

PLSC 497: Social Movements and Public Policy
Professors Baumgartner and McCarthy, Spring 2009

Suggestions for Preparing Research Reports

A research report should present very clearly how the research was carried out, the results obtained and the implications of the results. The report should be concise and to the point. Any information that would be necessary for another researcher to replicate the research should be included.

Try to limit your report to five pages (one inch margins, 12 point font), not including appendices. Single spacing is appropriate within sections, but leave more space between sections in order to emphasize transitions between sections. Use section headings. Use a cover page that includes the title of your report, your name, the date, and the class and professors who are teaching the class. Be sure to paginate your paper. Staple it on the upper left-hand corner. Don't put it in a folder.

The following form is strongly suggested. The numbers in parentheses indicate the total number of points possible for each section when it is evaluated. (Total = 40)

Title (2)

A good title captures the essence of the project and if possible hints at the results. One good way to think of the title is to work in the dependent variable into the title. If you can also work in a reference to what you think explains it, or your most interesting finding, so much the better. But you start with the dependent variable, which is the thing you are explaining. Don't be cute.

Statement of the Problem (7)

This section should be divided into two parts:

Review of Research. Here you should state the problem the research is designed to address, drawing upon past research and theory. In constructing this section, you should include at least one reference to past work in appropriate reference form. This section should also set up the remainder of the report, serving as an introduction. You will be provided a research article appropriate to the purpose of this section in class.

Hypothesis/Hypotheses. You should state at least one hypothesis. It should be related to what you have done in the previous section. It should include the concepts you have discussed and should be stated in a way that it can be tested with the research being reported.

Research Procedures (12)

This section should be divided into two parts:

Sampling. Explain here the unit of analysis that is used in the research. Then explain how many of them were gathered, where, and anything else that you know about them. If the units are people in a survey you would say how many of them were contacted, how they were contacted, and some detail about the sample of them.

Design. Explain what kind of design was used and how the data was collected. Was the design a cross-sectional survey, an experiment, etc.? What sorts of measures were employed to indicate the concepts that are included in your hypothesis? Explain them in detail. What there any attempt to check their reliability and validity? Was the data collected by observation, survey, interview or from some other source?

Measurements. Clearly define how you *operationalize* your variables, starting with the dependent variable.

This section is typically the most difficult one to organize in a research report. One method of organization in the design part is to present what was done chronologically, prefaced by a statement about the nature of the design employed. Make sure to include all of the details of how the research was conducted. The idea is to write in such a way that another person could replicate your work exactly without ever having met you or asking you any questions—so it should be self-explanatory.

Results (7)

In this section the data is presented. You should include at least one table in your report. Table format is important, and the quality of your table will be important to an adequate results section. A poorly organized table is confusing. See Sample Table.

Your discussion should begin with a description of the pattern of results shown in your table. This discussion usually refers to actual percentages or summary statistics shown in the table. Number your table and refer to it by number (e.g., Table 1 shows...). Then conclude by noting whether or not the pattern of results supports your hypothesis/hypotheses. A well presented table and a concise description of results means that this section can be quite brief.

It can sometimes be appropriate to use a Figure rather than a table, but the idea is the same.

Interpretation / Conclusion (5)

How does this study relate to past research? Are there any problems with this research that might lead you to be concerned about the results? If so, what are those problems? How might this research be improved if it were done again? Does it suggest any further research questions?

Summary / Abstract (5)

This section should consist of a brief paragraph or two that summarizes all of the above. A sentence or two summarizing each section will usually do the trick. In many journal articles this summary would be included as an abstract at the beginning of the paper. Abstracts, however, are typically written after the body of the report is written, then placed at the beginning. So, be tricky and write up this abstract after you are done, and then put it on your cover page. Note that the abstract should contain no new information; it is simply a short summary of your problem, the approach, and the findings. Furthermore, after you have your interpretation and results section done, go back and revise your first two sections to make sure they clearly lead the reader to the findings you actually got. There is no such thing as a mystery novel in academic writing. (That is, non-fiction; it may be fine in a creating writing class, but not here!)

References (3)

Include the complete reference to any source you have cited in your report in alphabetical order. Use the form shown in one of the research papers we are reading in class. The easiest format is to cite the author and the date of the citation in the text (Baumgartner and McCarthy, 2005) and then include the full citation to the reference in this section. The score on this section depends, also, on your use of correct citation form in the body of the paper.

Sample Table

Table 1: Hypothetical Pattern of “Withs” Observed at the January 22, 2008 “March for Life,” National Capital Mall, Washington, DC.*

<u>Size of With Group</u>	<u>Number Observed</u>	<u>Percent of With Groups</u>
1	195	3.3%
2	2597	44.3%
3	1890	32.2%
4	950	16.2%
5	129	2.2%
6	27	.5%
7	18	.2%
8+	57	1.0%
Total	5863	100.0%

* *USA Today* Reported “Tens of Thousands of Marchers” attended.” (January 23, 2008:3A)