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Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:30am—2:30pm, and almost any other time by appointment

Course Description:
The last few years have been busy ones for international law. Perhaps you got caught-up in the “Kony 2012” viral video sensation, highlighting the atrocities perpetuated by Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Yet despite all the attention, Kony remains a fugitive from justice and the International Criminal Court that seeks to put him on trial. How could such international attention be translated into concrete action? Why has the international community been seemingly so unable to capture this guy?

If you missed Kony, you couldn’t have missed-out on the coordinated US Seal Team Six attack killing Osama Bin Laden in his Pakistani compound on May 2, 2011. Yet even as celebratory chants of “U-S-A” erupted from Citizen’s Bank Park that night, thorny questions were raised about whether such military operations in a foreign, sovereign country are legal according to international law, to say nothing about the assassination of a foreign national in the ongoing “war on terror.” Such legal questions have been amplified by talk of targeting American citizens, such as the Al-Qaeda operative Anwar Al-Aulaqi, who was killed in Yemen in 2011. While such attacks are done in the name of making the world safe from terrorism, are they also undermining the foundations of international law?

The Arab Spring has unleashed a number of dilemmas for international law as well. As Libya was descending into civil war, the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague issued an international warrant for Libyan leader Moammar Gadafi, his son Seif al-Islam Gadafi and his chief of intelligence Abdullah al-Sanoussi for crimes against humanity in the killing, injuring, arrest and arbitrary imprisonment of hundreds of civilians, which prompted the United Nations Security Council to authorize humanitarian military action against his regime that would ultimately be lead by the US and NATO. Will the Court do the same for Bashar al-Assad in the ongoing bloodletting in Syria? Speaking of which, why does the international community seem unable to do anything about this humanitarian disaster? Some critics argue that so long as international law is subservient to international politics, warrants by the ICC will be devoid of deterrent effect, and will always be too little, too late. Others worry that the ICC has set a dangerous precedent indicting acting national leaders. Does this move suggest a growing role for international law in general, and the ICC in particular, in international relations? And if so, who is going to go arrest them?

Even beyond the walls of the ICC, former rulers have increasingly stood trial for sanctioning illegal activities during their time in office. Saddam Hussein was tried and executed by the Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal, while the fate of former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, was recently sentenced to 50 years in prison by the UN Special Court for Sierra Leone. How are these trials possible? And what are the implications of such developments of international human rights law for American civilian and military leaders when it comes to issues of prisoner interrogation, torture, and the indefinite detention of foreign nationals without trial at a detention center at its military base in Guantanamo Bay? How did we get here? What legal price is to be paid? By whom? To whom?

In other news, Russia sent a submarine to plant a flag on the ocean floor at the North Pole to stake a symbolic claim to the pole as an extension of the Siberian continental shelf, and to the mineral wealth that is thought to be in that area of the Arctic Ocean. Can they do that? Are the Russian claims legal? Who decides?

These recent developments all hit at the very core of international law. Yet despite the widespread invocation of the concept of “international law,” there is a surprising amount of disagreement as to both its effectiveness, and even some of its foundational principles. The purpose of this course is to explore the general principles of—and current debates surrounding—international law in order to more fully understand its roles both as an instrument of, and a constraint on, state action.
Assignments and Grading:

The series of PSC6900 courses are intended to be a capstone of your undergraduate experience within the political science major. While the specific topic of the course may not allow you to draw together all of your experiences in the wide range of political science classes that you have already taken, it does allow you to hone the research and writing skills that you have (hopefully) gained as part of your experiences within the political science discipline. Therefore, as a bookend to the sophomore research seminar (PSC1900), your performance in this course will be evaluated not only through participation, short assignments and exams, but most notably through a final research paper. Each assignment is described in greater detail below.

The grade breakdown is as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case-Study Paper</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-Term Theory Paper</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leaders-on-Trial Project</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>45%</td>
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Class Participation (15%)

Please note: this requirement is called “class participation,” not “class attendance.” While it is certainly difficult to participate in discussions within our small seminar if you don’t attend, simply attending class does not guarantee you a passing participation grade. What I look for in tabulating a participation grade is whether you come to class having done the readings for that day, had time to think critically about them, ask thoughtful questions, and engage (“participate”) in meaningful discussions. Ensuring that everyone is familiar with the arguments put forth in the various readings is the minimum condition for developing an effective classroom environment. If you spend the entire class session on Facebook, surfing the web, or looking down at your crotch as you text your friends on your phone—don’t expect a passing participation grade.

International Law Case Study Paper (10%)

Perhaps the most frustrating element of the study of international law is that authors and experts often make references to a myriad of different legal cases in a rather flippant and offhand manner, assuming that you, of course, know all about each of these disputes and the implications of their resolution. I do not expect that you know the ins and outs of every case that you come across in the assigned readings, but this case study assignment will help you to become at least somewhat more familiar with the substance of international law by delving into some detail into one particular case of your choice.

This assignment will require you to write a 1-2 page (single spaced) executive summary of a major dispute in international law from a list of about 500 such cases that I will provide for you. You may not consider a case discussed previously in lecture, or a case involving the criminal prosecution of heads of state or heads of government, as that will be covered in a separate section. The summary should include the following elements:

1) The litigants
2) A brief background of the dispute
3) The form of dispute resolution (ICJ, third party arbitration, etc.)
4) Some discussion of jurisdiction (Why is this court empowered to judge this matter?)
5) The judgment
6) Whether (or how) the judgment was enforced

And most importantly, 7) Why we should care (or alternately, what precedent or lasting impact does this case decision have for the development of international law?)

This case study will help you to develop some expertise in an area of international law of your choosing, and facilitate more in-depth participation in class. The case study will be due in class on Thursday, September 20, 2012.

As explained in more detail below, breaches of academic integrity, including plagiarism, will be dealt with severely.

Mid-Term Theory Essay (20%)

Before moving on to the substantive issues in the study of international law, it is necessary to have some mastery of the relevant approaches to international law and how they relate to various international relations theories emanating from political science. Therefore, before moving-on to the second section of the class there will be a brief take-home essay that exclusively covers these conceptual aspects. The assignment is open with respect to length, but...
5-7 double-spaced pages should suffice. The theory essay will be due in class on Thursday, October 25, 2012, and will be worth 20% of the class grade.

To both deter and detect the plagiarism that is inconsistent with your purpose as a graduate student, I will ask that all papers be submitted electronically through the SafeAssign program, which is located under the “Course Content” tab on the course Blackboard site: https://elearning.villanova.edu/webapps/login/.

Leaders-On-Trial Project (10%)

From Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein to Charles Taylor and Moammar Gadhafi, the last decade has witnessed a surge in the number of cases of heads of state and heads of government being charged for war crimes, human rights violations, and corruption the world over. As a means to facilitate a livelier classroom discussion on-and comparison of- these developments, each student will be required to investigate the criminal cases associated with the criminal prosecution of a particular world leader.

Like the case-study assignment, the leaders-on-trial project will require you to write a 1-2 page (single spaced) executive summary of the case for the prosecution of a particular world leader from a list of about 70 such cases that I will provide for you. The summary should include the following elements:

1) The litigant.
2) The charges.
3) The form of dispute resolution (ICC, domestic courts, ad hoc tribunals, etc.)
4) Some discussion of jurisdiction (Why is this court empowered to judge this matter?)
5) The judgment
6) Whether (or how) the judgment was enforced. (Appeals?)
And most importantly, 7) Why we should care (or alternately, what precedent or lasting impact does this case decision have for the development of international law?)

The leaders-on-trial project will be due in class on Thursday, November 1, 2012. As explained in more detail below, breaches of academic integrity, including plagiarism, will be dealt with severely.

Research Paper (45%)

The capstone of this class is to write an academic research paper of 17-20 pages relevant to the topic of international law, either in its theoretical form, or in its application. The paper will be due during the final exam period, 8:30—11:00am, Thursday, December 20, 2012. Simple historical overviews or general investigations will not suffice: such papers should be driven by a good “how” or “why” question, as we will discuss in class, and in the “Expectations for Research Paper” section below.) To ensure that the research develops in a timely fashion, I have instituted a number of (ungraded) benchmarks for the project throughout the semester.

Deadlines for Research Paper

First, you must submit to me—either in hard-copy form or via e-mail—a statement of your preliminary research topic and thesis question, by Thursday, September 27, 2012. Broad topic declarations such as “I want to study human rights” are too vague—a concrete topic question is required, and can be worked out in conjunction with the professor. Usually addressing topics with “how” or “why” questions can help: asking instead “how can the international community make economic sanctions more effective?” Supplemeting such questions with some notion of how your research question “matters”—in terms of furthering our understanding of international law—is also a plus. The reason for the relatively early deadline is so that you can work-out a reasonable thesis question in conjunction with the professor, while still having the flexibility to adapt to subsequent changes without imperiling progress on the paper, as might happen later in the semester.

Second, once your research question has been approved, you will need to submit a brief bibliography and conceptual outline of your paper by no later than Thursday, November 8, 2012. This should help keep you on schedule, and prevent the sudden appearance of last-minute (and usually dubious) research papers.

Finally, the completed paper is (again) due to me during the final-exam period: 8:30—11:00am, Thursday, December 20, 2012. In order to guard against plagiarism, which is completely antithetical to your scholarly endeavors, I require that you submit both a hard-copy version for me to grade, and submit your paper online through the SafeAssign program, which will be located under the “Course Content” tab on the course Blackboard website: https://elearning.villanova.edu/webapps/login/. Unfortunately, previous experiences—even here at Villanova and even in both upper-division and graduate classes—have made concerns over plagiarism, submission of peers’ papers, and papers from online “paper mills” and other universities into a well-justified concern. (See section on “Plagiarism and Academic Integrity” below.)
Expectations for Research Paper

A good paper will be both persuasive and informative—meaning that not only should the facts be correct, but also your argument should be comprehensive (meaningfully addressing potential rival explanations), balanced, well-organized and well-written, making appropriate use of a wide range of supporting information and evidence. To assist in the researching and writing process, I’ve attached a section on “Writing in Political Science,” which re-hashes some of the basics of researching, organization, writing and presentation that you (should have) learned in PSC1900.

Beyond that, every semester, I invariably get the question “what are you looking for?” when it comes writing a good research paper. Certainly, even beyond plagiarism and potential violations of academic integrity, there are lots of things I look for in a good paper, from the “global” (argument structure and effectiveness) to the “local” (punctuation, spelling, fonts and margins), but here’s my list of ten things I ask myself about every research paper I read, whether written by a student or a fellow academic:

1) “Does the paper have a clear and effective thesis question, with clearly-stated variables?”
2) “Is the approach of the paper appropriate to the question being asked? Or would a different approach yield better results?”
3) “Is the cause-and-effect relationship clearly stated from the outset?”
4) “How effective is the roadmap, which articulates where the argument is going?”
5) “How effective is the literature review in giving a general sense of the topic area, and where the current research will fit in to it?”
6) “Does the paper have an effective warrant, or theory-based grounding of the investigation?”
7) “Is the paper effectively structured in a way that brings the evidence to bear on the research question?”
8) “Does the author consider potential objections to his/her argument, either theoretical or empirical? Does the writer effectively address and rebut them?”
9) “Is the quality and quantity of the evidence appropriate to its use? Is the evidence well-sampled, including peer-reviewed sources? (Or is it all from a handful of the same sources, potentially of dubious quality?)”
10) “Does the author answer the ‘so what’ question? Is there an attempt to generalize the research findings, or establish its importance—either theoretical or empirical—beyond the particular case at hand?”

As I said, these are my fairly general guidelines for grading papers. If you have any questions about any of them, please feel free to ask, either in class, via e-mail, or (the best option) stop by during office hours!

Class Policies:

Grading

All assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale which can be used to translate your number grade into a letter grade. At the end of the semester, your final grade will be calculated by adding-up the grades on each assignment in proportion to the weights assigned to them above.

Grade Entitlement

A recent UC Irvine study found that 1/3 of all students surveyed expected a course grade of “B” just for attending lectures, while 40 percent expected a “B” simply for completing the required readings. Moreover 2/3 of all students surveyed claimed that explaining to a professor that they “worked hard,” it should be factored into the calculation of a grade. This trend increasingly mistakes effort for quality of work. I strive to objectively assess the quality of assignments in this class against a uniform standard, nothing more. Course grades should not be thought to be a reflection of either the amount of effort exerted or some sort of evaluation of the personal worth of the student.

Late Assignments

Written assignments turned-in after the due date and time indicated will be penalized one full letter grade (ten points) for each full day that it is late. Therefore, an otherwise “100” quality paper turned-in one day late would become at best a “90” two days late would become at best an “80,” and so forth, all the way down to zero. As all of the deadlines are clearly articulated here in the syllabus from day one so they should come as no surprise, no extensions will be granted, based in part on the same premise as the policy on extra credit (see below).

Questions on Grading

Invariably throughout the semester, students have questions about the grade they received on a particular assignment that goes beyond the written comments. If you feel that you did not deserve the grade you received on a given assignment, I am certainly open to discussing the matter. However, I insist upon the following:
1) A 24-hour “cooling off” period. Please do not approach me with questions about “why did I receive this grade” within 24-hours of having your test or assignment returned to you. This will allow you time to re-read the comments, and understand whatever shortcomings may be in question.

2) Come to office hours. I will not discuss individual grades during, before or after class. Questions about grades will only be considered in face-to-face discussions during office hours. In the end, it is exceedingly rare that a grade will be altered—but if you can persuade me that the evaluation was in error, I am generally not opposed to re-evaluating the grade, though I do, of course, reserve the right to revise the score upward or downward as the re-evaluation warrants it.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, assisting dishonesty and other breaches of the University Policy on Academic Integrity, as outlined in the Enchiridion (http://www.villanova.edu/vpaa/office/student-services/policies/integrity/), are serious business. Not only are such activities contrary to your entire purpose in attending college and official university policy, but are also a personal affront to me as an instructor and competent human being. So, consider this your warning: if blatant breaches of academic integrity are discovered, I will prosecute them to the fullest extent.

Fortunately, when it comes to plagiarism, the Villanova Writing Center has a handy guide to effective citation and how to avoid plagiarism (http://www.villanova.edu/artsci/vcle/writingcenter/guide/citing.htm), I suggest looking it over. If you have additional citation, formatting, or any other questions throughout the semester, please feel free to discuss them with me so as to clarify any ambiguities and prevent ethical problems before they develop.

The Penalties for Infractions of Academic Integrity are steep, and you should be aware of them: at a minimum, you will flunk the assignment or test, and likely, the entire class. Moreover, an official report of the transgression will be made to the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Board of Academic Integrity, and you will be required to complete a program on academic ethics. If a student is twice found responsible for such transgressions of academic integrity, the Dean may expel or suspend you from the University. So, long story short: don’t waste my time, don’t waste your time—just don’t do it. Again, please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have on this issue so that they can be easily resolved before the assignments are completed!

Extra Credit?

No. Let me clarify that: if there comes a situation where extra credit would be appropriate, it would be offered on an equal-opportunity basis to all students, and that would be exceptionally rare. Individual extra-credit opportunities distort the baseline of evaluating every student by the same standard (as do requests for extensions). This is to say, please do not approach us at the end of the semester asking for some extra-credit opportunity to make-up for a poor performance on an earlier assignment. While you might think that such a request conveys a notion of additional dedication to achievement in the course, in reality, the message received is quite different: such requests are based on two implicit assumptions: 1) that the student in question wishes to be held to a different (lower) standard than the rest of the class, and 2) that the professor is willing to bend the rules and sacrifice objective standards of evaluation. As a result, I tend to find such requests to be rather off-putting, even though that was surely not the student’s intent, which is why I feel compelled to spell-out the justifications for this policy here in the syllabus.

Online Lectures and Materials?

No. Let me clarify that: lecture notes or slides will not be posted online, except in exceptional circumstances, so please do not ask for them to be. Similarly, review sheets are not used in this class. It is not my duty to provide notes to you: I cannot do the learning for you. I suggest that you exchange your e-mail and contact information with the people seated next to you (or other friends in the class) to obtain notes if you happen to miss lecture on a given day. This interpersonal contact may stimulate the development of study groups, and has been the way courses have historically been conducted.

Why not? Here are my reasons, in order of ascending importance: 1) Technical issues: the huge file size precludes uploading. 2) Legal issues: effectively “publishing” lectures online violates the “fair use” doctrine of intellectual property rights protections, by which we may utilize many of the copyright-protected images and other lecture materials. 3) Negative effects on attendance and grades: pedagogical studies have shown that online materials, notes, and review sheets lead not only to dramatic drops in attendance, but also grades. Students tend to become overly-reliant on the printed word, which is often just a stepping-off point for a more important discussion (which in turn is missed if all you focus on is the content written on the power-point slides). These studies demonstrate that students become passive observers rather than active participants in learning, leading to worse correspondingly worse grades. 4) Finally, there is the more existential aspect: if the entire learning experience boils-down to an instructor writing outlines and students reading them, what is the point? What is my raison-d’être at this university:
professor, or outline-writer? For that matter, what is yours: student, or outline-consumer? To that end, why not just get an online degree? The answer to all of these questions is in the mix: the traditional dynamic of classroom lectures, discussions, and the exchange between instructors and students that is the hallmark of the university learning experience, which prepares you to become a well-rounded and competent individual, and ultimately prepares you for life outside of academia, where very little is scripted in advance, and available on-demand.

All of these elements are damaged, rather than helped, by posting lectures, notes, slides, and other review materials online. I heartily suggest that, in lieu of such aids, that you take responsibility for your own education. Come to class. Raise questions in class or during office hours. Use e-mail. Post questions on the online review website. Create your own study groups. It is my responsibility to teach, it is your responsibility to learn; and while I will do my best to help you in that endeavor, you likewise have an important role to play.

Living in the Computer Age
Computers are great. Ever more, computers are an integral part of the learning experience. Much of the readings are available online, you’ll probably do a great deal of research online, and write a paper or two on your computer. But as we all know, networks and computers are not always reliable—computers crash, networks fail, printers jam and run out of ink—these are the realities, and we must all confront them. Experience has shown that computers disproportionately tend to crash the night before an exam or assignment is due. As a competent adult, it is up to you to take responsibility and plan ahead for such eventualities. Back-up your files to the web or an external drive. As an excuse for not being able to access online materials or being able to complete an assignment on time, “my computer crashed” will garner little sympathy.

Respect
A key aspect of maintaining an interesting and energetic classroom environment is to ensure that all participants in discussions feel free to express their ideas and opinions without fear of scoffs or condescension. To that end, it is incumbent upon everyone to treat everyone—and their ideas—with respect, especially when another student’s perceptions may not align with your own. Of course when speaking of politically charged topics disagreements will surely arise, yet please be aware of and show respect for others’ ideas and feelings. If at any time you feel offended, please try to raise your concerns in a constructive, level-headed manner—either in class, with me directly, or even anonymously—to amicably resolve the situation. Many times, interpersonal conflicts are rooted in simple misunderstandings, other times they reflect serious issues that need to be resolved before continuing.

Accessibility
Generally speaking, I am a fairly easy person to get in contact with. I encourage you to e-mail me with questions, clarifications, and concerns as they appear throughout the semester, and I especially encourage you to come speak with me face-to-face during my office hours, or by appointment: nothing beats old fashioned interpersonal interaction. However, there are limits to my accessibility, especially outside of normal daytime business hours. A lack of preparedness on your part does not necessitate a crisis on mine—which is to say to not expect me to reply immediately to panicked, excuse-riddled e-mails the night before an exam or assignment due date.

Research Resources
Some useful websites for advanced research on international law include:
- American Society of International Law (http://www.asil.org/)
- Foreign Affairs Online (http://www.people.virginia.edu/~rjb3v/il.html)
- International Court of Justice (http://www.icj-cij.org/)
- United Nations General International Law (http://www.un.org/law/)
- Collection of International Law Links (http://www.law.ecel.uwa.edu.au/intlaw/)
- Harvard University Law School Library’s Foreign and International Law Resources (http://www.law.harvard.edu/library/ref/ils_ref/annotated/)

Course Website:
This syllabus, along with relevant class announcements, reading assignments, and other information will be available on the Blackboard course site: https://elearning.villanova.edu/webapps/login/.
Assigned Readings:

The required reading load for this course may be considered by some to be heavy, but it is quite standard for a capstone research seminar. The assigned readings are sufficient to give a rudimentary, baseline understanding of the history, development, functions and functioning of international law. In addition to these required readings that will be necessary to facilitate the week’s discussions. As both the quantity of assigned readings and research load are not inconsistent with the requirements for a capstone research seminar, please do not ask or expect for reductions to the requirements.

The following book is available for purchase at the Villanova University Shop, as well as through online retailers. Just be aware that ordering books online may be a great way to save money, but that must be balanced by the risk that the books may not arrive in a timely manner, which may in turn put you behind in your studies.


Additionally, there are a large number of additional required readings (articles and book chapters) that will be posted electronically through the course site on Blackboard (https://elearning.villanova.edu/webapps/login/). These readings should be read before the appropriate class session, and should be considered fair game for examination purposes. Additional recommended readings will also be posted online for those with an interest in additional reading for a more nuanced understanding of the various topics and themes discussed throughout the semester.

Assigned Readings and Organization of the Course:

Section I: International Law Concepts and Theories

Week 1: Course Introduction: International Law Today

Thursday, August 30

Required Readings:


Week 2: International Law: Evolution, Concepts, Sources

Thursday, September 6

Required Readings:

Week 3: Approaches to International Law

Thursday, September 13

Required Readings:


Week 4: International Law Meets International Relations Theory

Thursday, September 20—Case Study Assignment Due!

Required Readings:


Week 5: Cooperation and Compliance with International Law

Thursday, September 27—Topic Statement & Thesis Question for Research Paper Due

Required Readings:


Section II: Topics in International Law

Week 6: Intellectual Property and International Trade Law

Thursday, October 4

Required Readings:

Week 7: Environmental Protection  
Thursday, October 11  

Required Readings:  

Week 8: Mid-Semester Break. No Classes!  
Thursday, October 18

Week 9: Borders and Jurisdiction  
Thursday, October 25—Midterm Theory Essay Due!  

Required Readings:  

Week 10: War Initiation, War Crimes & Genocide  
Thursday, November 1—Leaders-on-Trial Project Due.

Required Readings:  

Week 11: Sanctions & Interventions  
Thursday, November 8—Conceptual Outline & Preliminary Bibliography Due

Required Readings:  
Week 12: Piracy and Terrorism
Thursday, November 15

Required Readings:

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break. No Classes!
Thursday, November 22

Week 14: Human Rights
Thursday, November 29

Required Readings:

Week 15: Prisoners of War
Thursday, December 6

Required Readings:
Optional Reading—Declassified interrogation documents available on Blackboard website:


Week 16: Arms Control & Nonproliferation; Conclusions

Thursday, December 13

Required Readings:


Final Exam Period: Thursday, December 20, 2012: 8:30—11:00am
Tips for Writing in Political Science

(Sections borrowed from Dr. Maurits van der Veen and Dr. Markus Crepaz)

This outline presents general guidelines for writing a political science paper. They may seem overly long and, at times, repetitive. Nevertheless, it is probably worthwhile to read through them at least once before you begin writing your research paper and then again as you are finishing up, to make sure you have not overlooked anything. Above all, keep in mind throughout the entire process that you are making an argument: your goal is to produce persuasive writing. The final two sections contain pointers on style and grammar you may want to keep in mind as you write.

What is the purpose of a paper?

You want your paper to be persuasive. In order to persuade, the paper must contain an argument that is your own. In addition, it should adduce evidence to support that argument from primary or secondary sources, from historical or contemporary events, from thought experiments, etc. Your goal is to persuade readers. This means readers should never be tempted to stop reading! Three things that can make your audience stop reading, but that are under your control are content, structure, and style.

Your paper’s content should be made clear to readers from the outset. The paper’s title should give an indication of the general topic and—if appropriate—of your thesis. The first sentence should draw the reader in: make sure it runs well and is not too long! The reader should know what your argument is by the end of the first few paragraphs, and roughly how you intend to prove it one or two paragraphs later. At this point, if readers are still reading, you can assume that they are at least basically interested.

For the rest of the paper, make sure you do not lose your audience. Make both structure and style as easy to follow as you can. Your argument should proceed smoothly from one paragraph to the next, and it ought to be internally consistent (unlike some of the material we will read this semester!). Sentences should make sense and not run on. We will criticize spelling, grammatical errors, or inconsistent use of tense, as it is important to realize that all of these are barriers to understanding your argument. (Unless such problems are egregious, however, they are unlikely to affect your grade.) Each time the reader has to pause or go back to make sure he or she has read a word or a sentence correctly, you provide a small temptation to stop reading. In addition, you make it harder to follow your argument. Nothing should come between your reader and your argument; least of all eminently preventable problems such as spelling errors.

At the end of your paper, you should restate your argument and the main points you have made—do not assume the reader has remembered everything exactly. You want to leave readers with an impression that reflects the whole paper, not just the last part of your argument.

One Way to Proceed in Writing a Paper

Choose a paper topic (if not already provided for you). Pick a topic that interests you, and about which you would like to learn more. A lack of interest in your topic means that the research will be less rewarding and that you will be less likely to do much of it. Moreover, if you do not find your topic interesting, you are unlikely to make it interesting to your readers—in other words, your paper is less likely to be successful at persuading anyone.

Decide what you want to argue, preferably without referring directly to the source material.

Write an outline of the paper, listing the important points to be made in the different paragraphs, still without referring directly to the material, although you may want to note which author, passage, etc. you think you will want to refer to.

Write an introductory paragraph, closing with your thesis. The exact contents of this paragraph may need to be changed at the end, but it is important to have a thesis in your mind as you write.

Write a first draft of your conclusion. This will give you an idea of what you need to work towards as you write. The conclusion should restate your thesis and the most important point(s) from the body of the paper. It is not the place to introduce new ideas for the first time!

Do the actual writing (see below).

Rewrite your conclusion, making sure you do not claim to have argued, shown, or suggested something unless you have indeed done so in the preceding pages.

Rewrite your introductory paragraph, making sure your thesis statement matches the conclusion and the argument throughout the paper.

Write a brief road-map paragraph, to follow the introduction, which gives the reader an idea of how you are going to persuade her. This is where you would indicate which authors or subjects you are going to discuss (and in what context), for example.

Proofread, spell-check, and read your paper aloud to make sure it sounds right.
How to Make and Support an Argument

If you are going to be commenting on books, articles, etc., do not assume the reader knows or can guess what you are talking about. Give a brief paraphrase or synopsis of the main argument of the passage or work you are discussing.

The burden is upon you to make sure the reader does not suspect you misrepresent an author to the latter’s disadvantage. This is where quotations may come in handy. Use them sparingly, however. If you fall for the temptation to string quotations together, you will not be making any argument of your own. As a rule, try to avoid quoting passages longer than 3 lines, unless you feel doing so is crucial to supporting your argument.

The burden is also upon you to make sure you do not represent the writing and ideas of others as your own, even accidentally! When you make a claim, make it clear whether this is your argument or that of one of the authors. When you cite or paraphrase an author, make sure it is followed by a correct citation (do not cite a random page in a book—we tend to double-check these things). Not giving credit for sentences, ideas, or facts that are not common knowledge is tantamount to plagiarism, and will be treated seriously! To avoid inadvertently quoting an author from your notes, always try to use your own language—just changing 1 or 2 words in a sentence is not enough!

Whether you agree or disagree with an author, make it clear which is the case, and explain why! Do not just assume that this will be obvious to the reader.

Think through the implications of your argument. Think of the logical extreme implied by your argument, and see if you agree with yourself. If not, you may want to qualify your claims.

Similarly, make it a point to write down the two strongest objections to your argument. Do not content yourself merely with thinking through them—write them down. This will make it more difficult accidentally to overlook an aspect of an objection you cannot handle satisfactorily.

Make sure your argument is coherent. Do not jump from one topic to the next randomly. Make the connection between different parts of your argument clear. If you find it impossible to proceed smoothly from one paragraph to the next, you need to re-examine your argument!

On a related note, make sure there is a sense of progression to the argument. The reader must be drawn from one paragraph to the next and be able to follow along with your argument in a natural manner. For example, do not make your main point first, and then pad with some marginally related smaller issues. Your audience will lose interest before you get to the end.

Finally, recognize the limitations of your argument. In particular, realize that it is incredibly difficult to “prove” anything definitively in the social sciences (it is much easier to disprove hypotheses), especially when it comes to a simple term paper. Therefore, conclusions like: “I have proven that globalization is bad,” or “I have proven that IMF policies do more harm than good,” seem a bit pompous—as though the writer is congratulating him/herself on discovering some iron-clad law and is only waiting for a Nobel Prize committee to reward this magnificent contribution. More often, overstated conclusions often simply confirm the opinions of the writer, and may be easily “disproved” by someone addressing the same issue from another angle. A more tempered conclusion like “I have demonstrated that globalization can have bad consequences,” or “my results suggest that IMF policies do more harm than good,” is less likely to raise the ire of the reader, especially one who may not be fully inclined to agree with your assessment.

Handy Checklist as You Finish

Does the paper have a short introductory section ending with a clear statement of the argument? Does the paper have a short concluding section that restates the argument and pulls everything together?
Have you thought about how authors you criticize (or ignore) might respond to your argument?
Are any of the paragraphs longer than 2/3 of a page? If so, check whether the paragraph makes more than one point, and consider rewriting it or splitting it into two parts.
Have you not toyed with margins and font size to a noticeable degree? If your paper is considerably longer than the assigned length, you may be trying to tackle too much at once—simplify your main argument and cut out paragraphs that do not add to it. If your paper is considerably shorter, you may be approaching the issue too simplistically. (Have you really considered item 2 above? Most authors we read are/were intelligent people, and cannot just be waved off in a single paragraph).
Have you either a) read the paper out loud or b) given it to a friend to look at? Try to catch typos, confusing language, and holes in your argument before handing it in.
Have you spell-checked and proofread again after you made your final, small changes?

Some Issues of Style

As noted above, you must indicate the source (in some standard citation format) of every quotation. Directly quoting a lot is not a good idea, but leaving off quotation marks to reduce the apparent amount of quotation is considerably worse (and opens you up to charges of plagiarism).
Avoid sentences that run longer than 3 lines, where possible. They slow down the reader unnecessarily, and the longer the sentence, the greater the risk that it becomes badly structured.

Look up any word of whose meaning you are not entirely sure. Even a slight shade of difference between a word’s meaning and the one you intend can color or distort your argument.

Be careful with your use of this, these, etc. Is it clear what these words are referring to (usually the subject or object of the previous sentence)? If there is any ambiguity, try to rewrite your sentence so you can eliminate the issue. Common errors to check for: cite vs. site vs. sight, its vs. it’s, principle vs. principal, imminent vs. immanent, accept vs. except, affect vs. effect, etc. An excellent and detailed listing of general errors in English can be found at: http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/. There is no excuse for committing such common errors at this point in your academic careers.

Local Grammatical Concerns

The list of grammar points that follows is borrowed at least in part from New York Times columnist (and former Nixon speechwriter) William Safire. It circulates widely in writing departments, for good reason.

- Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
- Never use no double negatives.
- Use the semicolon properly, always where it is appropriate; and never where it is not.
- Reserve the apostrophe for its proper use and omit it where its not needed.
- Verbs has to agree with their subjects.
- No sentence fragments.
- Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
- Avoid commas, that are not necessary.
- If you reread your work, you will find on rereading that a great deal of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing.
- A writer must not shift your point of view.
- Do not overuse exclamation points!!!
- And do not start a sentence with a conjunction.
- Place pronouns as closely as possible, especially in long sentences, as of ten or more words, to their antecedents.
- Hyphenate only between syllables and avoid un-necessary hyphens.
- Write all advverbal forms correct.
- Don’t use contractions.
- Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
- It is incumbent on us to avoid archaisms.
- If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.
- Steer clear of incorrect verb forms that have snuck into the language.
- Take the bull by the hand and avoid mixed metaphors.
- Avoid modernisms that sound flaky.
- Avoid barbarisms: they impact too forcefully.
- Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
- Everyone should be careful to use singular pronouns with singular nouns in their writing.
- If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times: avoid hyperbole.
- Also, avoid awkward or affected alliteration.
- Do not string a large number of prepositional phrases together unless you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death.
- Always pick on the correct idiom.
- “Avoid overuse of ‘quotation “marks.’”
- Never use more words than are necessary in order to get your point across: be concise.
- Always chek you’re spilling.
- Always be avoided by the passive voice.
- Every sentence a verb.
- Do not give other professors or I a paper with improper use of personal pronouns. Them and me do not like that.
- Be sure to affect the proper effect on your reader.
- Last but not least, avoid clichés like the plague: seek viable alternatives.