

Introduction and Welcome!

1. An outline of the MA(IL) 806.
 - I. General Approaches to Preparing a Project: A User's Guide to Formal Success
 - a. Introduction and Outline
 - b. Getting to know you and your interests
 - c. Writing in the social sciences
 - d. Expositions versus criticism
 - e. Choosing your topic versus knowing your area of interest
 - f. Work on the 'homework' essay
 - II. Practicing the Forms of Exposition: Practice Makes Perfect
 - a. Review
 - b. Discussion of the homework
 - c. Representing and presenting data
 - d. Manipulating data
 - e. Developing your homework
 - III. Spicing Up Your Project: Boring is Not Required for Completion
 - a. Review
 - b. A classroom example
 - c. Spicing up your essay
 - d. Pitfalls
 - e. Developing your homework
 - IV. Knowing When to Quit: You are Writing a Project not a Book
 - a. Review
 - b. Discussion of homework
 - c. Choosing an advisor
2. The purpose of the course is to help you to prepare to write your major course paper. It is not merely to inflict an artificial hurdle to be surmounted.
3. Reaction and discussion: this is an opportunity for us to get to know one another and for me to see where your general interests lie.
4. Requirements for this course.
 - a. You will build an essay of at least 20 pages: most of you will write more pages than this as you will see how hard it is to write compactly.
 - b. Each of the first three parts of the essay will conform to the “lessons” taught in class. For example:
 - c. As part of your ‘homework’ at the end of today’s class you will be expected to write an introduction to your topic that explains:
 - i. What your question is.
 - ii. Why it is important.
 - iii. Who are the scholars that have previously written on this subject?

- iv. Where it fits into the literature on the subject.
 - v. The last two points are seldom finished until the essay is well on the way to completion as the process of writing the essay should uncover nuances that were not apparent upon first writing. You should not expect to have all the authors or the literature ready before you launch into the theory and analysis. In other words, expect to rewrite the first paragraphs several times with the final version possibly the last thing you write!
5. The general form of the overall essay:
- a. Introduction
 - i. Catch the reader's attention
 - ii. Why your topic?
 - 1. It is important
 - 2. It fills a gap
 - 3. It extends an argument
 - 4. It adds to a body of evidence
 - 5. It contributes to a debate
 - 6. It shows that others who have written are 'wrong'.
 - 7. It raises new issues that are more significant than others that have previously been developed
 - 8. It highlights an anomaly that others have missed or underemphasized
 - b. The literature review: who has written before and why it is germane to your topic.
 - c. The theory relevant to your topic that you plan to use.
 - d. The evidence you plan to use to develop your argument.
 - i. You need to explain what it is.
 - 1. You need to describe the data in context.
 - a. You may need to present it in a table or graph
 - b. You need to characterize it
 - i. Show trends
 - ii. Show variation
 - ii. You need to explain its shortcomings
 - 1. For example, when it was gathered, it may have been contaminated by the fact that the gatherers had a vested interest in the outcome.
 - 2. The data may be incomplete. How have you filled the gaps?
 - 3. It may not correspond as well as you would like to the theoretical concepts you are developing.
 - e. You need to explain how the evidence bears on the theory that you have used to answer the question that you are answering. This is often the heart of the matter, and while only a point on the outline, make no mistake, this is the crucial part of the essay.

- f. You need to conclude by tying your evidence to the issues that you have raised in the introduction and re-linking the story that you have developed to the broader issues that you have raised in (a).
 - i. Sometimes your analysis will suggest that you have decisively answered the question you have posed.
 - ii. Sometimes your analysis will suggest future work.
 - iii. In all cases you need to highlight what we have learned from your essay. Do not let the reader be in any doubt as to what has been your contribution. It may, in the event, appear small in the greater scheme of things. But make no mistake; increments to knowledge are often small. Do not be ashamed of your contribution. Scholars recognize that knowledge is hard to produce but easy to reproduce. Whatever you have learned in writing your paper is likely to be a contribution.

Finally, as the great British admiral, Lord Nelson remarked, “No battle plan ever survives first contact with the enemy.” Not all essays will fit neatly into this model. We cannot always be sure that the topic will permit development in tidy categories. However, many of the elements described above are important to most essays. If you choose to leave one of the ingredients out, you should be sure that you have a good reason, and that this reason should be apparent to both you and your advisor. Good luck and happy hunting.