logic different then? The last two theory-advancing questions are also puzzles in the sense that they address a change or a difference in two time periods that Gabriela can't easily and obviously account for. Perhaps further research will show that the variations are obvious, but perhaps not, and finding those differences among seemingly like events is a good strategy for finding a puzzle. Your instructor will have a good sense of whether the events you are juxtaposing are similar enough to be worth pursuing, so don't hesitate to check out your question with her or him.	The first public policy question asserts that social media are what made the difference in unseating incumbents (which is very hard to do). If that is the case, then Kevin has a genuine puzzle. However, this contention might turn out to be factually wrong, so Kevin has to find out whether this is true in general or whether he can find, for instance, two similar cases in which the difference (incumbent loss) seems to come down to social media. Of the questions related to 2011, the last two in the theory-advancing category are potential puzzles. Here we see the kind of surprise in which cases that seem comparable did not turn out the same. Again, Kevin would be wise to consult his instructor to see whether she or he is impressed that these cases are appropriately comparable.

not ask questions that would require them to know what is happening in the future. As we have seen, while good theory helps us predict the future, we should avoid research papers that are wholly future focused. For instance, Gabriela would likely not receive approval from her professor for a research paper that asked, "Will Congress pass immigration reform legislation by 2016?" That might be an interesting think-piece essay, but the empirics would not be available. However, often when analysts wish they could know the future, they look to other cases to give them insight. So, once Gabriela knows, for instance, what has caused the increase in polarization today, she would be able to think about what is likely to happen in the future and what impact that would have on polarization. The bulk of their work is then on another case or cases, but their research gives them some knowledge about the situation that motivated their question. Last, only one of the student questions so far poses a puzzle.

You should also notice that Gabriela and Kevin have begun to justify their topics. This work is part of their insurance policy—confirming that they have picked issues that others, especially their professor, will care about; ensuring that they will be able to find information, both theoretical and empirical, on their topics; and making a kind of down payment on future writing assignments. As you will see, your paper's Introduction will explain why your topic is interesting, important, and perhaps puzzling to multiple audiences. Doing this work now means that Gabriela and Kevin will have an easier time at the end of their writing projects when they need to draft their Introductions.

STATING YOUR QUESTION CONCISELY AND DIRECTLY

When you can state your Research Question with the appropriate starting words and can justify why scholars, practitioners, and citizens would be interested in it, then you, too, are on your way to a good paper. But you're not done yet. Have you ever gone to a public lecture and noticed that a questioner takes too long in posing her or his query to the speaker? Are you often frustrated listening to that audience member go on about her or his issue before stating the question? If you answered yes to these two queries, then you have an instinctual understanding of the fourth characteristic of a good research question: it is short and direct. You want to identify a question and ask about it as briefly and straightforwardly as possible. For instance, notice the differing impact of two questions that Max could ask:

Example Question A: Vladimir Putin has impressed people all over the world with his tough talk and gruff style. He has been enormously successful in helping Russians feel pride again in their country, and

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important to that pride was Putin's successful hosting of the Olympics in February 2014. Many people thought the Olympics would be a disaster, that there would be terrorist attacks, that the facilities would be inadequate, that LGBT competitors and spectators would be harassed or arrested, and that protests would mar the games. Instead, the games were a wonderful spectacle, but instead of ushering in the peace the ancients had hoped would arise from these competitions, Putin used this time to foment greater unrest in the Ukraine. As a result of Russian efforts and those of separatists in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, about a month after the Olympics' end, Russia had annexed that peninsula and had designs on the east. While all this happened, the West simply stood by. Did Putin simply think he could get away with taking parts of Ukraine for Russia? How did the Olympic Games affect Russia's behavior, and does it account for Russia's aggression toward Georgia in 2008 too? Do these territorial grabs mean that Russia will continue to expand and take land from other post-Soviet states?

Example Question B: Why did Russia intervene in 2008 and 2014 in the disputes between separatists and the leaders of post-Soviet states (Georgia and Ukraine)? Is the Olympic similarity merely coincidence or of some importance?

In the first example, Max spends too much time explaining the background logic for his question and actually gets sidetracked into details that are interesting and may even be related to his question, but need to be investigated further for their relevance. Yes, some of this information will likely appear in his paper in some form, but at this early stage, being able to state the question concisely is important (having a focused explanation for the question is relevant too, but Max isn't there yet). The questions in B are focused and they don't require Max to get inside Putin's head (as in the first example). Clearly, Max is interested in Russian foreign policy not only because of what happened but because of what may occur, but he needs to realize that he won't be able to predict the future. In B, Max focuses on two cases of intervention that occurred during different Olympic Games. Perhaps the world competition is relevant, perhaps not. As Max continues his research on Russian foreign policy, he may adjust this question somewhat so as to achieve more of a puzzle (Why such decisive behavior regarding Crimea and much less clear action on eastern Ukraine? Or why challenge Ukraine in February and March 2014 but not earlier?). But even still, this second set of questions is preferable because they are brief, use appropriate starting words (at least for the first query), don't contain the answers in the questions, and are actually doable.[12] The lessons for

you from Max's question asking are to seek that crisp question and recognize that you will have plenty of time later in your Introduction to explain why your query is interesting, important, and maybe even puzzling. Most important now is to structure your question succinctly, with an appropriate starting word and without your answer appearing in the query. And if Max did pursue question B, what kind of research would he be doing? Why, theory-advancing research, of course. Max wants to understand what motivates Russian foreign policy, and he plans to examine some cases of Russian interventionism to do just that.

Pushing yourself to ask an appropriate question and taking some time to refine it are enormously important, because a well-phrased query makes your life much easier as your proceed. Remember that our fourth student, Zoe, came to her project with a kind of knack for question asking that may be a result of her research acumen, background in the field, or just plain luck. Her interests in gender and representation have led her relatively quickly to an excellent set of interrelated questions: How different are female legislators from male ones? Do they pass women's-issue legislation more often than male legislators do? Zoe's first question could be rephrased in a more general way (removing her answer from the question), to ask what determines how legislators vote or why legislators vote as they do. Her query assumes that gender is the main factor, but you will see (or perhaps you remember) that specialists on representation posit multiple factors for explaining the behavior of legislators. Still, that first query contains a theory-advancing element—Is gender an important determinant of legislative behavior?—as well as an important public policy one—If we seek policies that are female friendly, are we better off supporting female candidates regardless of their ideology or party or other factors that might affect a representative's policy preference? Note, again, that Zoe's questions are short and direct. Her second question, although it seems to be a yes-or-no question, will be sufficiently answered only when she analyzes the differences between what women and men accomplish in legislatures and considers the importance of gender as a predictor of behavior. Still, Zoe has a great start on her research with these excellent questions.

One final word. You may have noticed by now that I have a preference for why or how questions. In general, I think they lead you most clearly to the kind of research query you will find easy to answer, because they assert the basic concept you will need to research and they demand multiple, conceptually distinct (not just different intensity) answers. My advice is to do your best to push yourself into an appropriate why or how question. They are, in many ways, the "gold standard" of starting words for your research journey.

PRACTICAL SUMMARY

In this chapter, you have learned about what makes a good research question and the different kinds of research in which political scientists typically engage. Excellent research questions are interesting, important, brief, and doable.

Sometimes they are also puzzling. They start with an appropriate interrogatory, and while a certain factor might have inspired you to be interested in your question, be sure to take your answer (that factor) out of the question as you proceed. Once you state a question, check it again for its brevity and appropriateness. Also consider the type of research (theory advancing, public policy, or conceptual) as you are thinking about possible research questions. The type of query you pose is often not dependent on the topic but on the course or the purpose for which you are writing the paper. In other words, you can develop many different kinds of research questions from one topic. You want to be sure that the question you have posed will let you investigate concepts and events or developments that are actually interesting to you. So, think through the implications of your questions carefully. You may even want to talk through your question with your instructor before you move on.

This chapter has also provided several methods for generating research questions. We met four students (who will return in other chapters as we work through different stages of the research process) who are learning how to discover interesting topics and transform them into actual questions. Finding such a query often takes some effort, but it is not impossible, especially if you follow the advice outlined here. Perhaps the hardest part in determining the question is uncovering a source of inspiration. I have suggested several: (1) why you are majoring in political science, (2) your extracurricular activities, (3) your career ideas, (4) topics you enjoyed in earlier classes, (5) your personal concerns and hopes, and (6) contemporary issues and controversies.

To guide you in this process, the best advice I can give you is to fill out the matrices, just as some of our students have done, and work hard on actually stating a question that conforms to my advice. Your effort in generating your Research Question will be very worthwhile, as getting off to a good start is essential for your future success. Once you have some good candidate questions, try to decide which one would be most fun, interesting, or possible for you to do. You should also consider which one will satisfy your professor's criteria for the assignment best. Remember that your question will likely be refined as you proceed (again, the research process is not simply a linear one, but rather iterative), but without a start you have nothing to improve upon. With the question stated, you are on your way.

RECIPE 1: THE RESEARCH QUESTION

INGREDIENTS

- Tables 2.3 and 2.4 from the text and as blanks (supplied in the online materials: "Finding a Topic" and "Generating Questions")
- Access to Max's two attempts to state his question and Zoe's questions

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Using the work of the four students and the techniques explained here, develop your own question. This will require you to fill in Tables 2.3 and 2.4 for yourself and spend time refining your question so that it achieves the desired characteristics—in addition to its broad-based appeal, that it is short, direct, and potentially puzzling; has an appropriate starting word; and does not contain an answer within the question. If you are stuck, do either of the exercises below to help you.

2. Subject your question to further tests for "doneness." Ask yourself (and write down): What concept is the fundamental focus of my question? Will I be investigating events that have already happened? Will this question lead me to public policy or theory-oriented research? (If you can't identify a concept of importance or be sure that you are investigating events that have happened, you need to go back and revise until you can answer affirmatively.) Question posing takes time. This chapter is designed to walk you through the process, although in this recipe, I am skipping the early steps, hoping that simply reading along has gotten you thinking about your interests. Some of you, though, might need to go back and fill in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 for yourself before you can make progress. I will say, though, that if you have been trying but you are not able to achieve "doneness," you should bring what you have written down (and if you haven't written anything down, then you haven't tried sufficiently, so go back and make some efforts) to your instructor. Your thinking about what will be appealing to you and your instructor's skill at asking good questions will help you solve this challenge in no time. *Bon appétit!*

EXERCISES

1. Pick up a recent newspaper. Develop a research question based on a news article or editorial selection. Identify the type of question (theory advancing or public policy), and be sure your query starts with an appropriate word, is concise, and is doable. Explain why others—scholars, practitioners, and citizens—would find your question compelling. Remember that they each will have different reasons for liking your question.

2. Consult one of your introductory textbooks. Develop a research question with its help. Identify the type of question (theory advancing or public policy), and be sure your query starts with an appropriate word, is concise, and is doable. Explain why others—scholars, practitioners, and citizens—would find your question compelling. Remember that they each will have different reasons for liking your question.

NOTES

1. You can probably find some things still posted online on Blackboard or your school's equivalent.
2. You'll find a more complete discussion of searching in chapter 3 when you have to get very serious about finding the best quality sources for your research.
3. I'll discuss citations, as well as citation management tools like Zotero, Mendeley, and EndNote, and the importance of giving credit to sources and avoiding plagiarism in more detail in chapter 3.
4. Morris P. Fiorina with Samuel J. Abrams, *Disconnect: The Breakdown of Representation in American Politics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).
5. Jennifer Rubin, "Immigration Polling Tells Congress to Act," *The Washington Post* (July 9, 2014), http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/wp/2014/07/09/immigration-polling-tells-congress-to-act/.
6. Like some of you, Gabriela is initially interested in polarization both as an effect (Why is the United States so much more polarized now?) as well as a cause (How is polarization impeding immigration reform?). In political science, many concepts can play both roles. Ultimately, Gabriela and you will have to choose which factor is her major interest that she will investigate.
7. These terms come (with adjustments in nomenclature) from W. Phillips Shively. He identifies four kinds of research—normative philosophy, formal theory, engineering (what I call public policy), and theory oriented (here, theory advancing)—divided along two dimensions—nonempirical versus empirical and applied versus basic. For most undergraduates, formal theory papers are beyond their interest and the scope of their training, so I will not deal with them explicitly here. Discussions with political theorists and reflections on my own subfields have made me realize what political theorists share with others in the field, as all types of political scientists may write conceptual papers that make assertions about the state of the literature or engage in debates about concepts and definitions. Also, the renaming of types of research, I hope, will help reduce the confusion some students have had between Shively's terms of political theory and theory-advancing research. W. Phillips Shively, *The Craft of Political Research*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002), 4–6.
8. Ibid.
9. For instance, Richard Boyd, "Thomas Hobbes and the Perils of Pluralism," *Journal of Politics* 63 (2001): 392–413; Oliver P. Richmond, "Critical Research Agendas for Peace: The Missing Link in the Study of International Relations," *Alternatives* 32, no. 2 (2007): 247–74.
10. For assignments less than the full-fledged research paper in American, comparative, and international politics, you will often write conceptual papers.
11. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, enlarged ed. (New York: Free Press, 1968). Merton was discussing the types of theories, but a middle-range question will lead to developing middle-range theory.
12. At some point, Max will likely determine that the Olympic connection (in his second question) is related to one of the possible answers, so that one will drop out.