

## FINAL: RESEARCH PAPER

Making use of the techniques covered in this course, and utilizing the GSS or data of your choosing, you are asked to write a research paper. The paper should consist of a title page with abstract, 5-page double-spaced pages (12-point Times New Roman font and 1-inch margins), tables, and references. The title page and tables and references are not included in the 5-page limit. Your paper must be submitted through Turnitin to your T.A. no later than 5:00 p.m., **Friday, June 11, 2021**. This paper is worth 35 points (i.e., 35 percent of your final grade).

Your paper should include the following:

- 1) Title page and abstract: Include a title and an abstract for your paper that succinctly summarizes the components described below. See examples from *American Sociological Review* <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/asr>.
- 2) Introduction with research question and hypotheses: State a research question that can be answered with a quantitative analysis of data (GSS or other data). This research question should be motivated by reference to some substantive issue — i.e., a theoretical debate, a policy debate, a topic about which there is empirical disagreement, etc. State clearly why your topic is important and potential implications of your findings.

Refer to whatever literature exists on the topic you choose to investigate, placing your work in the context of what has been done previously. But bear in mind that the thrust of this course has been to develop facility at **using data to test ideas**. Draw on others' work merely as a way of presenting the state of the literature as it relates to your own study. Referencing an annual review <https://www.annualreviews.org/journal/soc> paper is a good idea for this section.

Explain how you will go about answering the question: what specific hypotheses you will test? Say not only what your hypotheses are, but also why a reasonable person knowledgeable in the field might expect them to hold. Be sure to clearly specify your independent and dependent variables.

- 3) Data, measures, and methods: Describe what data you use and how you operationalize your variables (i.e., what they intend to measure, and how each measure was constructed). What year were the data collected? Give the sample size and the sample characteristics. Is it a sample of males, black Americans, or some other subgroup? That is, if you are not using the full sample, but focusing on a subset, describe what restrictions you have imposed. What is the response rate of your sample? Justify the inclusion of the variables you are using. Describe your variables, saying precisely what the response categories are, how you handled missing data, etc. Describe what statistical models you utilize.
- 4) Results: Present and describe results. Present a table of means, standard deviations, and possibly correlations among your variables or, if you have a set of categories, the percentage distribution (i.e., present descriptive statistics). Lead your reader through these tables and figures, saying what they show. If you are making comparisons between groups, e.g., males vs. females, present the statistics for each group as well as for the entire population.

Present your regression results in tables, including: the coefficients and their standard errors or  $t$ -ratios or probability values, the constant, and the  $R^2$ . If you have a categorical dependent variable, use an appropriate logistic regression model.

Justify the inclusion of the variables in your model. Why is it there? What sign and, if possible, what magnitude do you expect for each coefficient?

Only present more than one model if you have a reason to do so. If not, just present the most complete model. The condition under which you want to present alternative (or nested) models is when you are interested in whether the effect of one variable is explained by another variable – that is, when you are interested in the effect of introducing one or more control variables. If you do present nested models, you need to justify the order in which you build up your model. This should not be arbitrary but should have a clear logic and should depend upon which hypotheses about spurious effects.

Make your tables and figures aesthetically appealing. Look at the course examples of well-presented tables and model after these. Include what model you are running, what the data are and the sample size ( $n=XXX$ ) in your table

heading, and what the numbers represent in your table notes (e.g., “Standard errors in parentheses”).

Make your tables easy to understand for the reader. Name dichotomous variables with the “positive” category. For example, better to call a variable “male” than “sex” since the reader cannot tell from “sex” whether males or females have the higher value. Also, you may need to reverse the coding of variables to better represent your theoretical objectives.

- 5) Summary and discussion: Remember that you are social scientists in your discussion and conclusions. Describe the social significance of your findings. In this section you tie your findings back to your originating question, explaining how your specific findings address your research question. Also include the limitations of your research (all research has limitations) and what future work might accomplish. Finally, describe the implications of your study for the state of knowledge in this area, future research, and policies.
- 6) References: Include references at the end of the paper (see format in *ASR*).

## NOTES ON WRITING

Strong papers are almost always the result of extensive rewriting. Once you have some semblance of an idea of what you are doing, you should try to get a draft of the proposal and then paper written quickly, because only after you have your basic ideas sketched out can you begin the process of polishing. Rewrite until you get it right.

Writing well is an important professional skill. Better yet if you can write with style. But for this sort of paper the premium is on clarity. Before submitting your first draft, read over and ask yourself, with respect to every sentence, is it unambiguously clear, or can it be interpreted in more than one way? If it can, fix it. It helps to put a paper aside for a few days after completing the draft, because then you are more likely to be able to respond in the way others do, and hence to spot the ambiguities.