

**Dr. Germaine A. Hoston**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**Senior Honors Thesis**

**Writing the Introduction/First Chapter of  
Your Thesis**

So you are ready to write the Introduction to your thesis. By this point, you have already developed an outline and have gotten far enough into your research to confirm that the key elements of your argument are included in that structure.

Once you have done this according to my handout on "How to Structure and Write an Effective Paper," you basically have the overall structure of your thesis as a whole. Generally, each Roman Numeral of Your Outline will correspond to a chapter of your thesis. Some items might have to be divided into two chapters, depending on how much data there is, but you get the idea.

Roughly your chapter outline will look like one of the following two dominant patterns:

	<u>Pattern #1</u>	<u>Pattern #2</u>
The Puzzle / Statement of Research Question	Chapter 1	Chapter 1
Literature Review (How Others have Answered This Question and Why Their Answers are Inadequate)	Chapter 1	Chapter 1
Your Answer (Your <b>Thesis Statement</b> )		
Your Argument in Support of This Answer	Chapter 1	Chapter 2
Brief Historical Background	Chapter 2	Chapter 1
Overview of the Structure of the Thesis	Chapter 1	Chapter 1
Analysis of Empirical Data	Chapters 3-4	Chapters 3-4
Conclusion / Summary of Findings	Chapter 5	Chapter 5

The purpose of the introduction is to make the reader want to read the rest of your study. You need to:

- 1. State Your Research Question (The "Puzzle" you are trying to solve) and indicate its significance**

Here, your first chapter explains why the research question addresses something that is both a real phenomenon that educated people outside your

narrow specialty consider important *and* a puzzle that is significant in the context of the theories developed by specialists in the discipline of political science. Try to relate your burning interest in a particular case or topic to issues of concern to a larger audience. It is important to be able to answer the person who might respond to your argument by saying, "So What?"

Although an individual, non-recurring event may be the inspiration for the puzzle that interests you, the research question usually should not be a question about a unique or idiosyncratic event. Your research question should address some *recurring, patterned* set of events in more general terms, even if you are going to be addressing only a single case. For example, if you are interested in the contribution of the Great Depression to the rise of Hitler, rather than ask "did Hitler come to power because of the depression?" you might ask "are fascist movements more successful in states undergoing greater social dislocations from economic depression?" The first asks about a single outcome, the second asks about a pattern of outcomes.

If your study seeks to address causal relationships, you should be able to state clearly at the opening, "My dependent variable is. . . ." This may represent a fundamental shift in the focus with which you have become familiar in preparing for examinations. In the latter we often focus on the independent variables in order to group authors into schools of thought.

- 2. Review the existing literature on the subject.** Indicate what answers have already been offered to your question. If there is a lot of material, you might just want to offer a brief overview of, say, the three major approaches to the problem, here, for example, and move the more detailed critical discussion of the literature to Chapter 2.

The literature review should not just summarize relevant books and articles. Instead, it should organize the literature (grouping works where appropriate) into alternative approaches and alternative answers to your research question. The objective of the literature review is to identify alternative hypotheses and to identify why your research needs to be done. Alternative theoretical approaches to your research question are usually rooted in some distinctive assumptions about what variables deserve close attention. Theories present a logic or chain of reasoning that links larger concepts to the more specific question that you have posed. Your literature review

should make clear the assumptions, reasoning, and hypotheses that characterize each major theory or approach. You will be able to identify in these approaches or theories what others have identified as the independent variables that account for the dependent variable (outcome) that you are trying to explain. The *independent* variable is the cause or *explanatory* variable and, within the context of the hypothesis is *predetermined* (that is, its causes are not specified). The *dependent* variable is the effect that is determined by a cause specified within the hypothesis. Also note that in this the values of the dependent independent variable in the hypothesis *vary*—that is, each can take on at least two values (e.g., high vs. low, more vs. less, present vs. absent). A so-called "variable" that always assumes one value (that is always present, always low, etc.) is a constant and not a variable and cannot be included in a causal hypothesis.

**3. If you need to give some brief historical or larger theoretical background,** you might want to do that here, or if it is very lengthy, move this to Chapter 2 .

**4. Articulate your Thesis Statement (your overarching argument that you will be supporting in response to your Research Question).**

This could be one of the hypotheses already offered in the relevant literature, or it could be an alternative to existing hypotheses that you find (and show to be) unconvincing. Here you need to explain to the reader that this thesis is an application to a specific situation of a larger analytic or theoretical tradition (in the second example, political institutionalism). You should explain the assumptions in this tradition that begin the chain of reasoning leading to your hypothesis and you should lay out this logical chain for the reader.

**5. Outline your argument, by stating your supporting hypotheses.** Show how these supporting hypotheses are logically essential to your overarching thesis statement.

**6. Outline your research design, the approach you will be taking to resolve the question.** This might be comparative, it might be one or

more case studies, and it can rely on quantitative or qualitative data.<sup>1</sup> You might make specific references to chapters in order to give your readers a roadmap to your Thesis (e.g., “Chapter 3 argues that [hypothesis 1]).

---

<sup>1</sup> If you are doing a comparative study, I strongly recommend that you consult one or more of the articles listed in the reference list below to make sure that your comparison makes logical sense and is sustainable.

## References on the Comparative Method<sup>2</sup>

- Mill, John Stuart. "Two Methods of Comparison." In *Comparative Perspectives: Theories and Methods*, pp. 205-212. Edited with an Introduction by Amitai Etzioni and Fredric L. Dubow. Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown and Company (Inc.) 1970.
- Lijphart, Arend. "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *The American Political Science Review*. 65.3 (September 1971): 682-693.
- Lijphart, Arend. "The Comparable-Cases Strategy in Comparative Research." *Comparative Political Studies* 8.2 (July 1975): 158-177.
- Zelditch, Morris, Jr. "Intelligible Comparisons." In *Comparative Methods in Sociology: Essays on Trends and Applications*, pp. 267-307. Edited by Ivan Vallier. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press under the auspices of the Institute of International Studies, 1971; paperback ed., 1973.
- Bendix, Reinhard. "Concepts and Generalizations in Comparative Sociological Studies." *American Sociological Review* 28.4 (August 1963): 532-539.
- Wolin, Sheldon S. "Paradigms and Political Theories." In *Politics and Experience: Essays Presented to Professor Michael Oakeshott on the Occasion of His Retirement*, pp. 125-152. Edited by Preston King and B. C. Parekh. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.
- Lazarsfeld, Paul F., and Barton, Allen H. "Qualitative Measurement in the Social Sciences: Classifications, Typologies, and Indices." In *The Policy Sciences*, pp. 155-192. Edited by Daniel Lerner and Harold D. Lasswell. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951.
- Collins, Randall. "A Comparative Approach to Political Sociology." In *State and Society: A Reader in Comparative Political Sociology*, pp. 42-67. Edited by Reinhard Bendix et al. Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, and Company, 1968;

---

<sup>2</sup> I have listed these in the order in which they are best consulted rather than in alphabetical order.

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, paperback ed., 1973.

Sartori, Giovanni. "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics." *American Political Science Review* 64.4 (December 1970): 1033-1053.

Scarrow, Harold A. "The Scope of Comparative Analysis." *Journal of Politics* 25.3 (1963): 565-77.

Holt, Robert T., and Turner, John E. "The Methodology of Comparative Research." In *The Methodology of Comparative Research*, pp. 1-20. Edited by Robert T. Holt and John E. Turner. New York: The Free Press, 1970.