

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 communicate their arguments clearly, succinctly, and cogently. The introduction should both situate the paper within the literature and provide a roadmap: i.e., what are the key claims being advanced? How will competing perspectives and conceptual frameworks be synthesized? What phenomenon is under analytic scrutiny (hint: it may involve *politics* and *exclusion*)? What is the central puzzle, problem, or idea being addressed? Students should resist the temptation of grandiosity. Invocations of ancient philosophers or fables are unnecessary. Instead, clarity and precision should govern the writing process.

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, fascism, boundaries *etc.*).

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 8 and 10 pages in length, inclusive of references. The text must be double-spaced and formatted in a 12-point 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. Moreover, students are free to prepare their “midterm” papers in Microsoft Word, Google Docs or \LaTeX . Concretely, this means papers can be submitted as .docx or .pdf files.

Zotero

Students are encouraged to make use of [Zotero](#) to manage their citations.