

# Research Paper Proposal (RPP)

*Main Task: Draft Your Own Research Paper Proposal from an Adopted Expert Perspective*

*Secondary Task: Requires a Writer's Memo*

Grade Weight 5%; Assigned: Feb. 19; Due: Mar. 01

**n.b. You will revise your RPP until your instructor responds that it is acceptable (PASS).** To assure that you will have time to prepare your RPPv1 by the time it is due, you must produce an RPP that is judged acceptable before you leave for Spring Break.

## Step 1: Choose an Expert Role

Experts are often motivated to write to a broader audience than one composed only of other experts or experts within their own field. To address a broader audience, an expert must accurately predict what readers are likely to know and what they will need to know in order to understand the writer's discussion. The expert must also consider the political and social contexts about a topic with which readers are already familiar and how ongoing conversations in other media are likely to have already shaped their audience's understanding of and attitudes toward the material they are presenting.

To begin the research paper assignment sequence, you will adopt the role of either a political scientist or engineer based on personal interest, career aspiration, and academic preparation. This role will determine the professional perspective you will emphasize in your own research proposal and paper (RPP, RPPv1, RPPv2). It will also determine the expertise you will contribute (in RPPv1) to developing a peer partner's proposal. Political scientists will help engineering peers to develop political and policy contexts for their technical discussions; engineers will help political-scientist peers to develop scientific and technological contexts for their policy discussions.

**Political Scientist:** A professional specializing in political science. Usually understood as one of the social sciences, political science “focuses on the study of government and politics, broadly defined. Its concerns include the formal organization and operations of governments, the clash of power and values that is politics, and the processes of authoritative decision making and the administration of public policies.” (*The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.).

**Engineer:** A professional specializing in engineering. Usually understood as one of the applied sciences, engineering utilizes “knowledge of the mathematical and natural sciences gained by study, experience, and practice [...] with judgment to develop ways to utilize economically the materials and forces of nature for the benefit of [hu]mankind (sic)” (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology).

## Step 2: Write Your Research Paper Proposal (RPP)

The purpose of preparing the Research Paper Proposal (RPP) is to help you to organize your work for the research paper, gain the benefit of a colleague's insights into your topic from a different expert perspective, and receive early advice from the instructional staff. Doing so will help you to define and develop a suitable course of research and complete your RPP on time. You are strongly encouraged to seek guidance from the instructional staff while preparing your RPP.

To complete an acceptable RPP, you must think deeply about your research question (i.e., a problem in contemporary global security and its possible solutions) and how you will address it, do a substantial amount of library research, formulate a thesis, and provide a list of the references on which you expect to base your research paper.

The research paper's primary purpose is to establish the nature and importance of a problem in global security from both a technical and policy perspective; its secondary purpose is to provide a recommendation on what the global community (or particular actors within that community) should do about the issue. We will refer to these purposes, put together, as your "research question."

### RPP Development Process

**2.1 Choose Your Topic:** You will develop a thought-provoking and well-informed discussion of a relatively current problem in global security based on one of the [approved research topics](#), so choose something that will sustain your interest. Alternatively, you may propose a topic not listed here to the instructional staff, but, **if you do, you must get explicit approval before you begin library research.**

**2.2: Define Your Research Question:** From the topic you have selected, next identify a research question that has both technical and policy aspects. Your global security problem must be narrowly defined enough to be addressed adequately in a paper that is only 5–6 pages long. It must be current enough to seem interesting and topical to readers, but not so recent that research in the academic literature is impossible to find.

You should devote substantial effort to defining a good research question, because having a good research question is vital to the success of your RP. Your research question will guide your research and help you to collect the evidence you will need for your RP.

Do not choose a rapidly evolving research question, because events during the semester could then render your research paper obsolete or even irrelevant. Do not choose a question on which there is little or no publicly available information. As an example, "Nuclear Terrorist Sleeper Cells in the United States" is an interesting topic, but you would not be able to find much publicly available information about this topic.

For advice on developing a research question (which your thesis will answer), see this Indiana University Libraries [handout](#). If you are having difficulty developing your research question, move on to the next step (literature survey) and then return to this step later.

**2.3: Draft Your Thesis Statement:** Your thesis statement will answer your research question. Although it may seem too early to determine the final answer to your research question at this point, formulating a possible answer will help you to choose sources to consider and begin to focus your analysis. You can modify your thesis as your knowledge and understanding of your research question increases.

For advice on writing a thesis statement, see the University of Illinois Writers Workshop [Thesis Writing Tips](#); see an example from the University of Richmond Writing Center on how to [develop an analytical thesis statement](#).

**2.4: Survey Literature on Your Research Question:** For your RPP and subsequent RP, you will be required to cite at least six and no more than eight sources. Your RPP/v2 reference list must include at least one relevant book, chapter from a book, or peer-reviewed paper. Unlike your previous Required Essays, your research paper must not be based on Physics/Global Studies 280 lecture-discussion slides. You may use no more than two of the assigned readings.

**Reference Requirements:** You are *strongly* encouraged to read and cite articles in professional and scholarly journals, such as *Arms Control Today*, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *International Security*, or high-quality magazines that address current affairs, such as *The Atlantic*.

You may use the online documents posted on the [Course Documents](#) page and documents posted on the web sites of the U.S. government and the nongovernmental organizations listed on the Course Documents page. **You may use other sources as well; however, they must be scholarly resources (i.e. free of extreme biases and peer reviewed from reliable publishers). Use your best judgement on these sources; your TA will look through the reference page to ensure they are viable sources.** For every online reference included in your list of references, you must include the complete URL and the date and time that you last consulted that reference.

You may use one or two newspaper articles from high-quality newspapers, such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Miami Herald*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, if they are essential to your thesis, but see the caution above against choosing a topic where the facts may change substantially during the semester.

**Citation & Reference Form Requirements:** The *Bulletin* uses *The Chicago Manual of Style* author-date form of citation, and you are required to do the same for the entire Research Paper Assignment Sequence, including the RPP. The journal provides authors with [guidance on how to use the Chicago author-date system](#). For Chicago style, see also *The Little, Brown Essential Handbook*, pp. 193-204 (but remember that we are using the “author-date” and not the “notes and bibliography” system), and *The Chicago Manual of Style Online* [author-date system](#).

Even at this early stage, to develop your research question and thesis, we suggest consulting at least three books, chapters from books, or review papers on your topic, to ensure that you have an adequate overall perspective on your research question.

**2.5: Refine Your Thesis Statement:** If you haven't yet done so, refining your thesis now will help you to organize your paper and develop your analysis in a logical manner. You should have your thesis in final form before you begin outlining your paper.

**2.6: Draft a Sentence-Type Outline of Your Research Paper:** Write a sentence-style outline of the major sections and subsections of your RP. For [tips on writing a sentence-style outline](#), see Celia Elliott's slides.

**2.6: Submit your Research Paper Proposal (RPP):** Submit both electronic and paper copies of your RPP by the deadline listed on the [Writing Assignments](#) page. Provide your colleague (peer) with a hard copy of your RPP, due at the same time as your class turn-in. If your colleague is not in class to receive the hard copy, you may give it to him/her in the next Writing Lab or email him/her an electronic copy.

**2.7. Revise Your RPP until Your Instructor Approves:** Your RPPv1 will be evaluated and marked either acceptable (PASS) or unacceptable (HOLD) based on the research question you have chosen and your thesis. Once your RPP has been judged acceptable (PASS), you may begin writing your Research Paper, faithfully following your RPP (although you may further refine your thesis statement and outline). The RPP will also be graded as a writing assignment.

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## RPP Format Requirements

In addition to the usual writing assignment format guidelines, you must include the following sections in your RPP:

### Page 1-2

1. **Topic:** At the top of the first page, where the title would normally go, write the topic of your RP, which must be **identical** to one of the topics in the [Approved Topics List](#). Or, if you have proposed and received approval for an alternative topic, write the name of your alternative topic followed by (alternative topic, approved) in parentheses.
2. **Expert Role:** [Engineer or Political Scientist]
3. **Outline:** Provide a sentence-type outline of your RP. (We understand that the paragraphs in your actual RP may differ slightly from the list given in your RPP.)
  - a. **Introduction:** The first section of your outline should provide your specific research question and revised thesis statement (which answers that question).

Your research question should be much narrower than the topic you have chosen.

- b. Body:** These sections and subsections are the topic sentences of the proposed paragraphs in your RP; they should be written as complete sentences. Because you will not yet have received input from your colleague, your paper need not yet show a technical-policy balance. This will be required instead in RPPv1.
- c. Conclusion:** The outline should end with a statement of your tentative solution(s). (Your conclusion may evolve somewhat during preparation of your Research Paper, as your thinking evolves.)

### **Additional Page** (Last Page for References)

**References:** Under the centered heading References, **list at least six but no more than eight sources** (articles, books, chapters in books) that you plan to use in writing your RP. Your reference list is *not* a bibliography (a general survey of literature on a topic): you should be expected to cite every one of the sources in your reference list at least once in the text of your RP. Remember, only approved online sources may be used. **Remember, use the Chicago author-date system for the form of your reference entries.**

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### **RPP Writer's Memo**

In addition to your RPP, submit a brief memo that requests feedback from your colleague whose expertise differs from your own (i.e., if your expertise is in engineering, the colleague with whom you are paired will be a political scientist; conversely, if your expertise is in political science, the colleague with whom you are paired will be an engineer).

In your request, please **formulate at least two questions to be answered by your colleague from the perspective of his or her complementary expertise**. This time, your questions should not be related to writing strategies or style, but instead to the substance of your research. We recommend that you ask about research topic-related issues that you don't yet know much about or have some confusion over. We also recommend that you ask questions that are broader than they are narrow, to help you gain as much benefit as possible from your colleague's expertise.

In your colleague's answering RPP, s/he may choose to address your questions directly (as one or two of the three issues s/he is required to discuss) or s/he may choose to incorporate answers to your questions into a discussion of three other issues s/he has identified as important for answering your research question. (See the RPP assignment sheet for more details.)

Writer's Memo Format:

- Title the memo: "RPP – Memo."

- The writer's memo will be on a separate page. Write your name in the same format as specified for the essay. Include your email address (so that your partner can email you his/her response).
- The memo must not exceed 0.5 pages in length.
- In technical writing, writer's memos can be used to direct specific questions for feedback to colleagues/experts reviewing the document. Your RPP Writer's Memo will be answered by your colleague in his/her RPCR.
- Rather than responding to your Writer's Memo for this assignment, your TA will provide feedback on whether your RPP is acceptable (PASS) or requires another iteration (HOLD) before you may proceed with library research.