

## ***Outline of an Honors Thesis:***

### **Introduction**

An introduction should be a clear, concise statement of the puzzle (or piece of the puzzle) you are addressing, of your resolution, and an overview of the evidence you will provide in the following pages. You should explain why your research is important to political science and ideally American politics more broadly.

The components for a good introduction are similar to the components of a good précis.

- What are you trying to explain and why? What is your dependent variable (the outcome you are trying to explain)?
- What is your argument? In one or two sentences, what is your central hypothesis? (This is your thesis statement.)
- What did you find in your research? Briefly summarize the answer you are going to present to the puzzle/question you are aiming to address.

Don't worry about making the introduction broad; you don't need to relate your essay to eternal questions of humanity. In fact, you usually shouldn't. It should introduce the main point of the paper as quickly and efficiently as possible and give an overview of the arguments and evidence you will present. This is why it is helpful to write an outline of your paper before writing the introduction. You need to tell the reader exactly what you're going to tell her/him in your paper.

### **Literature Review and Theory**

What other scholarly attempts have been made to explain your dependent variable or solve your puzzle? Do not catalog a "he said-she said" chronology; synthesize the existing literature in an analytical summary. Explain how your hypothesis is informed by these works. How will your thesis build on (or refute) this existing research? What will your contribution be?

In this section, you should also develop your argument and ground it in secondary sources. In detail, explain your idea, and justify its validity with as many good reasons as you can. This is the place to define the concepts you'll be discussing in your paper (this is key) and explain how your idea relates to, draws on, and advances the writings of other scholars.

### **Evidence**

In this section you will provide the evidence that support the argument you make in the intro and literature review/theory portions of your paper. Outline this section before you write it. Pay attention to competing explanations for your findings and be able to refute them. Provide tables and figures to guide the reader through your argument.

### **Conclusion**

Remind readers of your argument, summarize your findings, and show how your evidence supports your conclusions. Don't ever use the word 'prove' – with social science data, it's usually impossible to 'prove' something is the cause of something else. Rather, your research will indicate a likely relationship, and provide evidence supporting that conclusion. In this section, you can also draw implications of your work for other studies, current policies, and politics.