

Research Paper Instructions and Grading Criteria
PLSC 437: War in World Politics
Professor Roseanne McManus

Content

The research paper assignment is to analyze the causes of a current or previous international conflict. You may choose an interstate conflict, a civil conflict, or an asymmetric conflict. The conflict you choose need not necessarily involve violence, but there must at least be potential for violence.

Your paper should consider three different causes that might have contributed to the conflict you are writing about and make an argument about the relative importance of the causes. Your argument should be focused on the underlying causes of the conflict rather than just the events that led to the conflict. (However, the events that led to the conflict should be discussed in the background section of the paper.)

At least two of the causes you consider should be related to the causes of conflict that we learned about in class. For example, you could choose to write about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and discuss the spiral model, the deterrence model, and domestic politics as possible causes.

Your paper should have a clear thesis statement, articulated in the first paragraph, about the relative importance of the causes you consider. Here are some possible examples of what a thesis statement could look like:

- “This paper will argue that the most important cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is domestic politics, while the spiral model played a lesser role. Some people might blame the conflict on the deterrence model, but this paper shows that the deterrence model is not relevant because both sides have always been security-seeking.”
- “This paper argues that the deterrence model and domestic politics are primarily responsible for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although the spiral model also contributed to the conflict at certain points when fears were exaggerated.”

Your paper should be organized around the goal of proving your thesis based on evidence.

Papers should generally contain the following sections:

1. Introduction – Should be only one paragraph. Introduce the topic, briefly indicate its importance, give the thesis statement, and outline what the rest of the paper will cover.
2. Background – Give a chronology of major events during and leading up to the conflict and discuss who the main actors are. Should be about 1/3 – 1/2 of the paper.
3. Discussion of causes – Discuss each possible cause one by one. Explain each cause and discuss the evidence why it is or is not important, relative to the other causes. Should be about 1/2 – 2/3 of the paper.
4. Conclusion – One paragraph, summarizing your argument again and possibly discussing implications for the future.

Submission Instructions: Submit your papers in *.docx format* at <https://turnitin.psu.edu/> (use class id 23348996 and enrollment key McManus_S20 to sign up). Make sure that you complete the full submission process and save evidence of your submission. Points will be deducted from papers that are not submitted in the correct manner or file format. If an incorrect or unreadable file is submitted, the assignment will be considered late until the appropriate file is submitted.

Lateness Penalty: Papers that are not submitted by the deadline will lose 5 points immediately and another 5 points for every additional 12 hours they are late.

Length: Papers should be about 3,000 words long. There will be no automatic penalty for submitting a shorter or longer paper. However, if your paper is much shorter, you should ask yourself if you have included enough detail. Conversely, if your paper is much longer, you should ask yourself if your writing is repetitive or unnecessarily verbose.

Sourcing Requirements: Your paper must include in-text citations as well as reference entries at the end. You may use any in-text citation and reference format as long as (1) you are consistent among your citations and references entries and (2) you include all standard information necessary to look up the source. For websites, please include the web address.

Avoiding Plagiarism: TurnItIn will automatically check for plagiarism. To avoid plagiarism on your research paper, you must do the following whenever you incorporate someone else's arguments or work or any information that is not common knowledge into your paper:

1. Either use quotation marks around the author's words or rephrase *completely* in your own words. (Rephrasing is generally preferred.)
2. Include an in-text citation.
3. Have an entry in your References section at the end that matches the citation.

The rules above apply to any source material, including all types of websites and work by any type of author (either expert or non-expert).

People often get in trouble for plagiarism when they:

1. Copy and paste text – Instead of copying and pasting (even if you plan to change the words later), it is better to write everything in your own words from the beginning.
2. Rely on someone else's summary of another source – It is hard to summarize a source in your own words if you have not actually read it yourself. It is better to find the original source yourself, read or skim the whole thing, and write your own summary from scratch. If you do end up relying on someone else's summary, you should cite that person also to give them proper credit (and cover yourself if their summary happens to be wrong).

Outside Help with your Paper: It is acceptable, and even encouraged, to ask a friend or family member to proofread your paper. However, everything except proofreading should be your own work.

Other Formatting Requirements: As long as your paper uses proper English grammar, I do not care about other formatting details. Your paper may be either single or double-spaced. Having a few section headings is encouraged, but not required.

Grading Criteria

In each of the categories below, the following scores are possible:

- 10 – exceptional, goes above and beyond expectations
- 9 – good
- 8 – acceptable
- 7 – needs considerable improvement
- 6 – needs major improvement
- 0-5 – entirely unacceptable or completely lacking.

Category	% of Total Paper Grade	Grading Criteria
Argumentation	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the paper consider several different possible causes of the conflict? • Are the causes plausible? Are they truly underlying causes, rather than just events? • Does the paper clearly explain the logic behind how each possible cause might have contributed to the conflict? • Does the paper present a clear argument regarding the relative importance of the causes discussed? • Does it present evidence regarding why each cause might be more or less important? • Does the author make it clear how the evidence supports the argument? • Does the author consider and rebut any obvious counterarguments? • Are there any logical inconsistencies in the argument?
Knowledge of course material	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are at least two of the causes considered related to the causes of conflict that we learned about in class? • Does the discussion of these causes reflect a solid understanding of and ability to apply the course material? • Are the relevant readings from class cited?

Level of detail regarding the conflict	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is adequate background given to understand the conflict? • Are there any important details of the conflict that are left unexplained or explained inaccurately? • Are there too many minor details that are unnecessary to support and understand the author's argument?
Quality of sources	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many sources are there? (The minimum to write a good paper is probably around eight, although you may need more.) • How many of the sources are high-quality (for example, books and academic articles)? • Are there any problematic sources, such as Wikipedia or non-mainstream news outlets?
Introduction and conclusion	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the introduction make it immediately clear what the topic of the paper is? • Does the introduction indicate why the topic is important? • Does the introduction contain a clear thesis statement? • Does the introduction describe the organization of the rest of the paper? • Is the introduction brief and to the point? (In general, no more than 200 words.) • Does the paper have a conclusion that summarizes the findings?
Organization	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the paper move from topic to topic in a logical order? • Does the author avoid jumping back and forth between topics? • Are there transition sentences when the author switches between topics? • Does each paragraph have a single topic, and is this topic clear in the first sentence? • Are the sentences within paragraphs in a logical order? • Are paragraphs of reasonable length? (Generally, avoid paragraphs longer than 200 words.)
Grammar	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the paper follow standard English grammar and punctuation rules?
Style	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the sentences clear and professional in tone? The following are tips for achieving this: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be concise. It is good to explain things thoroughly, but do not use more words than are necessary to convey the information.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Except in the introduction, conclusion, and transition sentences, do not repeat information you have already given. ○ Simple language is preferred to “flowery” language. Read your sentences aloud to see if they sound clear or awkward. ○ Do not rely too heavily on quotations. It is generally preferred to paraphrase from sources so that your own voice comes through. ○ Avoid slang and contractions. ○ Analogies and personal anecdotes often come across as too casual. ○ Avoid all use of second person (you). ○ When giving your own arguments and opinions, avoid using the first person (I).
Citations and references*	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is other authors’ work and all information that is not common knowledge properly cited? ● Does every citation have a matching reference entry? ● Are quotation marks used when necessary? ● Is the paraphrasing sufficiently different from the author’s original words? ● Are the citation and reference formats consistent? ● Is adequate information included in the reference entries?

* Minor shortcomings in this category will result in lost points in this category alone. However, serious shortcomings in this category constitute plagiarism and will be penalized with a reduction in your grade for the entire assignment and reporting to the appropriate authorities in the College of Liberal Arts.