A Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Government

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A Guide to Writing a Senior Thesis in Government

People become interested in the study of politics in response to an unacknowledged fantasy: they see themselves as occupying seats of power. There have always been rulers and ruled, and the former radiate glamour as they inspire fear, resentment, hope, and admiration…. It is therefore not at all surprising that so many of us are fascinated by the ways in which power is exercised, lost, and gained.

– Judith Shklar

John Cowles Professor of Government

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The Government Senior Thesis

preface

The decision whether or not to write a senior thesis and to pursue an honors degree in the Government Department will have important consequences for your final year at Harvard. Since writing a thesis will be quite different from almost anything else you have undertaken, you may well be wondering whether or not you are up to the task, or even whether writing a thesis is the best way to mark the culmination of your academic program. These are very real questions that you must decide for yourself. While not the only or even primary determinant, you also should be aware that the highest Latin honors for which students are eligible if they **do not** *write a thesis will be cum laude.*

We in the Government Department and in the Undergraduate Program Office would like to help you make the choice that best suits your particular needs and interests. This handbook aims to answer your procedural and substantive questions about the process of thesis writing and honors determination, as well as to provide you with the accumulated wisdom of seniors in Government who have gone through the process before you.

We urge you to read through the entire handbook and to use it as a reference throughout the thesis-writing process. We have made every effort to address the problems and questions that you are likely to encounter in the year ahead. A careful reading now may help you approach the thesis process in a more productive manner, and should also help you avoid common mistakes and pitfalls that often result in a lower quality of work and lower thesis grades.

Once you have reviewed this handbook, please feel free to contact the Undergraduate Program Office with any concerns about the thesis process in general or your project in particular.

Getting Started: About Topics, Research Questions and Thesis Research

chapter one

If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?

- Albert Einstein

1.1 Getting Off the Ground

You will return to school in the fall in various stages of the thesis process. Some of you may still be developing a topic and trying to find a thesis adviser; others may have spent the summer doing archival, interview, observational, or data-set research; still others will have taken previous work—such as a seminar paper or research project—and continued to read background sources to situate your work in the larger theoretical literature. But everyone is now faced with the same deadline: the thesis is due right before Spring Break in March, and there are no exceptions. Regardless of where you are now, you need to get to work. Much remains to be done in the next six months and deadlines loom. We have set these deadlines to help you pace your work appropriately, but each one will still require a significant investment of your time. In addition, start talking with your adviser about setting additional deadlines for completing tasks.

As you begin, it may help to understand what you will produce in the end. Your thesis will be neither a book nor a dissertation. It may serve as the basis for a larger and later research project, should you go on to a doctoral program in political science or choose to try to publish some of the results. But the thesis process is meant to produce a particular work that demonstrates your competence to conduct basic research in political science and present those results to the department's teaching staff. As a result, there are things that your thesis should and should not do. You should attempt to define a unique question that has not been previously answered, identify political phenomena or ideas that operate in some general (not entirely particular) sense, and answer a smaller question adequately and persuasively rather than a larger question inconclusively. You should not take a partisan position on a matter of policy or politics or simply aggregate a host of sources (as you may have been asked to do for previous research papers).

Potential thesis writers are often tempted to write a piece of direct political or policy advocacy. Try not to succumb to this temptation. In political science, we begin by seeking to understand what is going on behind the phenomena we observe and hope that our final conclusions follow from the evidence that we have gathered, analyzed, and presented. Remember that your audience will be faculty and graduate students in political science. They will evaluate your work for the level of scholarly achievement it contains: research, results, analysis, and facts will impress and persuade them in ways that mere opinion and advocacy will not.

An example of the difference between advocacy and analysis may make this matter clearer. Say you are interested in writing about the war in Iraq. You may or may not have found the President's reasons for going to war to be persuasive, but arguing the case either pro or con would not be an appropriate topic for a senior thesis. You could, however, ask the following question(s): What specific justifications did the administration offer to justify the war in Iraq? When and why did various reasons emerge, and how were they disseminated to the public?[1] Alternatively, a thesis exploring Just War Theory and the morality of promoting democracy and liberal ideals abroad might very well contain a chapter on Iraq as a case study.

One of the first things you need to do at this point is to find an interest or topic that excites you. There are going to be many times over the next few months when you will get tired of your thesis. Without a fundamental curiosity or drive to know more about your question, it will be tough to get through the dry spells that may come. But how do you choose a topic and narrow it sufficiently to be manageable?

1. ***Find a topic or area that interests you and begin to refine it***

The first step is to discover your scholarly interests. The search for a thesis topic is a time for self examination. Look over your past work at Harvard and find the themes that run through the choices you have made. Indeed, each time you have made a decision about what course to take, what book or article to read, or what paper topic to pursue, you have left a clue about ideas that might combine scholarly potential with personal excitement. Do you detect any patterns? (This is good practice for discerning patterns in social phenomena!) Is there a question or event that jumps out at you? Upon further reflection, does something puzzle you? Retrace the steps that led to your decision to become a Government concentrator. What played the most important role in that decision?

Your initial inclination will most likely be toward a very broad topic: "I'm interested in party systems." Or the area of inquiry may be specific, but the topic is still extremely broad: "The U.S. war in Iraq—that's what I want to write on." Or, "Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* fascinates me." The important point is to begin narrowing in on *something*.

Most first efforts at a topic are too broad. They lack focus and need an injection of special interest or burning issues. To give focus to a broad interest, read widely in the subject until some anomaly or surprise catches your eye. Ask yourself what specific concerns led you to the general issue. How did you first see the problem? Was there an important book? Was there an important series of lectures? Is there a recurrent argument about current affairs? Talk with others about the topic. What events stand out? Around what cases do the discussions revolve? Formulate questions with these specific facts in mind.

A student interested in party systems, upon reflection, might find that she is especially puzzled about the origins of party government. Her reading might lead her to the early examples of party government in 18th century Britain. A discussion with a professor or graduate student might remind her that Burke and Bolingbroke debated the merits of parties. Her topic might then become an investigation and assessment of Burke's defense of parties. Or, from the same general interest, a student might become curious about the relationship between political stability and party systems. He might wonder about how the nature of the party system was connected to British stability and Italian instability since World War II.

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[1] This, in fact, was exactly what one 2004 thesis at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign sought to answer, and the conclusions received wide dissemination in the media. Ms. Devon Largio coded 1500 statements and stories and found that the administration originated 23 of 27 distinct arguments for going to war. Moreover, she also found "that the Bush administration switched its focus from Osama bin Laden to Saddam Hussein early on…, only five months after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks..." (Lynn 2004).

On the other hand, some topics are too specific or too personal or both. They lack an awareness of the important general issues at stake in the experience of politics. You might have wondered, for example, why some immigrant parents (including your own) have developed strong loyalties to a certain political party, while others have not. To turn this interest into a political science topic, you must situate the issue in a larger literature (e.g., integration of immigrant groups into urban political machines, or rational choice theory as applied to party choice, or studies of ethnic voting patterns, or contemporary debates over multiculturalism and democratic theory, or perhaps classic discussions of the functions and worth of political partisanship). What basic concerns do the writers in these different literatures emphasize? Which ones most intrigue you? How might you enter into a dialogue with these writers?

2. ***Identify a scholarly puzzle***

As the above discussion suggests, refining your topic to something manageable involves the further step of turning it into a research question. A question is not simply a further narrowing of the topic. It transforms the topic into an unanswered but answerable query. Another way to think about it may be to think of finding a puzzle that inheres in the topic, a puzzle that intrigues, or would intrigue, political scientists and that has occasioned debate in the field. Other researchers may have addressed the question, but they have not yet provided a fully satisfactory answer. Often, books or articles end with a discussion of the directions that the present study indicates for future research—this is one pointer toward good questions or puzzles.

Another way to look at formulating the question is to re-examine a previously posed question which has a variety of answers. Then ask yourself if there is an analogous question that one could ask that would add new information (we might call it "adding more cases"). Alternatively, the analogous question could allow you to bridge a gap between previously offered but diverging answers.

Formulating a research question also means deciding what kind of evidence you would (ideally) like to produce to evaluate it. What is the method through which you will solve the puzzle? Statistical/regression analysis? A comparison of case studies? Analysis of legal cases? Textual analysis? Historical institutional analysis? Research in archives? Content analysis? Experimental methods? Interviews? Survey data? Some mixture of these?

Please note that if you are planning on doing survey or interview research, you will need to contact the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research (CUHS) to determine whether review will be required. Any living person from or about whom information is collected for a scholarly study is deemed a "human subject." University regulations and federal rules require review and approval, or exemption, in advance, of human subject research. Most Government thesis projects can be approved by expedited review on a rolling basis, but occasionally a project will require full committee review. *Please note you will need to successfully complete a short ethics training course online prior to submitting your proposal to CUHS. You should assume that the process of obtaining human subjects approval will take 2-4 weeks*. Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research application forms, the full committee meeting schedule, and "The Intelligent Scholar's Guide to the Use of Human Subjects in Research" are available at: http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~research.

In refining your topic, formulating a question, and deciding on an approach, solicit feedback on your ideas by talking with friends, professors, teaching fellows, and tutors. Where does it fit into the subfields of political science? What literatures might be relevant? How can you formulate a question that can be answered in the time available to you? They may be able to suggest items to read or a person with whom to speak.

One last thought: Research requires a fair degree of flexibility, especially as concerns your topic and question. You will conduct better research if you remain flexible with respect to altering that question as you conduct your actual research. Have you ever reached the end of a paper where you made an argument and only then realized what it was you were really arguing? The same sort of circumstance may arise in original research. As you pursue the research, you will likely revisit the question and argument you have developed.

On the road to developing a thesis question: an example

Here's an example of developing a researchable thesis question whose answer might be of interest to your readers.

Step 1: Find a topic or area that interests you and begin to refine it.

Perhaps you are interested in the politics of same-sex marriage. You have taken a couple of courses that deal with American government, policy, and social movements. You have read a number of popular press articles, and perhaps some books, about same-sex marriage. You have begun to wonder about the interconnections between the GLBT civil rights movement and same-sex marriage policy across various U.S. states.

Step 2: Identify a puzzle or question

Beginning with the 2003 same-sex marriage case in Massachusetts, you decide you are interested in how the case set a policy precedent for future same-sex marriage litigation. But why should your answer be of interest to anyone beyond those who study gay civil rights? You realize that the interest of your question would be enhanced by situating it within a larger concern: the role of social movements in creating court-led social policy. But now you see that you cannot simply look at the GLBT movement; you will also need to consider the reaction to the case, and the counter-litigation, by the Christian Right. Perhaps you also need to add an additional case study; you could compare the same-sex marriage cases to early state-level abortion litigation (from before *Roe v. Wade*). The question therefore becomes a larger one about the role that social movements play in extracting policy consideration and rulings from U.S. state-level courts. In doing this, you can demonstrate the applicability of whatever ideas you come up with across some span of space and time. Political scientists call this "portability." You can engage the reader interested in political phenomena, but perhaps uninformed about gay rights.

Do not let this example deceive you; a process such as the one just described can take weeks, and a large amount of reading and talking with your adviser. It can be nebulous and time-consuming, but it is extremely important because it will set the outer limits of what you will spend the next few months examining in greater detail. You want to find the right balance between setting those limits too large or too small.

A Note on Normative Questions and Political Theory Theses

It is sometimes thought that political theory theses are normative (they ask how things "ought to be"), while theses in other Government subfields are empirical (they ask how or why things "are"). Yet this distinction is misleading, in part because political theory theses are not always aimed at answering a normative question. For instance, a recent thesis writer asked about the historical referents for Locke's position on slavery and how a recreation of this historical context (buttressed by archival evidence) bears on the theoretical contradictions that many commentators have found in his texts. The aim of this thesis was thus above all to *explain* and *clarify*, not to evaluate whether Locke's own normative position was justified. It is perhaps also worth noting that while theses in the American, Comparative, and IR subfields tend not to begin with normative questions, such theses are often informed to some degree by normative concerns. For example, a thesis that tries to show how voter registration laws in two states influence the rates of voting in those states may be motivated by certain normative commitments and may gesture towards these commitments.

We can get a better sense of what political theory theses tend to be about by distinguishing among some broad types. First, some theory theses are in fact focused narrowly on normative questions, e.g. if human slavery can be justified on utilitarian grounds, should utilitarianism be rejected as an inadequate basis for a theory of justice? Second, some political theory theses do not aim to answer an "ought" question, but rather aim to explain or clarify our understanding of a political concept, idea, or argument, or they seek to show how some political phenomenon can be given greater clarity through theoretical treatment. The thesis on Locke mentioned earlier would fit under this broad grouping. Finally, some theory theses are motivated by both normative and empirical (often historical) questions, e.g., can a consideration of the classic debates among 18th and 19th-century writers over the legitimacy of *de jure* slavery illuminate the issue of whether new forms of *de facto* slavery ought to be included among contemporary crimes against humanity?

Finally, a word about methods: just as thesis writers in other subfields have an array of methods on which to draw, so too do political theorists. It is probably obvious that political theory theses often rely on careful arguments about the canon of political philosophy and the work of contemporary political theorists, but they also regularly make use of approaches from contemporary philosophy, intellectual history, legal theory, professional ethics, feminist and queer theory, etc. Additionally, when empirical or historical considerations are part of their concern, theory thesis writers also tend to draw on methods employed in other areas of political science. The diversity of approaches possible in political theory theses attracts many students, yet this same flexibility brings with it the challenge of deciding from among so many options. The best approach is to be aware of these choices, and to seek out advice from members of the department, and in particular your adviser, about what will work best for you.

1.2 Library Research

Library research is crucial throughout the thesis project, not just when you are collecting your data. To follow the steps discussed above—to move from that initial interest to a more specific topic and, finally, on to your question—you will need to do reading and other investigation. Your time in the library will help you fill in gaps in your knowledge, lead you to further sources, and allow you to drill down more narrowly.

One of the necessary parts of both the Senior Thesis Writers' Seminar and your thesis will be a review of the literature relevant to your project (which we will cover below and in the seminar). Good library work is an essential part of creating and writing the literature review.

Numerous undergraduates confess that Widener Library is an intimidating place, but you must enter the belly of that beast in some fashion if you want to complete a thesis. Lamont Library will likely have insufficient resources for your topic, especially if you aim to do your best on the thesis and do original research.

The Government Department has relationships with several reference librarians who are particularly knowledgeable about the sources and library resources that political science researchers use and need in their studies. If they do not know the answer to where you might find some source or type of information, they will help you figure it out.

Library portals

You may or may not be familiar with the various web portals for accessing Harvard's library resources. Here are just a few of them:

- The Harvard University Libraries main page (http://library.harvard.edu). This may be where you go first. This portal is not really optimized for the end-user of the library. It tends to display news and information about the University Library (which is a different system, technically, from the College Library). Skip this as your main portal, and go to the College Library main page.
- The Harvard College Libraries main page (http://hcl.harvard.edu) focuses on the student and researcher as the primary audience. To that end, it presents you with an increasingly detailed but generally intuitive interface to the library system's vast resources. The top of the page also provides quick links to the Hollis catalog system, E-resources (which although part of the HUL website are not easily accessed from the main page of that site), hours for the various libraries (as well as libraries open at this precise moment), and a quick search of all of Harvard's catalogs (there's more than just Hollis!). This site should be your first stop when you access our libraries electronically.
- The Hollis catalog (http://holliscatalog.harvard.edu) is Harvard's primary catalog database. From this catalog, you can find books, journal subscriptions, and digital copies of books and journals. It also contains links to the E-resources for finding particular articles.
- If you use the Firefox web browser, Harvard has a great tool that integrates the catalogs of the library system here with the browser itself, via a plugin. The HUL LibX toolbar allows you to search the HOLLIS catalog, E-Journal List, E-Resource List, Citation Linker, and Google Scholar.[2] LibX will also put a little Harvard shield next to search results in Amazon, Barnes & Noble, the *New York Times Book Review*, and lots of other search resources that will lead you directly to the e-resource.

[2] One of the advantages of using Google Scholar from the HUL LibX tool or from the e-Resources page is that when Google Scholar comes up with an article or book or other resource, you will also be provided a link to that source's location in the catalog or database, so you can often link directly to an article that Google Scholar mentions.

Finding Sources

You likely have a few sources in mind already, from classes and preliminary research into possible topics. You now need to conduct a comprehensive search of books, articles, theses and dissertations related to your topic. Here is where you must go to the library:

- **Search Hollis.** What books exist on your topic? How about closely related topics?

  Try browsing Hollis by subject heading instead of searching by keyword. Keyword searches limit you to exactly literal returns that the database generates. Subject headings are more useful. They have some conceptual coherence. Librarians link items to them based on an understanding of the contents. Subject headings also facilitate connections to different categories of resources that you can explore. Finally, librarians have based the headings on codes and standards set by the Library of Congress. They are standard across all research libraries in the United States, and you can use them at libraries outside the Harvard system, such as the Boston Public Library, other university libraries, and the Library of Congress itself. Learning the controlled vocabulary of subject headings will soon lead you to browse all sorts of electronic (and non-electronic) catalogs more efficiently than keywords and allow for any retracing of your steps you may need to do. But be aware that articles tend to come out much more quickly than books, and it is thus in your best interest to consult journals for the most cutting-edge research in the field, especially if your topic is time-sensitive.

- **Search JSTOR** via the E-Resources link that you can find on the HCL main page (see Section 2.2 above). Although it is unlikely there are no books on your topic, there may be very few, and you may need to rely fairly heavily on articles. Please note that JSTOR has a "moving window" of five years, and so the last five years of any included journal will not be found there. Also remember that all journals are not indexed in JSTOR!

- **Search Academic Search Premier (EBSCO)** via the E-Resources link as well. This should provide you with the latest journal articles and related scholarly publications on your topic, as it does not have the moving wall that JSTOR does. But be aware that you will need to use discretion concerning which sources are the most relevant to your project. In general, you will want to consult the most respected journals in the field (e.g., *American Political Science Review, International Organization, World Politics*) along with more specialized regional or sub-field publications. If you are not sure which journals you should be paying most attention to, talk to your adviser or a reference librarian. You might also want to take a look at syllabi from past Gov classes you have taken—which journals did your professors assign readings from most frequently?

- **Search Political Research Online**: http://www.PoliticalScience.org. Political Research Online (PROL) "is a collaborative project led by the American Political Science Association and a consortium of political science and related associations." PROL "serves as the common resource for all emerging scholarship in political science." On PROL, you will find conference papers, reports, and working papers. You will likely find some of your professors' and TFs' work on PROL. These are not polished articles, but they'll give you a sense of what political scientists do. Hopefully, as you see the range of quality in the papers, you'll also begin to see that you can do this. Indeed, thesis writers have sometimes gone on to present their work at professional conferences.

- **Search other journal indices and other government resources.** The Harvard Libraries staff has compiled an extensive set of electronic resources that should be of great interest to political researchers. From the main E-resources page, click on the "Subject" link, and you can then look up sources via the subject field. Look at all the applicable resources here, but the most relevant initial ones for your literature review will probably be the journal databases.

- **Ask a librarian!** You can do this in a couple of ways. From the HCL portal Research area, there is a link to send a message to a research librarian. Write a message that is as specific as possible, so the librarian can be as helpful as possible. Or go directly to the reference desk in the Atkins Reference Room (on the second floor of Widener), where you can get initial help and figure out whom to speak to subsequently. When you schedule a meeting with a librarian, make sure you set aside at least 2–3 hours. Then, after your meeting, you can go straight to the library stacks or Government Documents to follow up on resources identified during your consultation.
- **Search Dissertation Abstracts** (again, available through E-Resources). Have dissertations or master's theses been written about your topic? If they have, and they did not show up in your Hollis search, make sure to search the dissertation abstracts database. Then, request a copy via Interlibrary Loan or download (if available).
- **Examine the bibliographies and reference lists** of books, articles, and dissertations/theses that you consult. You will be surprised at how many new sources you can find by examining the previous research of other people.
- **Once you have physically located resources**, make sure to look at the sources located physically **next to and proximate to** the sources you find. One of the best things about the Library of Congress system is that books on similar topics are shelved next to one another.
- **Exhaust the Harvard catalogs** before using search engines for the World Wide Web. Electronic resources catalogs are set up for research purposes, while search engines have popularity and commercial (advertising) interests as their organizational basis. Moreover, thousands of resources will appear in Harvard catalogs that will either appear in a limited fashion or not at all on the Web.

Searching catalogs is not simply an administrative task that you must rush through as quickly as possible so you can get on to "real work." ***It is real work.*** Work in catalogs and search resources constitutes the initial process of discovery; it can help you figure out how to pursue the thesis you had in mind or lead you to a topic or twist on a topic you had not yet considered.

Additional Resources

Harvard's Institute for Quantitative Social Science (IQSS) also maintains a comprehensive resource page for undergraduate researchers, with "information and tools for doing research at any level." While geared towards quantitative research, all thesis writers would potentially benefit from taking a look at the resources presented, which are broken up into common stages of research: finding resources, analyzing information, writing up research, presenting research, and managing workflow: http://projects.iq.harvard.edu/undergradscholars/pages/research-resources.

1.3 Developing Your Project

An early step in developing your project is writing your prospectus, as is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. After you have set your topic, written the prospectus, and searched the library and its resources extensively, you will likely find yourself in the following place:

1. Other researchers have written extensively on a topic closely related — perhaps identical — to yours. You ask yourself, "Since my topic has been done already, can I still do it?"
2. There is *nothing* written on your topic. You've found no books, articles, or dissertations on the topic.

You say to yourself, "My topic must be really uninteresting, since no one seems to have done any work on it. How can I do research of my own if there is nothing for me to engage with?"

Both of these situations are great! Your approach to the topic will vary, depending on which situation you find yourself in. You might also be somewhere between the two extremes, so the two sets of advice below will both have utility for you.

Been there, done that

If other researchers have covered your topic in such amazing detail that there does not seem to be anything more that you can add to the conversation, do not worry. You've picked a topic that has energized a number of other scholars, and the vitality of that engagement indicates that your topic is viable. At the very least, the very active nature of the scholarship should allow you to track down the extant literature quite comprehensively; it's unlikely you will miss something.

Tip # 1. Read books with the most recent publication date first. These are most likely to cover the most recent developments in the scholarship, as well as to cite, summarize, and review the recent literature considered most important.

Since the ultimate standard for a senior thesis is to make some contribution to the scholarly literature of politics, you must find some way to make your project different from previously published work:

1. **Revision**. If you can examine previously overlooked sources or contribute new data, your analysis may contribute to revising the standard understanding of the phenomenon or text you study.
2. C**onfirmation**. Through your study, you may provide further confirmation of a general trend or causal mechanism.
3. **Complication**. With the combination of overlooked sources, new data, and in-depth examination, you can complicate an accepted generalization prevalent in the literature.
4. **Adjudication**. Where the literature is unclear as to the relative merits of one explanation or an alternative, your examination will offer confirmation and support to one position or another.

As you compile a working bibliography of the relevant literature and begin to consider which of the above strategies makes the most sense given your data or sources, consult with your adviser and other teaching members of the department.

Tip # 2. Search journals for literature reviews, which will take the form of book reviews, "state of the field" essays, or even a history of how the topic has been studied.

A brief discussion with those familiar with the subject or approach can point you in the direction of vital books and articles. It is not necessary to read everything written on your topic, especially if it is a well-covered topic.

Ex nihilo

It can be quite intimidating to realize that the thesis topic you propose does seem to exist in the literature. As you have written papers in the past, you could always find something if you dug long enough and deep enough. So now what?

As Bobby McFerrin said many years ago, "Don't worry, be happy." Almost by definition, the work that you do will make a contribution to the scholarly literature on your topic. Somehow, you have found a new twist on a puzzle that scores of other researchers have overlooked or ignored. While your friends and fellow government thesis writers work to find something "new" to say, you have a grand vista in front of you.

You will have to be more creative, both in situating your topic and developing your question or puzzle. To make your arguments and evidence sing for other researchers, you will need to situate your project in extant bodies of political research. Here are some practical suggestions for how you may do this.

First, summarize the topic. Get the topic down to one sentence of 25 words or fewer. No exceptions! If you cannot speak simply of the subject matter, you need to get a better grasp on it. The summary can then point you toward the more general import of the particular cases or problems.

Second, situate your research theoretically. It is extremely likely that even if the particular subject or circumstance that you want to investigate is new to political science, the theory or explanation you employ will come from some larger body of literature. If, for example, you are interested in the ways that countries formulate their armed forces' health and social policies, you might employ principal-agent theory (which is often used in other areas of political research). In this case, there is a large body of literature in International Relations and Comparative Politics that employs principal-agent theory, and you can draw on these theoretical approaches to shape your initial answers to the puzzle of why some states have social service provisions for their military that do or do not align with the levels they offer to society at large. In essence, you must learn to think analogically from one set of topics to another, looking for similarities and noting pertinent differences, so that you can formulate appropriate explanations.

Third, you can offer tentative answers to your puzzle (hypotheses). This will allow you to test the plausibility of the answers you try out (because sometimes things look more or less reasonable when you put them down in writing). Moreover, it will also point you toward the more general aspects of your problem, pointing to the theoretical angle you may want to take and aligning you with a larger body of literature (even one somewhat "far" from your topic) on which to hang your explanation. Tentative answers suggest ways to "read around your topic." There might not be a vast literature on military social service provision, but there is certainly a large literature on how military policies of other sorts are made, how states and societies decide how much social service provision to offer their members, and civil-military relations. By situating yourself in these larger literatures, you open your analysis to a wider range of scholars. You will also open yourself up to a larger set of possible explanatory solutions to your own puzzle. The process works in both directions, for as you open up to a larger audience, you will see a corresponding opening of your own options.

1.4 The Literature Review

Your thesis does not exist in a vacuum—or it should not. The question you ask comes from *somewhere* and it has some context. But your reader probably does not know how your research question relates to previous political science studies. What similar questions have others asked before? What were the answers? What contribution to the dialogue will you make? It is up to you to explain this to the reader. You must situate yourself in a larger literature.

A Note on Human Subjects Research and Thesis Writing

Note: Efforts are presently being made to streamline the human research approval process for undergraduates. Please contact the Undergraduate Program Office of the Government Department for the latest information before proceeding to apply for approval.

If you are going to be doing ***any*** research involving human subjects (e.g., conducting interviews, administering surveys, engaging in participant observation during fieldwork, or running experiments), no matter how seemingly innocuous, you will need to get either an ***exemption or prior approval*** to do so from the University. *Under no circumstances may you conduct research for your thesis involving human subjects without your proposed project being reviewed beforehand, nor may you apply for retroactive review.* Failure to comply with this mandate will result in your thesis not being accepted by the Government Department. You may also open yourself up for disciplinary action.

The Standing Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research (CUHS), the Faculty of Arts and Sciences' federally mandated Institutional Review Board (IRB), is responsible for reviewing proposed studies from undergraduates that involve humans as research subjects. By federal regulation and University policy, no research involving human subjects may begin until it has been reviewed by CUHS and received either an approval or exemption determination. *You will need to satisfactorily complete the ethics training workshop or online module (either CITI or NIHS) before submitting an application to CUHS.* You will also need a Faculty Sponsor (only tenured and tenure-track professors and senior lecturers are able to serve as sponsors, also known as Principal Investigators [PIs]). If your thesis adviser does not qualify to serve as a PI (e.g., you have a Ph.D. candidate or lecturer advising), you should alert the Department's Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) to arrange for accommodation.

Applications for CUHS approval are submitted through the Electronic Submission, Tracking and Reporting system (ESTR). Please consult the Government Department Undergraduate Program Office and the CUHS website (www.cuhs.harvard.edu), or contact CUHS at 617-496-2847 or cuhs@fas.harvard.edu, to find out more information about:

- The types of research that require IRB review
- The process for submitting applications through ESTR
- The training required for investigators and their Faculty Sponsors
- The standards that the research must meet
- Appropriate forms, templates, and guidance documents

You should also be aware that if your project changes after being exempted/approved, you will need to contact CUHS and apprise them of this. Only they can determine if the changes are substantive enough to require additional review.

A final note: Although it may at times feel like a bureaucratic hurdle to surmount, the IRB approval process at its core deals with determining what constitutes the ethical conduct of research and treatment of research subjects. As such, it is a critical component of the research design process. So please take the need for oversight as a compliment—Harvard has decided your thesis project is serious enough that it warrants outside review.

The literature review not only contextualizes the work you will do, but it also shows the reader the special contribution you make to the study of politics. Your thesis should not cover ground that others have trod before you; you need to find some understudied corner of politics and explore it.

Once you have conducted your searches and think you have a handle on what exists on your topic, you must then synthesize it. What this means is that you should filter the sources that you have found through the question you want to answer. Don't make lists of the sources and then engage in aimless summary of those sources. Not all sources will be equally interesting vis-à-vis your question, so there is no need (or time) to devote equal space or importance to each. Instead, with each source, ask yourself, "How is this relevant to *my question*?" You will find yourself summarizing the work of others, but that summary should be subordinate to your concerns.

1.5 Checking Your Progress

E pur si muove. (And still it moves.)

- Galileo Galilei

The senior thesis can feel as if it drags on interminably, with little or no progress that you can see. You have a year-long task ahead of you, and although it will move slowly, you want to make sure that it does indeed move. Just as you cannot do all of the research and writing in the final few weeks you have in March, you cannot get everything done in the first weeks of the fall term.

The thesis process is a new one to you, and so one of the best ways to assess your progress on the thesis is to draw on your experience writing all sorts of research papers during your time at Harvard. This section of the handbook will highlight some of those similarities, as a way of helping you to assess where you are and where you need to go; in addition, it will introduce some other techniques for helping you chart your progress.

Be sure to try the following techniques from the beginning of the thesis process. You may not be able to complete them as exercises, but that's perfectly fine. The answers you do come up with will chart your progress thus far. The amount of each exercise that you can complete will indicate what your next step should be.

The "cocktail party answer"

In Cambridge, England, the antecedent of our own fair city, there is a large park called Parker's Piece. Just south of John Harvard's own college, Emmanuel, this large expanse of grass has no trees or other vertical encumbrances. However, since at least the advent of gas lighting in cities, at the center of Parker's Piece, where two paths across the Piece come together, there stands a light-post. When confused about their research, generations of graduate and undergraduate students have been advised to go explain their thesis topics to the light-post on Parker's Piece. The idea is that since the light fixture is mute, the student stands naked before his project and the light's muteness forces the student to speak simply, succinctly, and sensibly.

Here at Harvard and other American universities, we have our own version of that tradition. It is called the "cocktail-party answer" or the "elevator-ride answer." Imagine you are at a cocktail party or riding in an elevator and you meet a casual acquaintance. The person knows you are working on a thesis of some sort, but she does not necessarily have an abiding interest in the topic. (An even more strenuous version of this test posits that the interlocutor may just be polite, rather than interested.) After a quick salutation, she asks you, "So what is your thesis about?"

Stop. Can you answer that question in three ***short and simple*** sentences? Why or why not?

Whether you are addressing the light on Parker's Piece or formulating your cocktail-party answer, the underlying motive is still the same: ideas that you have developed well should be easy to state and understand. If you cannot do this, your idea and argument need further refinement. You and your idea are not an exception to this rule. We can express the greatest ideas in human history in this simple fashion. For example, let's look at some arguments you have seen before, in their own words. What would the cocktail-party summaries be for:

1. …***The Declaration of Independence***? The King and Parliament of England have violated our rights as Englishmen. The most sacred of those rights are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We state this so that it is clear why we fight against our countrymen.
2. … ***Machiavelli's Prince***? For a republic to survive, it needs a strong prince who knows himself well to guide it. His means may be harsh, but they are geared toward the survival of the polity, which is the highest good.
3. … ***The Communist Manifesto***? The central organizing principle of modern social life is the relationship between the people who produce things and those who own the means of production, and everything derives from that. This arrangement contains the seed of its own destruction. That destruction will bring about the end of individual and private ownership and usher in an era of fully joint and corporate control of all social and material resources.

Sure, there are many more details, and one might highlight different parts of each argument made in these political texts. But the essence of each exists in these cocktail answers. You must strive for the same in your own research.

The Three Thesis Tricks

Another way to assess your progress on the thesis starts with the very basics of your project. Your first goal is to move beyond simply having a thesis topic to arriving at a place where you can articulate the central question that makes your thesis unique. One method requires that you perform the three "thesis tricks" once a month. These will help you to anchor your work and self-diagnose your direction and progress.

1. Summarize and describe your puzzle in three sentences.
2. Raise three analytic or methodological questions about your topic.
3. Cite three means by which you will attempt to answer those questions. These can be data sources, a particular methodology by which you will arrive at an answer, or the solution to a methodological problem you have encountered.

If these seem daunting, you will want to speak with your thesis adviser and seminar leader as soon as you can. It will be particularly difficult to start down a research path if you cannot identify a *topic*, a set of *questions*, and a *means by which to answer*.

Your thesis tricks will look different in September than they will in December or March. This is normal as your thesis evolves and develops. This is all part of the process of research and one of the factors that keep research fresh. Follow the alternatives that open up as you engage in your research, analysis, reading, advising, and writing. Soon enough, you will begin to be able to justify why it is that someone should spend a day reading and understanding your argument.[3]

Do these once a month, at least. You can use the daily writing time we suggest in the following chapter to do these, or you can perform them reciprocally for your thesis-writing friends.

[3] The average thesis takes up to a day to read, digest, and write significant comments upon.

1.6 Working With Your Adviser

After you have found an adviser and returned to campus, the first task you need to complete with your adviser is to set a schedule to budget your time. This shows you and your adviser that you are serious about the task ahead of you, and it will help you to assess realistically the amount of time that you have for other activities vis-à-vis your thesis work. Your adviser, having research experience him or herself, can help you to assess whether the time goals you set are realistic.

The key to a good relationship with your adviser is regular, forthright, and clear communication—by both parties. You and your adviser must have regular meetings, although the frequency of these meetings will vary over the course of the year and from student to student. It is almost always a good idea to schedule your next meeting before you leave any meeting.

You should be clear with your adviser from the very beginning and over the year about your needs and expectations. The thesis is your project and you must drive it. Your adviser is an ally and a resource, but this is *your* project. Past seniors have commented:

- My adviser was awesome, spectacular, amazing. Never had so much help in my life.
- A real disappointment. I was happy at first to get him since he's so famous, and I thought I'd get a good theoretical grounding. But he was so terse. Once I turned in 30 pages, which had taken me a month to write, and he had maybe 6 or 8 minutes of comments. I really tried to draw on his knowledge but found it impossible. I can't even see him if I don't get an appointment 3 weeks in advance.
- Once I began writing, our meetings were much more frequent. Although very busy and often out-of-town, my adviser was always available — as long as I asked to be seen, I had no trouble scheduling appointments. He read all my drafts by our next meeting.
- If you are at all shy or unsure of yourself, your adviser must be someone you're absolutely confident with. I had immense respect for my adviser, but I was also afraid of her (especially when I had problems) until it was all over. I almost never asked her anything — my loss.

Written communication is particularly important. Work on your prospectus and chapter drafts should begin early enough to go through several drafts, each one benefiting from your adviser's comments. Give these drafts to your adviser as soon as you finish it, but make sure that you do not simply hand your adviser an agglomeration of pieces and parts without much relation, hoping that your adviser will fix things or figure out your argument for you. He or she will not.

The peer review feedback you receive in Gov 99 will help to improve the substance of the material that you send to your adviser. Once you have discussed a draft chapter with your peers and received their comments in Gov 99, you can discuss these comments with your adviser. The suggestions that your peers provide may cause you to alter the structure, content, or approach of your thesis, and you would do well to discuss such plans with your adviser.

Do not walk away from seminar thinking that you will need to re-conceptualize your thesis or engage in the research process entirely anew. This is another way in which your adviser can help you. You know your topic better than (almost) anyone, and your adviser can help you to contextualize that knowledge and show you how, even if your chapters need improvement, they still demonstrate your knowledge and the potential contribution you may make to our understanding of your topic and to politics more generally.

Writing the Thesis

chapter two

2.1 On Writing, Thinking, and the Senior Thesis

Writing is easy. You only need to stare at a piece of blank paper until your forehead bleeds.

- Douglas Adams

Up to this point in your education, writing has primarily been a process of creating finished products—or, at the very least, near-finished products. In the ideal, of course, you have produced multiple drafts of class term papers and other projects. In reality, if you began writing before the night before the assignment was due, you are probably ahead of most of your peers here at Harvard College.

In the senior thesis, however, there really is no "night before." The duration and length of the project allow you to use your writing to figure out the ideas in the thesis. Put simply, it is hard to know what your questions and their potential answers are until you have written about them both. You will not be able to learn what your thesis has to teach us until you have learned a few things by writing.

You have probably received encouragement from your professors and teaching fellows to work in the following manner: do the research, figure out your argument, flesh out the details, and plan the writing, perhaps even from a detailed outline. The thesis process, however, will change your relationship to writing. Writing—really writing—a senior thesis will teach you about the beautiful and intricate relationship between ideas and their expression. You will learn that good writing lies in revision, because the first draft (almost) never produces the final understanding of your ideas. You will learn that you may need to write ten or more pages that do not really capture your meaning, that do not quite go where you think your ideas and evidence *really* lead. Then you must throw those away and write ten good pages that better express what you meant to say.

You can start writing anywhere in the maze of ideas and phrases that run through your head. In fact, there is no other way to do it. You avoid writer's block by not constraining yourself to the mistaken idea that the thesis has to emerge in a linear fashion from your brain, beginning with the beginning and ending at the end. The first sentence of the first chapter is NOT the place to start. Everything will come together in the proper order at the end of the process (this is a form of revision, too!).

If you have chosen your topic well, then writing a thesis will be an experience of discovery, pleasing beyond anything else you have done so far. This does not mean that it will always be fun, entertaining, or relaxing. Virtually every professional writer will tell you that writing is the absolute hardest thing she or he does. Writing a senior thesis is a wonderful, terrible test of yourself, and the rewards are almost entirely personal. There is no other undergraduate experience like it.

Finally, remember, above all, that as the deadline approaches, a good thesis is a finished thesis. This is not your life's work. Write the best thesis you can in the time allotted and do not allow the perfect to be the enemy of the good.

Keeping a Journal

One of the most effective ways to get an extraordinarily large amount of writing done without realizing it is to keep a research journal. This works rather similarly to the idea of keeping a diary or journal of your personal life. Each day, you commit to writing a certain amount of time or a certain number of pages (20 minutes or 2–3 pages are a good start). And then you write whatever comes into your head regarding your thesis topic, no matter how frivolous, ridiculous, or odd it seems. The point is not to make sense or produce anything that will show up in your thesis—the point is get you thinking about your topic and evidence on a regular basis.

This can provide you with several benefits.

- **First, it is actual work.**

  Many of you may become concerned (or even obsessed) with the amount of work you are putting in on your thesis. You may feel like you're not doing "enough" or that everyone else is working more than you are. But be assured that this small 20 minutes constitutes significant work. It forces you to sit down and think about the thesis, even if it's just writing down a collection of random thoughts you have been having about various parts and pieces of the work. And you will be surprised as you go along how your journal sessions will often extend beyond the minimum goal you set for yourself.

- **It provides you an out when you need it.**

  There will be days when you do not want to work on your thesis, no matter how much you need to. A small amount of journal work may be all that you do that day. Since it is just 20 minutes, you only have to push yourself for that short period of time. Thus, you do something everyday.

- **It provides a bit of a check on the thesis process.**

  You may have heard the expression, attributed to Otto von Bismarck, "Laws are like sausages. It's better not to see them made." The thesis process is quite similar. It's sloppy, and all sorts of things get shoved in. By keeping a journal, you have a place to put all the various stuff that might otherwise end up in the thesis. And unlike a sausage (and remaining neutral on similarities to laws), the thesis that contains all your ingredients without judicious mixing and shaping will be messy and indigestible. Please do not assume that everything that you write must or even should go into a finished work. The journal provides a way to do your sausage-making behind the scenes.

How you logistically go about keeping your thesis journal is up to you. Many of you may be inclined to do all of this work on your computer, and that method might be the best for you. But please do consider the pen-and-paper route, and not just because it is a technology that has existed for centuries and served scores of generations of researchers before you. More than that, pen and paper seem less like producing a finished work than computer writing does—on the computer, you will often spend time futzing with formatting or other non-necessary aspects of your diary, so that everything "looks right." With paper, there's little chance that your mind will even sub-consciously slip into thinking that what you are writing will be for production of any sort. On paper with pen, everything is a draft, and it may free you from the problem of worrying what anyone else will think about what you're writing.

Writing it Bird-by-bird

By this point, you may be feeling *just a tad* overwhelmed by the prospect of 100 pages of prose, initially covering the broad range of work that others have done and staking a claim to your own piece of that work, laying out a coherent social science theory of cause and effect, and verifying it by convincing and well-presented evidence. If you don't, you soon

will. When Luke Skywalker told Yoda that he was unafraid of Jedi training, Yoda replied, "You will be. You *will* be."

The author and essayist Anne Lamott described the writing life in her book *Bird By Bird* (1995) and she related the story of how she keeps from feeling overwhelmed at the thought of writing a whole book.

… [T]hirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report on birds written that he'd had three months to write, which was due the next day. … [H]e was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the tasks ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, "Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird (18 ff.)."

The only way you will get through your thesis is bird-by-bird. What follows are some ways to attack particular birds and to make sure you cover each bird in some form.

"The s&##y first draft"*

Lamott also talks about the awful first draft. You have permission to write badly on the first draft, because it is the only way you will ever get *anything* on paper.

> … People tend to look at successful writers, writers who are getting their books published and maybe even doing well financially, and think that they sit down at their desks every morning feeling like a million dollars, feeling great about who they are and how much talent they have and what a great story they have to tell; that they take in a few deep breaths, push back their sleeves, roll their necks a few times to get the cricks out, and dive in typing fully formed passages as fast as a court reporter. But this is just the fantasy of the uninitiated. I know some very great writers, writers you love who write beautifully and have made a great deal of money, and not one of them sits down feeling wildly enthusiastic and confident. Not one of them writes elegant first drafts….. Very few writers really know what they are doing until they have done it.

Lamott points out that you cannot know what you will get from your writing until you do it; you cannot plan your brilliant moments, good ideas, or bad passages. They simply happen. "There may be something in the very last line of the very last paragraph on page six that you just love, …. but there was no way to get to this without first getting through the first five and a half pages."

So what should you write when you've sat down to "do some writing?" Anything that comes into your head. The first draft is something of a mental explosion onto the paper or screen. It's supposed to look awful. Don't worry, because you're not going to show that to a person anyway (and if you do, we certainly hope the person comes back and tells you that you can do better). We are all better writers than our first drafts would indicate.

If there is nothing else that you learn from the senior thesis experience, we hope you learn that writing is about process and not the final production. You certainly hope (and will) achieve something in the end, but that product can only come about through a process that begins with the crazy, foolish, and half-baked.

"Chunks"

Your thesis will not emerge in anything like the order it will actually end up in. Chapters will not emerge in anything like the order they end up in. Nothing will emerge in order. As we have emphasized many times over, the thesis is messy, and part of the academic task is to impose order on it all.

But you are not necessarily there yet. You must first get the material out, and then you, in consultation with your adviser, can figure out what will make the most sense to present your results.

One time-honored strategy for writing long pieces of prose is to write in "chunks." Often, you will know that some bit of the thesis, somewhere in the middle needs to be written down. (You might even hear the phrasing in your head as you go about doing other things.) But the writing process you have probably done so far has encouraged you to write documents from start to finish, in the "proper order." So while you may know that a particular piece that you need to write must be written, you also know that it's not the first part of the work. No matter—write it down anyway. You can always put it in the right place later.

Perhaps even more importantly, there will be times when you know that there are various bits to be written—perhaps a few paragraphs on methodology or on a small part of your theory or literature review—but you don't know how they fit together. Again, just write them down. If you are keeping a research journal, you can write them down in the journal during your daily writing time. Or open a document on your computer and write two paragraphs.

The important element here is not to be afraid of having lots of different little chunks of writing. Just keep track of them so that you can find them later. One particularly good way to do this is to print them out, place each in a folder for "Chunks," and keep that folder in a safe place. Then, when you're ready to begin using some of these writing chunks, you can begin to arrange them in an order, simply by reshuffling the sheets of paper.

As we have emphasized over and over, the one activity you must engage in when you are an active writer trying to do your best work is to be constantly aware of the opportunities and fortuities that come up. The fiction writer John Gregory Dunne (essayist Joan Didion's husband and gossip writer Dominick Dunne's brother) noted that a writer must not depend upon inspiration to strike if he wants to get work done, but he should always be prepared for ideas to simply pop up. He had personalized note cards that he always carried in his jacket pocket with a pen, so that he could write down ideas, quotes, phrases, and whatever else struck him. It's likely that like most of us who write, he threw away a considerable number of those ideas, but he always had them when he needed them later. So go to the stationery store, get a notebook that you like, and start carrying it with you where ever you go.

Some Additional Resources

Books on Research and Writing

There are several books we recommend to you. These are all widely available, and they contain different sorts of advice on how you can go about doing what you need to do to combine the process of research and writing.

Turabian, Kate L. 2013. *A manual for writers of research papers, theses, and dissertations: Chicago style for students and researchers.* 8th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Possibly the *sine qua non* of helpful thesis books (besides the one you hold in your hand right now). The Turabian guide contains extensive information about all formatting matters, whether you use a humanities (footnote and bibliography) style or a social science (in-text references and reference list) style. Want to know how to format the UN document you cite? Should you place a comma before the final item in a serial list? How should a table or figure be placed in a text? Turabian can tell you how.

Moreover, the newest edition also contains extensive advice on how to formulate, plan, execute, and complete a research project just like the one you are working on. All for $18 or

less. If you plan to go on to almost any sort of graduate education (and since you are writing a thesis, that may be a real possibility), this will be one of the best investments you make. For even more info, see http://www.turabian.org.

Becker, Howard Saul, and Pamela Richards. 2007. *Writing for social scientists: how to start and finish your thesis, book, or article*. 2nd ed. Chicago guides to writing, editing, and publishing, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Though aimed at graduate students, this book covers many of the topics and concepts of interest to senior thesis writers as well. Primarily, it seeks to make the *writing itself* better, training you to focus on editing, how sentences flow together, taking risks, and establishing the right tone.

Lamott, Anne. 1995. *Bird by bird: some instructions on writing and life*. 1st ed. New York: Anchor Books.

A colloquially written guide to the writing life. An easy read that reassures you that writing is hard, that writers are often lazy, unproductive, uncreative, and must simply keep plugging away to get it. Lamott teaches in a very concrete way: writing is like taking Polaroid pictures or making a school lunch. Moreover, she's got way more insecurities and neuroses than you do. This book will help you to relate the writing you are doing to some concrete reality, in the attempt to make the ideas easier to understand and the ways you express them more vivid.

Zinsser, William Knowlton. 2006. *On writing well: the classic guide to writing non-fiction*. 30th anniversary ed. New York: HarperCollins.

Another classic. Zinsser shows you how he goes through his own process, including markup from various drafts of the book itself. He address various forms of writing, including interviews, science and technology writing (which you may find more useful than you realize), and criticism (especially helpful if you are working in political theory). He also offers advice about how to navigate your potential audience, reducing "clutter," and learning to trust your material. Quick, informal, and another must-have.

Note that we have not included either the *Chicago Manual of Style* or Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*. Although these are good books, the Chicago Manual will prove less useful to you than the Turabian, and the Strunk and White is probably on your shelf already. Moreover, Strunk and White, although practically a necessity if you want to write beautiful English prose, often seems a tad idiosyncratic and does not provide as full a course in the process of writing and research as do these other books.

Online resources

There are a number of resources that can help you with your writing available online. Here are just a few.

First, since we did not recommend William Strunk's *The Elements of Style* or the *Chicago Manual of Style* in book form, you should know that each is available online.

Strunk (1918) is the original version of the work, and it is in the public domain. Subsequent editions are still under copyright and not available online. That said, the heart of the advice that generations of students have come to rely upon comes from the original version. Click on http://www.bartleby.com/141/ for a quick look.

The *Chicago Manual of Style* (often simply called the CMS) has a home page at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html. Some of the material is only available via a subscription, but Harvard does have a general one. There is basic information on citation styles at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.

Two useful guides are available on the **Harvard Expository Writing Website** (http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k24101&tabgroupid=icb.tabgroup35038): Harvey, Gordon. 2008. *Writing with Sources: A Guide for Students* 2nd ed. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co. and *Writing with Internet Sources*, published by the Expository Writing Program.

The Harvard Writing Center (http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k33202) provides comments on the argument, form, organization, and presentation of your drafts and you can schedule a meeting with a writing tutor who can help you with all of these. Each year the Writing Center also pairs thesis writers with specially trained senior thesis tutors. Further information on senior thesis tutors is available on the Writing Center Web Site. (Note that several of the **Harvard Houses** employ resident or non-resident writing tutors who are available to work with senior thesis writers. Check with your resident dean to see if your house has a writing tutor.)

Outside of Harvard, one of the very best college writing centers is at Purdue University (http://owl.english.purdue.edu/). Almost any question you have—whether on citations, formatting, avoiding plagiarism, writer's block, use of appropriate language, and source evaluation—has a resource at this site.[5] Well worth your time and use.

[5] These are particularly good, and we recommend these to you whether you have writer's block or even mild writer's congestion. The specific page is at http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/567/01/.

A Note on Plagiarism and Collaboration

The information below is adapted from the following Harvard policy statement: http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k70847&pageid=icb.page355322.

The College recognizes that the open exchange of ideas plays a vital role in the academic endeavor, as often it is only through discussion with others that one is fully able to process information or to crystallize an elusive concept. Therefore, students are encouraged to engage in conversations with their teachers and classmates regarding their thesis research; this is one of the primary reasons for requiring senior thesis writers to take Gov. 99, the Senior Thesis Writers' Seminar. At the same time, it is important for all scholars to acknowledge clearly when they have relied upon or incorporated the ideas of others.

It is expected that the senior thesis will be the student's own work. Writers should always take great care to distinguish their original concepts from information derived from sources. The term "sources" includes not only primary and secondary material published in print or online, but also information and opinions gained directly from other people. Quotations must be placed properly within quotation marks and must be cited fully. In addition, all paraphrased material (i.e., material restated in another form or using other words, but substantially the same as in the source) must be acknowledged completely. Whenever ideas or facts are derived from a student's reading and research (or even from their own writing), the sources must be clearly indicated.

Students must also comply with the policy on collaboration established for each course and/or project. ***The Government Department permits no collaboration in the researching or writing of the senior thesis.*** However, we are aware that thesis writers occasionally find themselves part of larger data-gathering efforts (e.g., they work as research assistants on a project directed by a Harvard faculty member) and may want to incorporate the data collected into the thesis. If this applies to you, you will need to ask for prior written permission from the project head; if granted, this documentation should be submitted to the Undergraduate Program Office.

Students who, irrespective of reason, submit work either not their own or lacking clear source attribution will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including being required to withdraw from the College. The responsibility for learning the proper forms of citation lies with the individual student (see Chap. 4: Formatting, Submitting, and Grading for further information). If you are in any doubt about what is permissible and what is not in academic work, you should consult your thesis adviser, Gov 99 TF, and/or Resident Dean.

Inclusion of Prior Work in the Thesis

It is the expectation that all work submitted for a course or for any other academic reason at Harvard will have been done solely for that purpose. Nonetheless, we realize that the thesis project often evolves out of prior papers you have written/courses you have taken (e.g., you write a paper for a junior seminar and later want to incorporate it or parts of it in your thesis). It is permissible to use this earlier work, or portions thereof, ***provided you obtain the prior written permission of all the instructors involved and consult with your Resident Dean*** (information on this policy may be found in the Harvard College's Student Handbook [http://handbook.fas. harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k88702&pageid=icb.page516359#a_icb_pagecontent1104653_2]). A student who utilizes earlier work as part of the thesis without prior permission will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including being required to withdraw from the College.

Students with questions are urged to consult the Undergraduate Program Office concerning this important matter.

Term Paper Companies

In keeping with the principle that all material submitted for the thesis should be the student's independent work, any undergraduate who makes use of the services of a commercial term paper company is liable to disciplinary action. (N.B. Students who sell their academic work [including translations], or who are employed by a term paper company, are similarly liable and may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including being required to withdraw from the College.)

2.2 Completing a Government Senior Thesis: Useful Strategies

Remember your audience

Your senior thesis should be addressed to its readers: teaching members of the Government Department who are knowledgeable in the general field of the thesis, but who have not advised it. Assume that your readers are well informed about and interested in the broader issues of your topic but not experts in its specifics or the information you have collected, and that they are benignly skeptical about your project. Your readers' background means that you will not need to spell out in great detail those basic facts, ideas, and theories that are known to everyone in the field.[6] This does not mean, however, that your readers know anything about you or your individual thesis, about what you are trying to do, about the question you ask, why you are asking it, or how you intend to answer it. You must thus provide a full and developed introduction to explain to the readers what you do and why.

By March, thesis writers' views of their work are hardly impartial — blindly affectionate might be a better description. Writers in love frequently omit the basic explanations and justification needed to win over their readers, and the writers lose the struggle to persuade before they have even begun. *Highlighting the details of the research tends to be the focus of the writer, but readers generally care less for those specific cases and arguments than for their larger implications*. Tell your reader what everything you have done means for the study of politics or political life. Social science readers are less interested in the unique than the universal—they actually want to know why the study is not unique. From the readers' perspective, a thesis is not about facts — they will trust you to get those right —but about theories and conclusions.[7]

Be clear about your ambitions

Ambition is the product of the first stage of thesis writing: the selection of a topic and definition of a question worthy of study. In the thesis, ambition becomes most evident in the introduction, conclusion, and bibliography. These three portions generally prove quite revealing. The introduction and conclusion not only reveal what the writer is trying to do, but also whether it is being done properly and with what degree of insight. The reader examines the bibliography —usually during the reading of the substantive chapters—to see what is *missing*. The reader wishes to know whether you have overlooked some portion of the literature relevant to your argument. The reader will often form an impression as to your ambition based on these three sections. Therefore, it is not wise to sweat over the body of the thesis and then content yourself with a hasty introduction and conclusion tacked onto the work at the last minute. Similarly, your bibliography should indicate your careful coverage of the research literature, and you can do this by making sure that the bibliography is neat, thorough, and conforms to a standard style of research referencing.

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[6] Be careful that you yourself know what that pool of common knowledge is. You should make it clear, at the very least via a bibliographic footnote, that you also know who and what is in that common pool.

[7] Always remember, however, that readers can and do believe in Ronald Reagan's old adage: "Trust, but verify." Even if they trust you, they will expect that you provide the evidence to allow them to verify the claims you make about that evidence.

Follow through

Execution is what thesis writers normally think of as making a good thesis. Execution is the product of all the research and writing that occurs after the topic and question are settled. Execution is important, but the best execution will not save a poorly conceived project. Senior thesis writers will often think that the real work of the thesis takes place in the execution phase, and they devote insufficient attention to grounding the project appropriately. Execution also applies to matters of style and proofing. A thesis riddled with spelling, grammatical, typographical, and other errors will not succeed. This occurs not because readers are attempting to be picky or enforce capricious and arbitrary standards, but because the quality of your expression and execution is directly proportional to the quality of your thought. If poor execution constantly distracts or confuses your reader, the reader will assume that you were at least as distracted or confused yourself. Don't rely blindly on spell-checking or grammar software (which is often wrong or inappropriately set). Do not assume that a word-processor's auto-formatting functions will function correctly. Check your work carefully! Have other impartial readers look it over as well (but give them sufficient time to do a good job, too).

Maintain your momentum

At some point in the writing stage, you will begin to feel stuck or lost. Everyone struggles through complex passages, loses track of the central argument in a chapter, or faces other obstacles that arise because the writing process is a thinking process above all. So here are some suggestions for strategies to maintain your writing momentum even when it feels like everything is grinding to a halt.

- **Stick to a schedule**

  As we indicated at the beginning of this chapter, you should be writing from the beginning of the process. There will come a point, however, when you say to yourself, "I need to start the formal first draft of this chapter on Monday." Next step? Start the chapter *on Monday*! You may not be ready, but one is never ready to start writing. You could read one more book, one more article, one more dataset. But this will always be the case. When you reach the point where you must begin writing, more research often proves a hindrance as much as a help. You never thought you could get to a point where research becomes a procrastination technique, but here you are.

  You must set a certain number of hours every day where you simply write. Write at the same time each day. Create a routine that makes it as easy as possible to fall into the writing and minimize the opportunity to avoid your writing.

- **Keep track of the hours you spend at the computer working on your thesis.** Even when those hours prove "unproductive" on some days, they do add up to completed drafts. But don't expect yourself to sit in front of the screen all day or night. (Ask your thesis adviser how many hours a day he or she can write. You may be surprised to hear that it is only about three or four. Writing is difficult work, and you can't sustain it indefinitely without rest.)

- **Stay at your writing location, even if you type nothing that whole time.** There are those days when you cannot get more than a couple of paragraphs written in the course of three or four hours. Those days are still days when you are at work. But if you get up from your desk or table or wherever you write, you lose the focus your mental processes need to put your ideas together. Sometimes nothing will come out; your brain has not taken a vacation, it's just working very quietly. But those days can be followed by days where the prose comes so abundantly and so fast that you have little idea where it all comes from.

- **Count only that time spent in front of the keyboard writing** when you are tallying the hours you spend writing, even if the results are extremely short. Do not count those times you are tracking down books or reading articles.
- **Work in units of time.** Some people work well using "units." In this method, you set yourself a timer for 50 minutes of work, and you stay in your writing program for the entire duration. When the 50 minutes are up, you take a ten-minute break to surf the internet, get a cup of coffee, walk around the block, or whatever will be something pleasant for a reward. When the 10 minutes (and no more!) are done, go back and repeat. Do this three or four times per day.
- **Avoid being overly critical as you write** because you will get in the way of your own progress. Refine the argument and polish the prose when you have something to work with first.
- **Write the central argument** of your section, chapter, thesis, or whatever unit you are working on at the top of your computer screen (or on paper above it) so that it confronts you as you begin each writing session.

Do the three thesis tricks

Although you (think you) know what your thesis is about, you might find it difficult to explain to someone who is not surrounded by it. You should be able to do this whenever someone asks you what it is about. Your answers to these questions have likely changed quite a bit over the course of the thesis, but make sure that this reflects an increasing knowledge about the thesis rather than jumping from subject to subject. Talking to faculty, graduate students, and peers is important, but you will also find it helpful to explain your project to a friend or family member who knows little about it. Continually repeating the central goal of your investigation and analysis in clear, understandable language will focus your writing.

Start fresh

If you get a bit overwhelmed by your analysis, start anew or from where you previously left off. Save or file your document, and begin a blank computer file or with a new piece of paper. Sometimes a fresh piece of paper gives you that little bit of freedom you need to clear matters up. When you begin again at the beginning, you do not have to worry whether you are off track or not. You can cut and paste the various documents together later.

Remember it's "just a draft."

Any writer, especially a senior thesis writer, can be overwhelmed if he or she stops to think, "This is supposed to be the masterpiece of my career." You should more appropriately think of the senior thesis as the capstone of your education and training. All of your skills will make the experience a worthwhile one, and like any paper, the senior thesis comes out in rough drafts that you will gradually improve by editing, more research, and the helpful comments of others.

Ask for help

Balancing the various commitments in your life often requires some degree of outside help, so that you can figure out the order of your priorities. This is precisely why Harvard has the Bureau of Study Counsel (http://www.bsc.harvard.edu). Asking for help does not imply inadequacy, weakness, or an inability to cope; it reflects a degree of self-awareness and knowledge that plenty of people have not yet attained. BSC workshops of particular interest

to thesis writers include: "Insanely Busy: What would happen if I slowed down?", "Perfectionism", "Procrastination Group", and 'Senior Thesis Workshops." Do yourself a favor and check them out.

When you're stuck, remember tortoises and hares

There are going to be times when you just can't sustain the writing very well. You will grind to a halt, and writing progress will be stuck. This may seem especially frustrating if your peers appear to be cruising along while you are by the side of the road. This should not surprise you too much: each thesis writer balances an individual project and its challenges with curricular and extracurricular commitments. You will have to determine which factors outside of the thesis are holding you back from progress on your thesis and make adjustments so that you can better direct your efforts. Here are a few suggestions.

- **Prioritize your readings**

  There are mountains of books and articles in your room. They overwhelm you. You wonder how quickly you might die if they were to all fall over and crush you in your bed or at your desk. Were your room to catch on fire, the blaze would be hot and fast, because of the sheer amount of paper. You need to do something—you need to sort and organize.

  Set aside two hours (write it in your calendar book or software). Create two piles: "To Read" and "To Return." Build the return pile with books that looked interesting down on Pusey 3 but which have proven irrelevant in the bright light of the world above the ground. Having many, many, many books in this category should not disconcert you. Rather, it is a good indication that you have a greater awareness of the true focus of your topic. Next, flip through books you have not skimmed or read, but only for 5–7 minutes (since you only have two hours allotted for this). From this scan, you should be able to figure out if this book or article is worth any more of your time. If any portion looks useful, mark that portion for reading (which gives you permission to ignore the rest of the book).

  You may feel guilty about all of this, because it is "not really work." You are just making new piles from old piles. Not quite true. You are focusing your resources and assessing the state of your thesis even as you make new piles. And it is only two hours of time.

- **File, file, file**

  You are also likely to have a large quantity of photocopies and printouts. These also need a good sort. Group them by topic, and put them in file folders that you have labeled for the purpose. [8]

  Do the same with your computer files. Categorize notes by subject, source, or thesis chapter. Also, as regards your computer, make good use of meta-data. Whether you work on Mac OS X, some flavor of Windows, or Linux, there are programs that keep track of all the data about your data. OS X uses a native program called Spotlight to do this, and Mac and Windows users can both use Google Desktop. Each of these programs catalogs the date(s), contents, keywords, and all sorts of other information about each file you have on the hard drive. You can then type in a few words, and the program will pull up all the files that match those words in some fashion. If you really want to be on top of things, most operating systems allow you to also assign "keywords" to files. Keywords are essentially your own data about your data.

  You can do the same thing for any electronic sources you might find on the Internet. Check out a bookmarking service like http://del.icio.us, which allows you to assign keywords to your bookmarked pages

[8] You may also want to go a stationery or office supplies store and get boxes or crates to place all those folders in. This way, you can keep track of your materials and move them about easily.

(along with allowing access to all the other keywords other users have assigned to that resource).

Not only will this make everything neater, but the reorganization may spark you to find new connections and gain insights into your material.

- **Write up notes**

  If you like the facility that these meta-data programs offer, you may wish to enter all of your data, notes, and other material into your computer, as the programs will give you access to all the information about some set of words that you have come up with. Pen and paper notes also have their advantages, the chief two being that they do not become randomly corrupted and that they can last for nearly infinite amounts of time, given the right conditions. Whatever you do, make sure you have a working and regular backup solution.

  Similarly, you will want to keep a running commentary of your own thoughts about the notes that you take. Even as you write down what a source says, write down your reactions to that information. Mark these clearly in some fashion—bracket them, put an asterisk next to them, highlight them, whatever works best for you—so you can distinguish them later from your informational notes. This will focus you on the main task of collecting all this information: How useful is it? How does it connect to your theory and to the other information you have gathered?

  In addition, here are some "obvious" but still important bits of advice for your note-taking that even the smartest of us sometimes forget (as recent high-profile cases where famous professors have committed unintentional plagiarism demonstrate).

  § Always include the source and page number

  § Indicate whether the notes are a direct quote or summary

  § If you take notes via computer, print them out so that you have a hard copy backup. If you take them on pen and paper, make photocopies regularly and store them in a separate, safe location.

  § As you write, no matter whether the words are flowing or not, do not fail to put in at least a notation of any source you use and its page number. "Going back" to fill in references, even if you are completely confident of your memory, makes you much more likely to commit unintentional plagiarism.

- **Work on your bibliography**

  In days of yore, we would have said something here about keeping track of your bibliographic information, telling you to use downtime to update your bibliography and make sure it is current with the sources you have used thus far in the thesis. A more useful approach now is to acquaint yourself with computer resources that will do this work for you. We will take up some of these tools in Gov 99 and you can decide whether they work for you.

Gov 99 Matters

chapter three

To help you navigate the thesis process described in the first two chapters, the Government Department has developed the year-long Senior Thesis Writers' Seminar (Gov 99) course. This seminar has two goals. First, we will provide you with practical guidance and writing advice as you complete your senior thesis in Government. We will discuss many of the common hurdles and pitfalls that students often encounter. Since critical thinking and careful writing are two sides of the same coin, we will focus on matters related to assessing and improving your writing skills throughout the year. Second, the seminar will bring you together with other government thesis writers, to share your experiences, techniques, lessons learned, successes, failures, and progress on your theses.

This chapter describes what you can generally expect from the Gov 99 seminar. The course syllabus and web page will provide you with this year's specific details, e.g., dates, deadlines, and specific assignments. Gov 99 is graded Sat/Unsat, but this does not mean that you should consider it an "easy" class. You must fulfill all of the Gov 99 attendance, writing, and peer review requirements in order to receive a grade of Satisfactory.

FAILURE TO COMPLETE ALL ASSIGNMENTS WILL RESULT IN A GRADE OF UNSATISFACTORY. YOU CANNOT RECEIVE A PASSING GRADE ON YOUR THESIS IF YOU DO NOT RECEIVE A SATISFACTORY GRADE IN GOVERNMENT 99.

3.1. Seminar Logistics

In the Fall shopping period, all seniors who are planning to write a thesis in the upcoming academic year must section for Gov 99. Part of the sectioning process involves organizing sections by sub-field (Theory, International Relations, Comparative, and American Politics) or thematic area (e.g., party politics, war/security, education policy). You can expect to be placed in a section with 6-8 other thesis writers who are also writing in your general area of interest. You will begin to receive notices about Gov 99 meeting times as the Fall semester nears.

Once you are assigned a Gov 99 section, you will meet regularly throughout the Fall and Spring semesters until two weeks before the thesis is due. Each weekly meeting will last one hour. **Gov 99 seminar attendance is MANDATORY.** Unexcused absences from Gov 99 will affect your grade and your ability to continue writing the thesis.

All Gov 99 readings will be provided either in class or through online distribution on the course website. The course web page is available via my.harvard.edu, and will be updated regularly during the academic year.

3.2. What Do You Do in Gov 99?

Gov 99 will be an academic experience unlike most of your previous courses at Harvard. Instead of discussing someone else's book or study, each week of Gov 99 will be about *you and your peers'* research and writing. Later in this chapter we discuss at length what it means to do "peer review," and why the review process is so useful to your development as a writer.

As you will see on the syllabus, each week of Gov 99 concerns an important step in the thesis writing process. We will spend time on the topics that have been presented in this guide, including:

- How do I budget my time? What if I seem to be falling further behind?
- How do I establish an effective working relationship with my adviser? What if my advising relationship isn't working?
- How do I write a literature review? How do I know what's most important to read / write about?
- How do I set up my research design? What, exactly, is a "research design" again?
- How am I going to find evidence? Where should I look? What if I can't find anything?
- How can I measure or observe the phenomena I want to study?
- What do I do about statistics if I've never taken a statistics course?
- How do I frame my argument?
- How do I present all this evidence?
- What are all the formatting requirements?

We will answer these questions and many more in Gov 99. This workshop is meant to complement your relationship with your adviser and to provide guidance throughout the thesis process. We will do this via group discussions about issues and problems in political research. Beyond the nuts and bolts of writing and research, Gov 99 will also serve as the time each week when you can gain support from fellow thesis writers.

3.3. Specific Gov 99 Writing Requirements

Gov 99 involves seven writing assignments, with the seventh being the final submission of your thesis. Your 99 section leader will inform you of the deadlines for each of the first six assignments. *For each of these six, please consult with your thesis adviser regarding the appropriate content for inclusion. Each submission should reflect thesis work you are already doing.* In other words, the assignments are not designed to impose additional burdens.

1. **Preliminary statement of thesis question and research methods** (1–2 paragraphs circulated to your 99 section leader and fellow section members). By either the second or third meeting of Gov 99, you will prepare a preliminary version of your question. As you complete this first assignment, remember that your question should somehow speak to existing scholarship within political science.
2. **Prospectus** (1,000 words submitted to the Undergraduate Program Office, your adviser, and members of your 99 section). This is your research design—a plan for answering the question you have posed. We discuss it in detail in the next section of this chapter.
3. **First draft of literature review chapter** (10–15 pages circulated to 99 section leader and fellow section members). What have other political scientists said with respect to your question, and how does your study add to this on-going discussion? You will spend a week in 99 discussing how to formulate a literature review, and will then work in small groups to review your classmates' draft lit reviews.
4. **First draft of substantive chapter** (10–20 pages circulated to 99 section leader and fellow section members). Toward the end of the Fall semester, you should be ready to offer preliminary evidence or arguments related to answering your question. This draft will be peer-reviewed in workshop, and you can use the comments received to revise material for completion of the fifth assignment.
5. **At least 7,500 words** (about 30 pages) of literature review, theory or hypothesis generation, and evidence. Sent to your formal thesis adviser on the last day of classes in the Fall semester. The more developed this material is, the more productive your adviser can be in offering feedback. You will be able to use the previous four assignments (and comments gathered from review of that material) to develop your ideas and writing.

6. **Theory / framing chapter** (15–25 pages circulated to workshop leader and participants). This is completed in late January and early February 2011, once you have feedback from your adviser. This assignment entails submitting a *revised* version of your literature review and theoretical/hypothetical claims; it is designed for you to incorporate received feedback and make your overview chapter stronger. No one—not even tenured faculty—writes their finished product at the first go.
7. **Final thesis** (submitted to the Undergraduate Program Office by the deadline specified on the syllabus). The guidelines for final formatting and submission are discussed in the Appendix, and will be discussed in workshop.

3.4. Learning from Previous Theses

One of the best ways to learn how to write a thesis is by examining theses written by Government Department seniors in the past. There are several ways to do this, and you don't need to wait for Gov 99 to get started. First, you can visit the Harvard library system, and look at the Hoopes Prize theses, and theses graded Magna and above. These represent some of the best theses in our department and beyond. Second, you can check out the Government Undergraduate Program Online Thesis Repository (http://gov.harvard.edu/undergraduate-program/seniors/theses-previous-years) which includes a growing number of recent theses.

Finally, we will spend time in Gov 99 reading and analyzing a sample thesis appropriate to your subfield. Reading and critiquing a completed senior thesis is useful for several reasons. First, it provides real evidence that the task can actually be completed. Your pages of notes, journal entries, document chunks, photocopies, primary sources, and datasets can become an actual thesis. Second, the sample gives a feel for the distinct flow of a thesis.

The sample thesis you receive will by no means be perfect; it will be indicative of solid, meritorious performance. It can serve as a model for your own research and writing, giving you an idea of something to aspire toward. The sample thesis that you read, however, is not an ideal to be copied—the style, organization, approach, and tone may not be appropriate for your own work, and you should make decisions about these matters in consultation with your thesis adviser.

When you read a thesis, whether it's the sample thesis or one of the others that you've located, consider the following questions:

- What assumptions does the writer make about the project?
- What choices does the writer make in presenting the research?
- How does the writer use the evidence?
- How does the writer situate the evidence in a larger body of theory?
- What is the central argument? What are the sub-arguments? How are they interrelated?
- What is the thesis *really* about?

Take notes as you read and analyze the theses. As your own thesis nears completion, you will find it helpful to look back on these notes with the following questions in mind:

1. Did you emulate the strengths you appreciated?
2. Did you avoid the pitfalls you identified?
3. How did you situate your thesis (in the context of a larger set of puzzles and questions)?

Reminding yourself how you responded to a completed thesis will heighten your awareness of how readers will respond to your own thesis.

3.5. Framing the Question: Writing the Prospectus

Science is simply common sense at its best; that is, rigidly accurate in observation, and merciless to fallacy in logic.

- Thomas Henry Huxley

The prospectus marks the culmination of your question refinement phase. It summarizes what you plan to accomplish through further research. The prospectus will outline your puzzle, the theoretical explanation you offer, hypotheses or suppositions you will test, your methodology, and expected conclusions. The prospectus attempts to ensure that you have a carefully and appropriately designed research project. As much as you can, get your ideas down on paper early. This will force you to be more precise and will let you take advantage of comments your adviser may offer.

Once you have refined your research question to the point that you know what you want to write about and perhaps the best feasible method for investigating it, you need to put these ideas down in the form of a thesis prospectus. As the word suggests, the prospectus should be forward-looking—that is, "prospective."

In writing the *thesis prospectus*, it might be helpful to consider another forward looking document, with which you may already be familiar—the *business prospectus*. When an entrepreneur or company is looking for new investors, they will often send around a document that outlines the plan for what the company wants to achieve and how it will go about achieving that goal. This business plan/prospectus allows the investor to decide whether the business is likely to be profitable and whether the potential profits are worth the risks; it also allows the investor to ask questions (and even make suggestions for revision) of the entrepreneurial strategy.

Of course, since academic research and starting a business are not the same, there are also important differences between a business plan and a thesis prospectus. You need not sell your thesis (except in the persuasive sense). But the similarities are more than skin deep, primarily because both documents seek to do the same thing: persuade an audience that you have a plan to conduct a long-range project and to complete it successfully, whether success means profit or new knowledge.

More specifically, in the same fashion as a company would present a plan for setting up and growing a business, your prospectus must present a "research design"—the particular tools that you will use to obtain evidence and test it against your theory and derived hypotheses. In addition, just as a business plan provides the basis for investors to ask questions about the enterprise, your prospectus will provide your adviser the opportunity to raise questions about your research design. Finally, just as business plans are short, your prospectus should be also: 1,000 words more or less (about 4 pages, in 11- or 12-point type, with 1-inch margins and double spacing).

Take the prospectus seriously! This is not a task to be gotten out of the way so that you can go onto your thesis' "real work." The prospectus is your plan for what you will do over the next six months and how you will do it. Often, the prospectus phase proves harder (conceptually) than many of the other phases of your research.

What should you include in the prospectus? Though your adviser may ask you to include other aspects, follow these guidelines:

- Begin with a precise and concise presentation of the research question and its relevance to the study of politics. This will not be a comprehensive literature review, but should allow your adviser to see at least a first approximation of how your thesis will connect to scholarship that has come before you. It's okay at this stage if you're not 100 percent sure how to frame your research question. Indeed, the point

of writing a prospectus is to allow your adviser to recommend new ways of framing your inquiry. An adviser is likely to read your prospectus and reply with comments such as, "I think you should read…" or "Scholars X and Y would be really interested in your question, why don't you look at their work."

- Once the research question is presented, the bulk of the prospectus should be devoted to explaining your proposed research design. An important focus of Gov 99, the "research design" is the combination of specific methods that you will use to collect and analyze evidence. In your workshops, you will discuss basic social science terminology that can be helpful in specifying your research design, e.g., independent and dependent variables, normative and positive arguments, causal inference, and counterfactual reasoning. **Be specific! Do not simply say that you will do "case studies" or statistical analysis: how and from where will you gather the information for your case study, or what particular data set will you use?**
- The importance of thinking ahead about your research design cannot be overstated. If your research design cannot provide sufficient evidence to answer your question, then you need to either change your research design or ask a new question. The prospectus, by allowing your adviser to examine your research design, serves as an early warning system for poorly matched questions and methods.
- A rule to follow as you write your prospectus is to be as detailed and specific as possible. The more detailed your prospectus, the more detailed your adviser's comments will be. For instance, if you write only vaguely in your prospectus that, "I will collect information about both of these arguments," your adviser won't be able to offer much in the way of constructive feedback. But suppose you write, "To test this hypothesis, I am going to gather data from eight different countries." Seeing this, your adviser might recognize that eight countries are too many (e.g., you won't have enough time, so let's figure out how to focus only on four), or too few (e.g., there's actually a dataset you can use that will allow you to look at 80 countries easily).
- Here are some suggestions to help you make the prospectus as specific as possible:
    - § Are you going to conduct case studies? If so, how many? By what criteria are you going to choose your cases? Does your case selection allow you to answer your question? (Also, please note, a "case study" is a specific technique of qualitative methodology and not a generic term for any narrative.)
    - § Will you conduct interviews, and if so, whom will you interview? Will you examine primary documents, and if so, which ones? How difficult will it be to gain access to the people, places, or things you want to examine? When will you go to collect this data?
    - § Are you conducting statistical analysis? If so, what level of statistical knowledge do you have? What type of data are you going to use, and how are you going to obtain it? How will the data you obtain, and the analysis you conduct, allow you to answer the question you've stated?
    - § Are you making normative claims (how the world "should" work)? If so, on what theories are you building your argument? What counter-arguments must you consider?
    - § Is what you're proposing feasible? Can you collect this evidence, then analyze and write it up, in the six month window? If not, how might you narrow your proposed research scope?

      Granted, you have but about 1,000 words in which to do this, so you may not get to describe each of the points above in as lengthy a fashion as you might like. That's actually quite a good state to be in—it will force you to write sparingly and concentrate on what most matters to your project.

3.6. Peer Reviewing

In the course of the Senior Thesis Writers' Seminar, you will evaluate several of your peers' draft chapters. *The goal of this peer review is to expose you to collegial criticism of your work*. This is exactly the kind of feedback that your professors and teaching fellows solicit when they ask colleagues to critique drafts of their work or send articles to peer-reviewed journals.

You are well qualified to undertake this sort of criticism because, as a writer of political research and analysis, you are attuned to those factors that make for good research writing. This process will hone your skills as your own editor; it will also assist your peers in honing their skills. Remember, the key to this process lies in offering analytic criticism; you need to be specific in identifying the nature of the problems you encounter, and your mindset should be, "What would make this piece better?" Even if you cannot offer a solution to your peer's problems, you should seek to improve what you read.

Knowing something about the topic that you read about is not really necessary. It may, in fact, be helpful that you do not know much about it—you will be able to give advice and feedback that will make the work under consideration more accessible to a wider range of political science readers. You are the expert on your own topic, and that can sometimes lead to a myopia about the subject of your labors. Peer reviews are opportunities to assess whether details, assumptions, and connections you take for granted need to be made clearer for the sake of your readers.

Everyone shares responsibility for achieving the goals of peer reviews, so all participants must adhere to the following guidelines and instructions.

When preparing feedback, do not be shy or embarrassed about asking for clarification, elaboration, or further explanation. As a peer reviewer, it's your responsibility to signal to your partners that passages or points are potentially confusing. This is not done due to the writer having chosen a bad topic or approach—you must offer advice on how a friendly but skeptical reader may approach the piece. *You are an ideal thesis reader because you are a thesis writer.*

If you are still perplexed after reading a passage over and over, do not be afraid to flag that for the writer. Assume the challenge of helping the writer convey the point to the reader.

Being a good reader requires a lot of effort, almost as much as writing the passage in the first place. You may have been frustrated in the past by the number or quality of the comments you have received (or, more usually, did not) on class papers; now that you can see how difficult that task is, make sure that your thesis writing peer gets comments at least as good as those you hope to get yourself. Be specific in your comments. "This passage was unclear—can you explain it to me?" would be much less helpful than:

- "I had to read this passage a few times, and I think you're suggesting X. Is that the case? What did I miss?"
- "On this page, you make points X, Y, and Z. I see how X and Z are related, but I can't figure out how Y relates to X and Z. What is their relationship?"
- "Your theory introduces term X, but I am unsure what X means in the context of your theory. Can you make that relationship clearer?"
- "You said that you plan to assess concept A by measure X, but I don't understand why they go together. Can you be more specific about how X provides a good measure of A? How are they related?"
- "You state that method X provides the best way to assess your theory's relevance, but you don't compare that method to any other. Can you discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of this particular methodology? Why is it the 'best'?"

As a peer reviewer, your job lies in motivating your thesis partners to improve the drafts that have come out of the research they have done. By focusing on issues of clarity, explanation, and presentation, you help them to present themselves as self-aware, confident researchers. Do not, however, "line-edit." Checking spelling, punctuation, and grammar are less helpful at this stage than you might think. If your thesis partners take your suggestions seriously, they will engage in some substantial revisions, and such suggestions will be largely irrelevant. ***The focus of peer review is on fundamental elements of chapters: structure, analysis, and presentation of evidence***.

Remember the above when receiving comments from thesis writing partners. The tone and content of feedback should be positive, even when critical. As you receive your comments from your partners and seminar leaders, you will help yourself much more by listening than arguing or defending your writing.

Tips for reading chapters

When you read a classmate's chapter, you should follow the general approach outlined below. Your Gov 99 workshop leader will provide specific instructions for the format of comments for your classmates.

Locate the central argument

What is the central argument of the work in front of you? There should be some passage that the author uses to indicate the main idea the author wants to convey over the next 25 pages or so. Double underline that passage.

Identifying tasks

In carrying out the central idea of the chapter, the author should indicate a series of tasks or steps that she or he will fulfill to sustain that argument. These tasks can include: offering background information, expounding on the theory, developing hypotheses, presenting evidence, drawing connections between pieces of evidence presented, arguing for the causal connection of evidence to theory, describing a methodology, and so forth. For this exercise, find (up to) the four most important tasks the author sets out; underline and number those tasks. Assess whether the author accomplishes those tasks (or whether there are tasks that the author should have undertaken but did not), and label each passage with the number of the task it helps to fulfill.

Paragraph assessment

Every paragraph in the draft chapter should accomplish some piece of the tasks that the chapter seeks to fulfill. Most will do this in a fairly adequate fashion, and so they will not need special attention from you. Others, however, will strike you in some way, and you need to mark them so the author knows that he or she should pay special attention to those paragraphs in the process of revision. Mark paragraphs like these with a + or - and elaborate upon the reasons for doing so in a marginal note.

- What does a - mean (for example)?
    - § Paragraphs that do not help to accomplish the stated goals of the chapter are likely to be superfluous, and they might need to be removed. BUT they might simply be misplaced. Consider, for example, an interesting point or piece of evidence that does not seem to be related to the stated tasks of the chapter. It may simply be that the author has left out material that would connect

this material to the main ideas and tasks of the chapter. Help the author to think about how to connect this lonesome bit of prose to the larger chapter.

  - § Perhaps it really is filler material. Explain why you think this to be the case.
  - § It may be repetitious or wordy. Help the author to make efficient use of his or her prose.
  - § It might be an interesting point, but perhaps it detracts from the main flow of the text and argument. You could suggest that the author consider moving it to a footnote or another location where it will prove less of an impediment to the larger goals of the chapter.

- What might need a +?
  - § The paragraph presents material vital to the central argument of the chapter.
  - § The paragraph links together tasks or crucial ideas.
  - § The paragraph fulfills one of the tasks you identified above.

Topics to consider

In all cases, there are some "objective" criteria that all draft pieces of writing must fulfill if they are to be truly effective. No matter how polished the prose, sophisticated the methods, or brilliant the theory, the chapter can still fail if the author does not do the following.

- **Evidence** There are several tasks regarding evidence that an author must fulfill. First, is there enough convincing evidence or evidentiary logic to sustain the central argument? If the author does not provide a representative sample or does not show how the philosophical principle under discussion matters in the "real world," then there may be sufficient reason to doubt the conclusions. Second, does the evidence have sufficient explanation or analysis? In this case, if the author does not provide a full discussion of what the evidence can indicate, the chapter may again fail to fulfill its purpose or tasks. Third, not all components of the chapter or tasks are equal in importance. The space an author dedicates to a task should be proportionate to that component's importance in advancing the central argument.
- **Accessibility and transparency** This topic covers several matters. First, the material must be accessible to the reader. As thesis writers, you may often get so involved in the subject that you forget what "basic" knowledge you need to provide for your reader. All key terms, especially ones that are specialized or used in very particular ways, should be defined. The narrative should move smoothly from one point to the next; transitions and the pattern of logic should be clear. Is there enough background material to make the context of the central point and the tasks clear? Second, the material should be transparent. Do you detect any subtle or explicit biases? Does the author consider all the evidence, or just that which upholds one side of the story?

Final thoughts on peer review

When you finish reading a peer's chapter, consider the following questions:

- What did you take away from the chapter?
- What else do you want to know about the subject of the chapter?
- Where is the author most hesitant? Most confident?

Finally, write down three reflections about the chapter, perhaps highlighting elements you found intriguing or suggestions for general improvement.

3.7. Reviewing Your Own Chapter

In large part, the way you review another's chapter is how you should review your own. This is certainly not easy, but you must critique your writing if you wish to improve it. Follow the instructions for locating the central argument, identifying your tasks, assessing paragraphs, and the final instructions in the previous section.

chapter four

Formatting, Submitting, and Grading

4.1 Formatting

Length

The length of a thesis must conform to these standards:

1. Maximum: 35,000 words of text.
2. Minimum: 15,000 words of text.
3. Recommended: 20,000 to 30,000 words (80–120 pages). Theory or highly quantitative theses are usually shorter than other theses. As a general rule, shorter is better: long theses are usually poorly edited.
4. Appendices (including discussions of data sources and methodology) count toward the word limit. Tables, charts, and graphs do not count toward the limit. Where possible, though, they should be integrated into the flow of the text rather than placed at the end of the thesis.
5. Bibliographies do not count toward the limit.
6. Footnotes do not count toward the word limit if they are merely citations. Footnotes do count toward the word limit if they are long and substantive.

Style and Format

Style and formatting rules are as follows:

1. Style will conform to an accepted style manual, notably Turabian and the *Chicago Manual of Style* (latest editions). We recommend you purchase one of these works. Other manuals can be used but only with the permission of the Undergraduate Program Office; consult the Undergraduate Program Office before you use any manual other than Turabian or *Chicago*.
2. Dedications and acknowledgments (including acknowledgments of funding) are prohibited before the thesis is graded, although they may be added (after grading) to theses going to the Archives. Any mention of the adviser is especially prohibited, in order to ensure impartiality in grading.
3. Page format must be as follows:
    a. Margins: left, two inches; right, top, and bottom, one inch.
    b. Page numbers are required: centered or right corner, top or bottom of page.
    c. Citations: if placed at the bottom of the page, should be separated from the text by a 1.5 inch line drawn starting at the left margin. Citations may also be collected as endnotes at the back of the text or through an author-date reference system. Citations may NOT be placed after individual chapters. A bibliography should always be provided even if the writer provides full citations in endnotes or footnotes.
    d. Text: printed on only one face of each sheet of paper (no double-sided printing or copying).

4. The thesis will begin with a title page following the format in Figure 4.1.
5. Typeface: any easily readable font, no smaller than 11-point nor larger than 12-point type, is acceptable. Laser printers are required.
6. Quotations: In quoting phrases or short passages, quotation marks must be used. Quotations of fifty words or more should be set apart from the body of the text as a block quote (no quotation marks are used in this case). Omissions within a quotation are permissible provided the sense is not distorted, and must be indicated by an ellipsis (…). For further details, please consult the aforementioned style guides.

   When the final words of a sentence are omitted, one ellipsis and one period are used. Editorial comments within a quotation must be enclosed in brackets. Example: "If it realizes its promoters' hopes, the [European Coal and Steel] Community may be called upon to play a unifying role in the economic order…." Passages in foreign languages should be quoted in English translation (either in a published translation or in your own). You may reproduce the original wording in a footnote if you think that it is important or desirable.
7. A footnote, endnote, or author-date citation must be used to state precisely the source or authority for every important statement of fact, for every quotation, and for every idea or inference derived from another writer. The key is to be consistent and not mix and match forms (e.g., in-text author quotes, citations and endnotes). The Government Department does not require any particular style be followed (e.g., APA or MLA) but does expect that the respective conventions of whatever usage you choose will be consistently utilized.

   When the matter in any paragraph comes from several sources you may include all references in one note. For footnote style, consult the *Chicago Manual of Style* or Turabian's *Manual for Writers*. Refer to the Harvard publication *Writing with Sources* http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k24101&pageid=icb.page123040 to ensure that quotations are used appropriately. The American Political Science Association (APSA) provides an online style guide available at www.apsanet.org/media/PDFs/Publications/APSAStyleManual2006.pdf that you may find useful for citations and writing more generally.
8. Appendices should be seen essentially as expanded footnotes. Avoid them unless you think that you must add important and unfamiliar ideas to your text. An appendix consists of additional but incidental support for an argument already developed in the body of your thesis, or of in-depth discussion of research and analytic methodology that is inappropriate to the main body of text.
9. A bibliography must be placed at the end of your thesis. It should inform your reader of the actual extent of your research. Include only the books, articles, and primary sources that you have cited in your thesis.

Figure 4.1: Thesis Title Page

A Brilliant Thesis

A thesis presented
by
First M. Last

Presented to the
Department of Government
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree with honors
of Bachelor of Arts

Harvard College
Month 20XX

If the thesis is by a joint concentrator, the line reading "The Department of Government" should be replaced by lines listing the primary and secondary concentrations (in that order), e.g.:
The Department of Government
and
The Department of Classics

4.2 Submitting the Thesis

The Department's Rules and Requirements

All theses submitted to the Department of Government must comply with the following rules and requirements. Violations may be penalized or may result in the rejection of the thesis.

Theses must be submitted in the following manner:

1. The deadline for submitting theses to the Undergraduate Program Office is 5:00 P.M. on the Tuesday four days before Spring Break. Late theses must be submitted in accordance with the procedures described in the section below on "Submitting the Thesis."
2. Two copies of every thesis must be submitted. A single copy is not acceptable.
3. Thesis paper must be "acid free." Ask for acid free, thesis grade, or archival quality paper when you have your thesis copied. These terms mean high quality paper which will not smear, fade, or otherwise deteriorate. You do not need to buy the most expensive paper in order to meet these standards; you should be able to buy enough paper for both copies of your thesis for around $10.
4. Theses must be submitted in black, hardcover, spring binders. Binders are available at the Harvard COOP. Buy early, as supplies everywhere are limited. The Undergraduate Program Office has a small supply of used binders available to you as well, on a first-come, first-served basis.
5. An electronic, PDF version of the thesis must also be submitted to the Gov 99r iSite dropbox no later than 12 p.m. on the Wednesday three days before Spring Break.

Computers and printers:

To get the most from your computer, heed the following advice:

1. Make sure your computer has enough memory.
2. Save revisions every few minutes and keep backup copies in different locations. You can never be too careful.
3. Back up your hard drive and thesis directories often, especially as you are actively working. Have more than one backup copy in more than one location.
4. Divide the thesis and keep each chapter in a separate file.
5. Correct your text on hard-copy and then type it into the computer. Keep hard-copy files of each chapter.
6. Use a spell-checker early and often.

The problem with printing is that no one ever worries about it until it is too late, and then it is literally too late. Trying to print your thesis out on the day it is due is a sure recipe for a lateness penalty on your thesis. How do you keep your printer from walking all over you?

Follow these simple rules:

1. Print out at least two days before the thesis is due, and make arrangements for a backup printer in case yours breaks down. Have extra paper and toner cartridges on hand. Moreover, even with a laser printer, a printout of an entire thesis can take quite some time, even without major problems — and remember, you still have to get the thing copied.

2. Know your print requirements, and know your equipment. You should be familiar with the printer you use for the final draft; do not print your final draft on a machine you have never used before. Do not wait until the last minute to learn that the printer cannot do everything the word processing program asks of it. If you have special graphs, tables, or charts, be sure that the printer will reproduce them properly.
3. Plan ahead. If you do not own a printer, make definite arrangements well in advance for the printer you intend to use. If the printer in your house computer room is being used by someone else, or your friend whose printer you are borrowing forgets, you can be in hot water.
4. Know how fast your printer prints.
5. Carefully label your backup files lest you print out an old copy accidentally.
6. Print the final draft in stages, as you finish each chapter. Even the most dependable printer can find something to object to when asked to print 120 pages all at once.
7. Adhere to the printer regulations below. Not all printers produce acceptable output. The output from your printer must be of "archival quality." (Use of a laser printer is required. You may not use an inkjet printer.) PLEASE NOTE (A final reminder): *No extensions, under any circumstances, are given for computer problems.*

Photocopying:

Once the thesis is all printed out, it still has to be photocopied. This will take more time than you think; remember, half of Harvard will be in line in front of you. Arriving at the copy store at 3:00 P.M. on Tuesday will earn you at least an ulcer, if not a lateness penalty. The Department requires two copies (remember, on acid-free high quality paper, bound in black spring binders), and you will probably want a copy or two of your own.

When you get your thesis back from the copy center, check it carefully for copying errors. Copy centers have been known to miscopy, lose, or change the order of pages.

Deadline Reminder:

At 5:00 P.M. on the Tuesday four days before Spring Recess, two copies of all theses must have been turned in at the Undergraduate Program Office, CGIS Knafel, 1737 Cambridge Street, K151. This is an inflexible deadline. *Please do not forget that you also need to submit an electronic PDF copy to the Gov 99 iSite dropbox no later than 12pm on the Wednesday three days before Spring Break.*

Penalties and rules for accepting late theses:

Penalties are allotted to late theses. For each day that the thesis is late, the grade will be reduced by .12 point (based on the 4-point Harvard grading scale). There will be no exceptions to this rule without the prior permission of the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Therefore, plan for emergencies and leave plenty of time to produce your two copies. The following departmental guidelines govern the acceptance of late theses:

1. A student may submit a late thesis to the Undergraduate Program Office — without prior approval from the DUS — if the thesis is submitted to the Undergraduate Program Office by 5:00 P.M. the Thursday immediately following the Tuesday due date. Penalties noted above will apply.
    a. The time and day of submission will be recorded.
    b. A thesis submitted by 5:00 P.M. on the Wednesday following the Tuesday due date will be considered one day late.

c. A thesis submitted before 5:00 P.M. on the Thursday following the Tuesday due date will be considered two days late.

2. Any thesis that is not turned in by 5:00 P.M. on the Thursday following the Tuesday due date will be accepted only if prior permission has been granted by the DUS. This permission will only be granted under exceptional, documented extenuating circumstances. Theses submitted after noon on the Friday following the Tuesday due date will be disqualified for honors grading.

If you are late…

Inevitably, a few seniors are unable to meet the 5:00 P.M. deadline. If you are one, don't panic. However, note that the Department will issue penalties for a late thesis, and that an incomplete thesis will not be accepted at all. If you are late, follow these guidelines and procedures:

1. Call the Undergraduate Program Office the minute you think you will be late. Do not bring a partially completed thesis to the Undergraduate Program Office —— it will not be accepted. Bring only two copies of a completed thesis.
2. Finish both copies as quickly as possible. Hours count. Theses that are days late will be penalized and risk disqualification.
3. If you are only an hour or so late, call the Undergraduate Program Office again. The staff is usually on duty that evening to take slightly late theses, although these will be penalized.
4. **WARNING**! Theses must be submitted to the Undergraduate Program Office (1737 Cambridge St.) **ONLY! NO ONE ELSE** can accept theses or bear responsibility for the time of their submission.

Extensions:

Extensions can only be granted by formal application to the Government Department's Director of Undergraduate Studies. In the past, extensions have been granted only for deaths in the family, severe illness, and similar extreme situations. If you find yourself in such a situation, contact the Undergraduate Program Office immediately.

4.3 The Thesis Grading Process

A quick overview

You turned your thesis in, and you shared a toast with your fellow thesis writers at the reception. Now what? You have questions in your mind like: Who will read and grade my thesis? How will it be graded? How will it affect my overall honors determination? How are my honors determined? This section presents a detailed overview of what happens after you submit your thesis.

1. At the beginning of the spring semester, you are required to submit a "Title and Description" form with some specific information about your thesis topic and research methods. The staff in the Undergraduate Program Office takes that information, puts it all together, and sends it out to the Government Department professors and graduate students who are potential thesis readers. Readers send us back a list of their preferences, and we use a database to match your thesis with readers.
2. Your thesis will be read by one faculty member and one graduate student. In certain circumstances, your thesis will go out to a third reader (this can be faculty or graduate student). If your thesis had two read-

ers, you will receive the average of the grades. If your thesis had three readers, the two outlying grades will count 25% each, and the median grade will count 50%. Students can pick up their thesis grades in late April.

3. Your final Government Grade Point Average (GPA) is then determined by weighting your Government concentration average to your thesis average 2:1. (Note: related fields courses, unless they are Government courses, do **not** count into the Government concentration average.)
4. A rank list (in order of highest overall GPA to lowest) of all honors students is then produced, and is reviewed at the first meeting of the Board of Senior Examiners. The Board draws preliminary lines for highest honors, high honors, honors, and no honors. Based on these lines, the board selects students for oral exams.
5. Each year, the Board of Senior Examiners selects certain potential summa candidates for an oral exam. If selected, you will be notified and given approximately a week to prepare for the 45-minute examination.
6. After the oral exams are completed, a new rank list is produced with the oral exam grades averaged in. Government concentration average, thesis average, and oral exam grade are weighted 6:3:1.
7. The Board of Senior Examiners meets for a second time and draws lines again. These lines are presented to the entire teaching staff of the department (graduate students and faculty) at the Final Honors Determination Meeting. The teaching members of the department vote on the placement of the lines, which vary from year-to-year depending on the candidate pool.
8. Finally, in mid-May, students are presented with a letter from the Government Department Chair indicating their levels of honors.

Grading

All faculty and teaching fellows in the Department serve as readers for senior theses. The thesis is initially assigned to two readers (one faculty member and one graduate student), but in some situations a thesis is assigned a third reader. The additional reader is not informed of the earlier grades. Your thesis will be returned to you with a sheet indicating the names of your readers, the grades they gave, the amount of any lateness penalty, and the composite grade for the thesis. The following instructions about grading are given to all readers of theses.

Grade levels

Summa cum laude. A summa thesis ought to be a contribution to knowledge. Whether it is successful research on a new or little studied problem, or an original and perceptive reassessment of a familiar question, it should manifest the consistency of high achievement expected in professional work (though even a summa thesis is unlikely to evidence the comprehensiveness and polish of a dissertation or published article). It should represent a substantial amount of effort and show the student's familiarity with the literature on the subject. It should not rely on secondary sources where work with primary sources is appropriate. It ought to be well written and proofread, free of errors in spelling, citation, and general presentation. Its arguments ought to be concise and logically organized, and the allocation of space judicious. A summa therefore is not equivalent to just any A, but the sort given by teachers who almost never give them or reserve them for extraordinary merit. Many experienced thesis readers have never read a summa thesis. A summa minus is equivalent to a more usual A, but it is still a cut above A. Although it lacks the consistency of a straight summa, it is still in almost all respects, substantive and stylistic, of professional quality.

Magna cum laude. A magna plus thesis should achieve a similar level of quality in some respects though it falls short in others. Also note on the figure of equivalents for the determination of honors (below) that the interval between a magna plus and a magna is double that between a magna plus and a summa minus. A magna plus is equivalent to an A-. A magna thesis need not be a contribution to knowledge, but it should show real achievement, more than mere evidence of hard work and unusual intelligence. A magna thesis is a work worthy of "great honor." It falls midway between A- and B+. A magna minus should also show hard work and unusual intelligence, though the results achieved may not be successful due to an unhappy choice of topic or approach, or to deficiencies in the style of presentation. It is equivalent to a B+ on a rigorous grading scale.

Cum laude. As is appropriate for a grade "with honors," a cum thesis should show serious thought and effort in its general approach if not in every detail. It should not represent merely the satisfactory completion of a task. A cum plus equals a B, a cum minus a B-, and a cum is in between. A student should not automatically receive a cum minus merely because he or she has written a thesis. Nevertheless, a grade of "not of distinction" (C or D with + or -, or E) should be reserved only for those circumstances when the thesis is hastily and carelessly constructed, a mere summary of existing material, and is poorly thought through. The high standards that the Department applies to theses must clearly be violated for a thesis to merit a grade of "not of distinction." Within the "not of distinction" category, a C represents satisfactory work, whereas D and E are unsatisfactory. The Department has sometimes held that a composite thesis grade of "no distinction" should be a bar to honors regardless of the student's performance in courses.

Ranking

Senior honors candidates are ranked on the basis of a numerical score made up of grades in courses and thesis.

Courses: All Government courses (and course-equivalents) and all Core courses taught by Government faculty — whether or not they are used to fulfill a concentration requirement — are used to calculate the final honors average. If you are uncertain as to whether a course counts into your final honors average, consult the Undergraduate Program Office.

Thesis: The numerical grade listed on your grade sheet is used. The numerical equivalents of the several elements of honors are assigned according to the 4-point scale used by Harvard College to determine ranking lists. The equivalents are as follows:

- Summa = A = 4
- Summa Minus = 3.85
- Magna Plus = A- = 3.67
- Magna = 3.5
- Magna Minus = B+ = 3.33
- Cum Plus = B = 3.00
- Cum =2.85
- Cum Minus = B- = 2.67
- C+ = 2.33 (this and all that follows are designated "no honors")
- C = 2.00
- C- = 1.67
- D+ =1.33

- D = 1.00
- D- = 0.67
- E = 0

Determining Honors

Each element - course grades and thesis - is converted into a number using the four-point scale described above, and then is averaged into an overall number (either 2:1, course grades: thesis, or 6:3:1, course grades: thesis: oral exam), again based on the same four-point scale.

Final Ranking

Students should understand that a final "raw score" number does not translate directly into an honors determination according to the same four-point scale. For example, if one's course grades, thesis, and oral exam (if taken) average to a raw score of 3.33, the student most likely will not be recommended to receive High Honors for departmental honors. *Historically, the cutoff point for a departmental recommendation of High Honors is significantly above a raw score of 3.33 on the four-point scale.*

The departmental decision is an art, not a science, and takes into account factors that cannot be captured in a mathematical formula. Nor is the Department's decision bound by narrow precedents. Each year and each case is considered on its own merits, and the decisions of one year do not bind the next. Thus there are and can be no precise and fixed minimum and maximum cutoffs for the different levels of honors.

Finally, it is important to note that the decisions on honors made by the Department at the Honors Determination Meeting each spring are only recommendations to the College. The recommendation that comes from the Government Department is called English honors (and will appear on the transcript) and the recommendation from the College is called Latin honors (and will appear on the diploma and transcript). Students cannot receive a level of Latin honors higher than the department's recommendation for English honors, but they may receive a level of Latin honors lower than the department's recommendation. Generally, each year some Government students receive degrees with levels of honors lower than those recommended by the Department. For information on College requirements, see the *Handbook for Students.*

This guide was originally prepared by Nathan Paxton, and produced by the Department of Government Undergraduate Program Office with revisions by Cheryl Welch, Ellen Hart, Francis Shen, Shauna Shames, Karen Kaletka, Tricia Vio and George Soroka.

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end matter

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