

## Sample Student Writing: Disciplinary Conventions of Research and Writing

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**Grade this group received on this assignment:** C+

**Positive aspects of this work:** the students do a nice job explaining their chosen scholar's research interests and the broader aims of this scholar's research.

**Problem-areas with this work:** the students' thesis statement is unclear, their summaries of the scholar's articles are incomplete, they neglect to offer a single citation in their discussion of these works, and their explanation of the conventions of research and writing in their particular field of study—here American Politics, which is a subfield of Political Science—is very cursory.

For example, the students never explain what they mean by “descriptive questions” and “positive inference” or by “interpretive and prescriptive assessments,” and they neglect to explain why they think these conventions characterize most scholarship in the study of Congress specifically (which a further subfield of American Politics) or of American Politics more broadly. Similarly, they note that a mixed-methods approach is common in this subfield, but nowhere in their summaries of their subset of articles do they explain how the scholar integrates qualitative research into his work.

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The field of American Politics is something every American, regardless of their academic aspirations, are paying more attention to. With the backdrop of immense political divisiveness and rancor, scholars such as Dr. Edward Scott Adler are advancing our understanding of public policy issues and issues of transparency in government. Dr. Adler is a professor of Political Science at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He is well known and respected as a researcher and academic in the subfield of American Politics. Dr. Adler began his education in Political Science in 1984 at the University of Michigan. Upon graduating in 1988, he went on to attend Columbia University, where he would earn both a Master's Degree and PhD. in Political Science. By 1996, Dr. Adler earned his Ph.D. with a specialization in the subfield of American Politics, a field in which he has been a driving force ever since.

Within the subfield of American Politics, Dr. Adler's work is specifically concerned with Congress, elections, and the policy making process. Having authored several books throughout his career, he was awarded the Alan Rosenthal Prize in 2003 from the Legislative Studies section of the American Political Science Association for his book [Why Congressional Reforms Fail: Reelection and the House Committee System](#) (University of Chicago Press, 2002). Along with two additional books illuminating issues associated with Congress, Dr. Adler has published numerous articles in more than 20 academic journals, including *The American Journal of Political Science*, *The American Political Science Review*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, and *Urban Affairs Review*. Dr. Adler has also had work published in many prestigious Academic Presses such as Cambridge University Press, University of Chicago Press, and Yale University Press. Resultant of these numerous contributions to the field of American Politics, Dr. Adler was named to the editorial board for the *American Journal for Political Science* (AJPS) in 2014. AJPS is a highly reputable journal, evidenced by its relatively high impact factor of 3.269. Dr. Adler maintains a position on several other editorial boards, though none are as prominent as AJPS.

Reading Dr. Adler's writing, the reasons behind his being widely published quickly become evident. With his focus targeting Congress, elections, and policy making, Dr. Adler has positioned himself as an expert on public policy inputs, formulation, and implementation. Equally, he is well

known for his unique insights regarding government transparency. Dr. Adler's writing seeks to enact substantive change by informing his audience of issues regarding malpractice in Congressional subcommittees. Dr. Adler has done extensive research, both qualitative and quantitative, to help inform and defend these positions. Within his substantial body of research, he practices a style of research and analysis that conforms to the general conventions of Political Science. More specifically, Dr. Adler's research and analysis asks descriptive questions and offers positive inferences, relies on a mixed-methods approach to data, incorporates mixed media and visual representations of data, and structures his writing according to discipline accepted best-practices. With his extensive research and exemplary writing skills, Dr. Adler has established his voice as one of authority within the field of American Politics.

Dr. Adler's article, *The Persuasive Effects of Partisan Campaign Mailers*, was published in the Journal Political Research Quarterly. This journal was ranked 59/163 of Political Science journals as of 2015 and has a relatively modest impact factor of 1.116. Dr. Adler's body of research investigates the inner machinations of the American political system, and this article provides an excellent insight into his research goals. Dr. Adler incisively analyzes the effects of partisan campaign mailers on campaigns and elections in the United States. Specifically, Adler asks questions such as: what are the effects of positive and negative campaign mailers? Do campaign mailers have different effects at different points in elections? How do mailers affect name recognition of politicians? Do they affect voter turnout? Are there different effects on democrats and republicans? And how do partisan mailers and non-partisan mailers affect voters differently? In order to meaningful insights into these questions, Dr. Adler incorporates survey based field experiments from different points in the 2012 U.S. Presidential election. In analyzing the results of his field experiments, Dr. Adler uses graphs and collected data to create regression models that can be analyzed by looking at visible percentage increases and significant R and R<sup>2</sup> values. Building on a wide breadth of previous research on the subject, Dr. Adler is able to compare the data he has collected to data from previous researchers on the effects of non-partisan campaign mailers. In this article, Dr. Adler uses his data to create graphs that he supports with in depth textual analysis. He also includes a discussion section that ties together the varying significant statistics and arguments introduced throughout the paper. The outline of his essay is typical of a Political Science article. There are four sections in his paper. The first section is an introduction in which he roadmaps his paper and provides a thesis. The second section presents the background discussion preceding Dr. Adler's work. Here, he gives a brief overview of existing research on campaign mailers and acknowledges the gap in the data he will be addressing, which, in this case, is research regarding the effects of partisan as opposed to non-partisan campaign mailers on the voting public. The third section contains Dr. Adler's analysis. This contains his discussion of the results of his field experiments and includes relevant graphs and data sets to defend his arguments for the effects of partisan campaign mailers. Finally he includes the Discussion section, which could also be seen as the conclusion. In this section he ties together his analysis of the data he has collected into one clear and cohesive argument for the effect partisan campaign mailers have on voters. Further, the prose he builds convey a scholarly and academic tone. Finally, he also includes several references to relevant research in the Political Science field, citing other pertinent authors to boost his argument's credibility.

Dr. Adler's article, *Demand-Side Theory and Congressional Committee Composition: A Constituency Characteristics Approach*, was published in the American Journal of Political Science,

which boasts an impressive impact factor of 4.515. In this article, Dr. Adler presents an in-depth look at Congressional committees. Here, he argues that the membership in each committee largely owes to the demand for policy benefits obtainable through a respective committee by each representative's district. In other words, each Congressional committee controls certain policy benefits and the Representatives or Senators from the districts that have a greater demand for those benefits are more likely to be members of that particular committee. This in-depth study focuses on the distribution of Representatives and Senators in Congress within different committees and how constituents impact committee membership. This article was written as an academically rigorous study on the intricate workings of Congressional committees. As such, Dr. Adler was patently writing for an audience of Political Science scholars, or perhaps professional civil servants, who would be concerned with trends related to membership decisions in Congressional committees. Dr. Adler writes in complex and academic prose, which is clearly intended for an audience that is already well informed on the topic at hand. In his article, he references the works of others in his field and writes in long, complex sentences that convey lots of information. This is an article that was published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, which is one of the leading journals in the field, arguably the most difficult to be published in. Therefore, not only is Adler's article written for members of his discipline, but potentially to reach a wider audience within the field of Political Science as well. Dr. Adler posits that his hypothesis contrasts from earlier research regarding Congressional committees. Therefore, it is likely that Dr. Adler intended for his argument to build on the current understanding of Congressional committees.

Dr. Adler's third article, *Constituency Characteristics and the "Guardian" Model of Appropriations Subcommittees, 1959-1998*, closely examines ten appropriations subcommittees in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1959-1998. He makes the argument that several subcommittees are composed of members with a disproportionately high need for the benefits controlled by the subcommittee. This article was also published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, incorporating the prestige of the journal and, in all likelihood, reaching a relatively large audience. Here, Dr. Adler uses extensive data on the district characteristics of all legislators over the course of 40 years. He finds that there has been little change in disproportionality of need for benefits of the appropriation subcommittee members since the 1960's. Dr. Adler's primary question in the article is whether either of the 'Guardian' or 'Claimant' models of appropriation subcommittee composition can be rejected or confirmed. He concludes that it is necessary to reject part of the 'Guardian' model, as his findings indicate that appropriation subcommittees are not composed of "non-advocates." This is largely due to the uneven need for benefits of the subcommittees that the legislators within them possess. Dr. Adler has written this article to convey his findings to other Political Scientists, and his comparatively simpler language indicates that the article was also intended for an audience that extended past the other members of his field.

Having conducted this review of Dr. Adler's body of work to analyze his conformity to accepted research, analysis, and writing methods in the American Politics subdivision of Political Science, several salient points become clear. Firstly, Political Scientists working within American Politics are frequently asking descriptive questions and making positive inferences. As our group's review of Dr. Adler's work shows, he demonstrably conforms to this standard. This analytical methodology allows those researching questions in American Politics to make better sense of how complex variables, especially various political institutions, interact and inform each other. Those

working in this field achieve this nuanced level of comprehension, in part, by expanding on the descriptive understanding of various institutions and making interpretive and prescriptive assessments of how they function. This is critical in terms of assessing how well, or not, American laws, norms, and institutions are functioning.

Secondly, the types of inferences describe above are commonly derived using mixed-methods. Qualitative data and process-tracking are combined with quantitative data analysis. This is because trends at the institutional level are perhaps better understood using this mixed-methods approach. Further, assessing historical trends, institutional development over time, and the interplay of various interests requires examining case-studies in addition to data. Similar to other academically rigorous research, many of the data sets being used are proprietary to the scholar(s). This serves to demonstrate both that the argument being made is adding a new insight(s) to the discipline as well as to buttress the author's credibility.

Thirdly, writing conventions in the subfield of American Politics heavily incorporate mixed-media presentations. Specifically, this is manifested in how data is presented. Allowing the audience to make powerful visual inferences about large scale, institutional trends over time has proven to be a popular method within the discipline. Indeed, in many cases, it is considered best-practice to include a visual representation of data being discussed. As discussed in the analysis of Dr. Adler's publications above, scatterplots are commonplace in this subfield. These regression and multiple-regression models provide a natural and efficient way to present a data set to the audience.

Finally, as discussed in further detail above, writing within this subfield of Political Science typically adheres to certain structural and stylistic standards. Many publications, especially journal articles, are built around a particular progression. Namely, they commonly flow from an introduction including a roadmap, to a treatment of the contextual background, to an analysis of the question at hand, to a discussion or concluding section. Further, first person pronouns are common, especially in the introduction and conclusion sections. The structure and pronoun choice serves to imbue a level of authority and declarative intent to writings in this subfield.