

Achieving an “A” on the Midterm Paper

Sakeef M. Karim*
Amherst College

1 The Introductory Section

1.1 The Goal

The student (or group) articulates the **central thesis** of their paper with lucidity and precision.

1.2 Achieving the Goal

Students should clearly, succinctly, and cogently communicate the arguments they intend to advance. Introductory paragraphs should provide a rich summary of the literature and offer a clear roadmap for the paper: i.e., what are the key claims being made? How will different theoretical perspectives and conceptual frameworks be syncretized? What is the phenomenon of analytic interest (hint: it may involve “politics” and “exclusion”)? What is the central puzzle, problem, or idea being addressed? Students should resist the allure of grandiosity. Ancient philosophers and fables need not be invoked. In their stead, clarity and precision should reign supreme.

2 The “Body” (Argument and Analysis)

2.1 The Goal

The student (or group) provides an excellent synthesis of the theoretical concepts explored in **Part I** of this course and evinces a deep understanding of both the *supply* and *demand* sides of radical politics.

2.2 Achieving the Goal

Students should discuss at least two foundational constructs (e.g., populism, fascism, nationalism, authoritarianism, inter alia), effectively map their elective affinities and differences, and detail their relevance for understanding exclusionary politics in the modern world. To this end, students must draw on readings assigned for the class—although the best papers will draw on supplementary material as well. Students are free to use publicly available data to advance their basic arguments or concretize concepts that are otherwise shrouded in abstraction, but this is not required. That said, adducing some “empirical”

*skarim@amherst.edu — www.sakeefkarim.com

evidence (e.g., by citing public opinion) or using *exemplars* (e.g., theoretical models that illustrate the point being made) may be helpful. More generally, although some of the concepts discussed in [Part I](#) are contested and multivocal in nature, students should not mischaracterize any of the arguments sketched by the scholars we have engaged with thus far.

3 The Concluding Section

3.1 The Goal

The student (or group) summarizes their central contributions with clarity and precision while outlining the affordances of the arguments they put forward.

3.2 Achieving the Goal

Students should briefly recapitulate the key arguments advanced in the body of their text. How do these arguments provide analytic utility? More precisely, how do they help us understand exclusionary politics in the modern world? To furnish an answer, students should situate their insights within the broader canon or literature reviewed in the body of their paper and address relevant counterarguments (e.g., competing ideas regarding populism).

4 Writing and Organization

4.1 The Goal

The student (or group) writes clearly, effectively and precisely by stitching together well-developed paragraphs that follow a logical sequence.

4.2 Achieving the Goal

Students will not be evaluated on—and therefore should not prioritize—the beauty of their prose. Instead, the best papers will be logically sound, clearly organized, and clinically precise about the line(s) of argumentation being pursued. Think systematicity instead of poetry. Students should use [effective transitions](#) to move from one paragraph to the next in a way that maintains argumentative clarity and logical consistency. For instance, students should not introduce new arguments on a whim or leave connections between ideas unstated.

5 Formatting Conventions

5.1 The Goal

The student (or group) adheres to a set of basic formatting guidelines without bending the rules.

5.2 Achieving the Goal

Students should submit papers between 10 and 15 pages in length, inclusive of references. The text must be double-spaced and formatted in a 12-point Garamond or Times New Roman font. Margins should be set to 1 inch on all sides (top, bottom, left, and right). Students are free to use either [APA](#) or [ASA](#) citation styles to manage references and bibliographies. While not necessary, a title page may be a nice touch, too.