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## Spring JP Research and Writing Guidelines

Welcome to the spring semester! I'm looking forward to working with you on your JP. As you know from the fall JP, the process of research and writing a JP is both challenging and rewarding. It is imperative that you make the most of the first few weeks of the term to ensure that your project starts on a solid foundation to ensure timely completion of the project. I am here to help you throughout this process. This guide sets out expectations and advice for your spring JP work.

### Expectations

The spring JP is an independent research project that is conducted with input and advice of a member of the faculty. This means that while I am happy to meet with you and offer guidance and feedback, it is up to you to take charge of your own work. It is your responsibility to be proactive, to set up meetings as needed, and to stay on top of the work. Although I find advising to be one of the best aspects of being a professor, I am simply not able to send reminders or come looking for you if you disappear. However, to help provide structure for the semester, I have included below a suggested timeline with milestones (deliverables). For my part, I will provide written or oral feedback on all of the milestones mentioned in the timeline. Note, however, that your grade for the JP will be based *solely on the final draft*.

Please be advised that I am able to be significantly more helpful on topics on which I have research and teaching interests. These topics include sovereignty and authority, statebuilding and development, state capacity and state weakness, international and intrastate conflict and security, and foreign aid. I have regional interests in Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

## JP Structure and Milestones

Some students choose to execute the project described in the fall JP research prospectus. In those cases, and especially if I was not your fall JP adviser, we should meet as soon as possible to discuss your plans for continuing your fall research.

Other students choose to start a new research project. As you know, the spring JP experience does not offer a structured workshop. Because of the nature of independent work, you may find it helpful to have structure in terms of suggested deadlines. Additionally, intermediate milestone deliverables are important for breaking up the research process into manageable chunks. Below is a suggested timeline with deliverables. *With the exception of the final two items (the full draft and the final draft), these deliverables are optional but recommended.*

### **Early February**

**Goal:** Work out your specific JP topic and research question and read the relevant scholarship on your topic.

Potential deliverables:

- Write 1 double-spaced page on your research question. What is the question and why does it matter (what is its broader relevance)? How do you intend to answer your research question?
- Complete an annotated bibliography. Identify five of the *most important* scholarly sources relevant to your research question. For each source, write one to two paragraphs that summarize the findings from the source and describe its relationship to your project. Be sure to cite your sources completely and correctly.

### **Late February**

**Goal:** Determine your research design and complete a literature review.

Potential deliverables:

- Submit your JP proposal (about 6-8 double-spaced pages). Think of the proposal as a road map for the junior paper. The proposal should describe your research question, why the question is important, previous information or scholarship relevant to your project (literature review), and how you will use evidence to answer your question (research design). State your dependent and independent variables clearly, as well as your hypothesis about the relationship between those variables. Because this exercise forces you to clarify your thinking about the research design, it is often useful to devote most of the proposal to discussing the research design. Some components of the proposal can also be revised and reused in the draft JP.

## Early March

**Goal:** Begin data collection and preliminary analysis. Continue to develop your theory and causal mechanisms.

Potential deliverables:

- Update me in person or via email regarding your data collection efforts.
- If you are doing a quantitative analysis, write a short memo with descriptive statistics and correlations for your variables of interest.
- Write up a short (about 2-4 double-spaced pages) discussion of your theory and causal logic. Why do you expect to observe the hypothesized relationship between your dependent variable and independent variable? In other words, what is the causal logic or mechanism that explains the expected relationship?

## Late March

**Goal:** A draft of JP by the draft deadline.

Deliverables:

- Turn in a draft of your JP. It is important to leave adequate time for me to read and provide feedback on your JP, and for you to have time to incorporate that feedback. If you experience serious setbacks that jeopardize your ability to meet this deadline, let me know as soon as possible so that we can address any problems related to the project.

## Early May

**Goal:** Finish it! Due dates are set by the Department and cannot be altered by me. Pay attention to emails from the Department!

Deliverables:

- Revise JP based on feedback, and turn in the full draft! Congratulate yourself for a job well done.

## Helpful Hints

1. Don't be a stranger.

Although the spring JP is an independent research project, I am here to offer guidance. There is no point in wandering around in the dark, particularly given the relatively short timeframe for your work. If you are struggling, come talk to me.

2. Take advantage of a wealth of resources for your literature review.

You can find scholarly work in many places. Google Scholar is NOT usually the most useful starting point. You will be better served by consulting existing syllabi (perhaps from a class that motivated your interest in a particular question) or Princeton Library's research guides to identify the most important works on your topic. From there, utilize their citations, or check Google Scholar to see who has cited that piece of literature. Of course, you may consult with me as well. Additionally, Jeremy Darrington, the Politics Librarian at Firestone Library, is an amazing resource for you. I encourage you to reach out to him at [jdarring@princeton.edu](mailto:jdarring@princeton.edu) to set up an appointment to talk about your project.

3. When in doubt, always cite.

Whenever you use someone else's own words or their ideas, cite that person. It is always better to err on the side of over-citation. It matters less what system you use and more that you cite correctly and consistently. To that end, it does not matter to me which system you use, though I have a preference for author-date, in-text citation systems such as APSA (American Political Science Association) or Chicago. Lots of online and library resources are available for the most common citation systems.

4. Less is (often) more.

The JP is 20-35 double-spaced pages. Within that range, your JP should be long enough to make its points effectively, while avoiding the pitfalls of fluff and filler. A 30 page JP may be more effective than a 35 page JP that includes 5 pages of filler that detracts from the quality of your work.

5. Organization matters.

The single most common problem I've seen in student written work is organization. You may have uncovered a groundbreaking discovery in your research, but no one will ever know if your writing is poorly organized. Outlines often help, if only to sketch out a road map of your JP. The hallmarks of good organization include logical flow and copious "sign-posting," which is the practice of using textual cues to help your reader figure out what you're doing and where you're trying to go. Sign-posting language can include enumeration (first, second, third, last) or sentences that indicate the purpose of some section or subsection ("In this section I address three potential alternative hypotheses."). Use topic sentences and make sure each paragraph sticks to that topic

(one idea per paragraph!). Your reader should be able to follow the logic of your writing by reading only the topic sentences.

6. Style, spelling, and grammar also matter.

Pay attention to style, grammar, and spelling, and refrain from abusing the thesaurus. You are welcome to use the third person or first person in your writing. Direct, active voice is almost always better than indirect, passive voice. Write this: “The rebels defeated the government.” Avoid this: “The government was defeated by the rebels.” The former is direct, active; the latter is indirect, passive.

Take advantage of the Writing Center. I can help with big-picture organizational issues but generally will not flag specific errors.

For more on writing, I suggest the following resources:

Henry Farrell on writing:

[http://www.henryfarrell.net/pol\\_science\\_essays.pdf](http://www.henryfarrell.net/pol_science_essays.pdf)

Christopher Blattman on writing:

<http://chrisblattman.com/2010/02/17/how-to-write-an-essay/>

7. Back up your work regularly.

Save your work daily and in multiple locations. Computer crashes happen to everyone, but they need not result in the loss of weeks or even months of work. To be on the safe side, create multiple backups in the cloud and on external media. Trust me: a little preparation will go a long way should you find yourself on the wrong side of a broken hard drive.

8. Dedicate regular time for your JP.

Because we do not have a workshop in the spring, it is easy to prioritize the short-term demands of your courses over the JP. This is a trap: the JP cannot be completed the week before the final deadline. To avoid falling into this scenario, dedicate regular time to working on your JP. For some students, blocking out time on their calendars is a useful strategy. For others, setting weekly writing goals is extremely helpful. For yet others, finding a writing partner adds a valuable source of external accountability.