

The Thesis Paper

INTRODUCTION

This component will count for 15% of your grade and will demonstrate to me your analytical skills as well as your mastery of a particular area of American Government. I expect this essay to be a minimum of 1375 words and a maximum of 1925 words. All papers are to be **double-spaced**, with progressive word counts at the top of each page (e.g. 350 atop page one, 700 atop page two, etc). Use a readable font.

GOALS

The aim of the term paper is to produce an analytical/critical examination of a particular area in American government—an analysis that is distinctively your own. Mere regurgitation of arguments found in the literature is therefore entirely unacceptable, as is simple descriptive or narrative treatment of the particular topic. Informed, critical essays should provide the following elements:

- (a) Clear comprehension of the key issues raised by the topic.
- (b) Evidence of broad reading.
- (c) A structured, coherent and logical argument with a **CLEAR THESIS STATEMENT**.
- (d) Examples, scholarly citations and data that support the argument(s), advanced in the essay.
- (e) A concise introduction and conclusion that set out and summarize, respectively, the overall argument.
- (f) A bibliography that lists all texts, articles and web sites consulted in producing the essay. An addendum to this point—generally speaking, I want you to avoid use of an encyclopedia. You may use the web, but do not over rely on it and do not use Wikipedia as a source.

FOOTNOTING/BIBLIOGRAPHY

Whenever you cite a source, you are (of course) to footnote it. The format I like is not particularly stringent. The first time you cite a source, it should be footnoted and listed in the following format:

¹ Fulcher, James, Labour Movements, Employers, and the State: Conflict and Co-operation in Britain and Sweden, Clarendon Oxford Press, 1991, p. 46.

After that, you need only to use **parenthetical** listings (Fulcher, p. 48), like that one. At the end of the paper, you should list all sources you have used in a bibliography on a separate page. The bibliography does not count as part of the word count. If you want an easy web tool for citations, I recommend Son of Citation Machine at www.citationmachine.net.

PROCESS

We will be writing in a two-step process. 1) Choice of topic and thesis statement. 2) Writing of the final paper. Your thesis statement will be due (entered onto a Google Form that I provide) by **Monday, December 15th**. Of course if you get it to me earlier, you can start writing sooner. The date that the final paper is due will be **Friday, January 9th**.

RESEARCH

Your research should lead you to books and journals that will back up your points. I don't expect you to read tons of books, but selected chapters should help you inestimably. One other important point: web sites should comprise 25% or less of your bibliography. Note that an article that exists in physical form **does not count** as a web source (e.g. an article from nytimes.com).

TOPICS

You may write about any issue in American government that you find compelling. Please avoid excessively historical topics.

WRITING TIPS

- Don't use "I"—this weakens and individualizes your points.
- Cite opposing points of view. Your paper should assume a moderately skeptical reader.
- Use simple language. Never use a complicated word when a simple one will do. Whenever possible use short sentences.
- Proof your work. After you finish, let it sit for a day (or at least an hour). Then re-read and edit. Avoid slang!
- Originality is good—try to find a topic I've never encountered before.
- By the time I finish the first paragraph, I should know what your thesis statement is and where the paper is going.