**CHAPTER 2**

**Reading and Writing Political Science Research**

**Multiple Choice Questions**

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ distills, presents, explains, and defends an argument based on empirical evidence in a format appropriate to its intended audience.

a) Quantitative data

b) Qualitative data

c) The research report

d) The thesis

2. Because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ differ in many respects, there is no single, generic format for a research report that can be used across all situations.

a) theories

b) audiences

c) research designs

d) course instructors

3. Which of these is *not* an important consideration when thinking about how to present your research?

a) Different audiences will have interests in different implications of your research.

b) You should always adapt your research findings so that the audience will agree with what you have to say.

c) Different audiences will have different levels of ability to understand the technical elements of your research process.

d) More than one type of audience may read your research report.

4. All research reports need to have a(n) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that they defend, which is based in empirical evidence.

a) argument

b) conclusion

c) hypothesis

d) research design

5. A \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ argument focuses on explaining what exists in the world, while a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ argument focuses on explaining why something happens.

a) valid; invalid

b) causal; descriptive

c) normative; empirical

d) descriptive; causal

6. Which of these is *not* an essential part of a research report?

a) the conclusion

b) the presentation of findings

c) the acknowledgements

d) the literature review

7. For more academic research reports, you should start with an \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, while for more public-facing reports, you begin instead with an \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

a) introduction; abstract

b) executive summary; abstract

c) abstract; executive summary

d) abstract; presentation of findings

8. Which of these is *not* one of the purposes of an abstract or executive summary?

a) to help readers decide if they should read your report

b) to present your results in detail

c) to give an overview of all the parts of the report

d) to help readers understand the argument in your report

9. The primary objective of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is to capture the reader’s interest. It should explain both the research topic and its relevance.

a) abstract

b) introduction

c) literature review

d) research design

10. Although in many respects the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of the research report will resemble the abstract or executive summary, it will generally *not* provide an overview of the research findings.

a) conclusion

b) introduction

c) literature review

d) research design

11. The following statement regarding the literature review is *not* true: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

a) It may provide the foundation for many of the empirical measures embedded in your report.

b) It shows readers how your research project grew out of the existing literature.

c) It shows readers how your findings fit into the established knowledge in the field.

d) It demonstrates how the existing literature has “said everything” about your topic.

12. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ demonstrates how your research fits into the larger body of the literature but is still unique.

a) abstract

b) introduction

c) literature review

d) research design

13. The intent of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is to present the research project to the reader, thereby establishing a context for what is to come and an enticement to read the entire report.

a) abstract

b) introduction

c) literature review

d) research design

14. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ may provide the foundation for many of the empirical measures embedded in your report.

a) abstract

b) introduction

c) literature review

d) research design

15. The question, “Have you confirmed, reinforced, challenged, expanded, or contradicted existing knowledge in the field?” refers to the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

a) abstract

b) introduction

c) literature review

d) research design

16. A good \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is more than a description of what has come before. It should present a critical overview of the existing literature, including an identification of problems, omissions, and contradictions.

a) abstract

b) introduction

c) literature review

d) research design

17. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ includes the collection of new data and collection procedures, the ethical issues encountered and how they were addressed, a sample description, sources of bias, empirical measures for theoretical concepts, and reliability/validity checks.

a) literature review

b) research design

c) discussion

d) conclusion

18. The key thing to remember is that the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is more than a description of what you did. It is also an *explanation* and a *justification* as well.

a) literature review

b) research design

c) discussion

d) conclusion

19. The research design section helps ensure your research’s methods are replicable and transmissible, which means that:

a) another researcher can understand what you did and would be able to do it themselves.

b) you are qualified to conduct the research and understand the methods involved.

c) your methods are a good fit to your research question and were conducted appropriately.

d) another researcher could not do the same work you did and would not get the same results.

20. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is the core of the research report. It is here that your contribution to the existing knowledge in the field is made.

a) literature review

b) introduction

c) presentation of findings section

d) conclusion

21. In the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ section, the author steps back from the details of the data presentation and tries to explore, usually in more general language, just what the empirical findings might suggest.

a) references

b) presentation of findings

c) discussion

d) conclusion

22. As a general rule, the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ should be accessible even to those readers who may not be able to follow the details of your statistical or qualitative analysis.

a) research design

b) presentation of findings section

c) discussion

d) conclusion

23. If your project obtains null findings, that means that:

a) it is not interesting and should not be published

b) your research design was fundamentally flawed

c) even though you did not prove your research hypothesis your results may still be theoretically meaningful

d) you proved your research hypothesis to a high degree of confidence

24. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ should take the reader back to the report’s introduction.

a) literature review

b) presentation of findings section

c) discussion

d) conclusion

25. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ should provide the reader with some interpretation of your findings.

a) research design

b) presentation of findings section

c) discussion

d) conclusion

26. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ serves to provide bibliographical details for any theoretical or empirical citations in your report.

a) presentation of findings section

b) discussion

c) list of references

d) conclusion

27. Which of these is *not* a function of the references section?

a) allowing readers to find your sources to follow up on ideas that interest them

b) ensuring that readers can replicate your work by checking your sources

c) avoiding plagiarism by properly citing your sources

d) including only the most important sources rather than everything you discuss

28. If we make an analogy between a legal case and a research report, the role of legal precedence in a case is similar to the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in a research report.

a) literature review

b) conclusion

c) research design

d) presentation of findings section

29. The \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ should recap the research problem and the thesis statement; remind the reader what you set out to do; and then discuss to what extent those objectives have been accomplished.

a) literature review

b) presentation of findings section

c) discussion

d) conclusion

30. Which of these should come first in a research report?

a) research design

b) discussion

c) presentation of findings section

d) literature review

**True or False Questions**

1. It is through the thesis that we convey our findings to an external audience.

2. The report is the capstone rather than an incidental stage in the research enterprise.

3. The reference section is an essential complement to the literature review.

4. A single generic format for a research report does exist.

5. Audiences will vary in their methodological sophistication.

6. Effective communication entails knowing one’s audience and writing to that audience in a way that clearly transmits the material.

7. For research reports, statistical or theoretical jargon is not necessarily bad; the issue is whether the vocabulary you are using is appropriate for your target audience.

8. The primary objective of the literature review is to capture the reader’s interest.

9. If a research report is aimed more at a non-academic audience, the recommendations are less likely to be policy recommendations than suggestions for future research.

10. Research is usually done for personal edification alone.

11. Appendices and footnotes can be used to convey the detail and complexity required by one audience but not another.

12. Graphical elements are rarely a significant part of a well-designed research report.

13. Political leaders are notorious for wanting long and detailed executive summaries.

14. Most people will read an entire research report right away.

15. Visual representations of data are not an efficient way to present the results of your work.

16. If more than one audience will be reading a research report, it is important to only speak to the most knowledgeable group.

17. Oral presentations of research do not need to be tailored to the specific audience and the oral presentation format.

18. In addition to the argument about the data, a research report should contain an argument about why the research matters.

19. If there is evidence that goes against your argument, you should ignore it in order to make a stronger argument.

20. The research design section of your report should come after the presentation of findings.

21. After reading the research design section, another researcher should be able to replicate your research.

22. A literature review can be written after only a cursory reading of the literature.

23. Null findings are defined as when the research hypothesis is supported.

24. Research reports that have gone through a process of experts in the field reviewing the work and approving it for publication are called grey literature.

25. Predatory journals are the most prestigious types of academic publications.

**Short Answer Questions**

1. Why are research reports important?

2. Explain in what respects audiences of a research report might vary.

3. Describe some adjustments that might need to be made when writing a research report for different audiences.

4. What are the two adjustments that a research report should make?

5. Explain the difference between an abstract/executive summary and the introduction to a research report.

6. Describe the purpose of an introduction in a research report.

7. Describe the purpose of a literature review in a research report.

8. Compare the different roles of your presentation of findings and discussion in a research report.

9. Describe the purpose of the conclusion section of a research report.

10. Discuss the types of questions or suggestions for future research that are typically explored in the concluding section of a research report – especially one aimed at academic audiences.

11. Explain why a reference list is included at the end of a research report.

12. Explain how a literature review and reference list are connected.

13. Discuss some of the considerations involved in planning an oral presentation of research.

14. Discuss how the literature review section of a research report may differ in reports written for non-academic audiences.

15. Readers of research reports often approach them with an eye to reading critically. List the sorts of questions or considerations that critical reading requires.

**Essay Questions**

1. Explain why the audience is an important consideration when writing a research report.

2. What is the role of an argument in a research paper?

3. Describe in detail the key components of a research report.

4. Discuss the research design component of a research report.

5. Suppose you are conducting a study on youth voter turnout rates. Describe how you might go about conducting and writing a literature review.

**Answer Key**

**Multiple Choice Questions**

1. **C**

2. **B**

3. **B**

4. **A**

5. **D**

6. **C**

7. **C**

8. **B**

9. **B**

10. **B**

11. **D**

12. **C**

13. **B**

14. **C**

15. **C**

16. **C**

17. **B**

18. **B**

19. **A**

20. **C**

21. **C**

22. **C**

23. **C**

24. **D**

25. **D**  
26. **C**

27. **D**

28. **A**

29. **D**

30. **D**

**True or False Questions**

1. **F**

2. **T**

3. **T**

4. **F**

5. **T**

6. **T**

7. **T**

8. **F**

9. **F**

10. **F**

11. **T**

12. **F**

13. **F**

14. **F**

15. **F**

16. **F**

17. **F**

18. **T**

19. **F**

20. **F**

21. **T**

22. **F**

23. **F**

24. **F**

25. **F**

**Short Answer Questions**

1. Research reports are important because they are the means by which you communicate your findings to other people. The final step of the scientific process is communicating your findings, and research reports are the major way that you can do this. The point of research is to ensure the collective growth of knowledge throughout the world; if you never share your findings, you have not done that.

2. Audiences may vary in their methodological sophistication. What you might present to your course instructor or the assessors for a scholarly journal could be quite different than what you might present to a community group. The former will understand quantitative measures of association, whereas the latter might be best served by a more generous discussion of association. It would not be enough, and perhaps not even appropriate, to present correlation coefficients to the group; the meaning of covariance must be described in a more accessible format. Matters such as tests of significance may be readily understood by one audience but require detailed explanation for another.

Audiences will also differ in the extent to which they are interested in how your research findings fit into the established literature in the field. Your instructor might be very interested in how you have managed to locate your findings within established disciplinary knowledge, but a community group may want to know only the specific results in the case.

If you are writing the same research report for more than one audience, appendices and footnotes can be used to convey the detail and complexity required by one audience but not another. Statistical or theoretical jargon is not necessarily bad; the issue is whether the vocabulary you are using is appropriate for your target audience.

3. When you are writing a research report, you should always tailor it to your audience. First, you should think about what the audience will be most interested in. Academics will be more interested in research methods and data analysis techniques, policy-makers will be most interested in implications and recommendations, and community groups will be most interested in what the data shows about their communities. Second, you should think about your audience’s technical sophistication. Researchers will likely be able to follow the details of complex methodologies such as statistical association, whereas community members may not know as much in that area. You should present your data in the way most likely to make sense to your audience.

4. Your research report should make at least two arguments. The first is the argument it wants to make about data you have studied. The first is an empirical argument, which can be either descriptive (about how the world is) or causal (about why the world works the way it does). This argument should be supported with your data that you collected. The second argument is an argument that your research is interesting and worth knowing about. This often can be thought of as an answer to the question, “so what?” Regardless of what you’re writing about, you have to make the case that it makes a meaningful contribution to the literature on the subject.

5. The abstract or executive summary and the introduction of a research report both serve to set the stage for reading the rest of the report. However, the abstract/executive summary is meant to be read alone, while the introduction is meant to be read as the start of the entire report. The introduction will generally not provide an overview of the research findings, but the abstract/executive summary must contain such an overview. While both serve to help the reader decide to read the article, the abstract covers more of the content, whereas the introduction focused on capturing the reader’s interest.

6. The primary objective of the introduction is to capture the reader’s interest. The introduction should explain the research topic and its relevance, present the basic research question or thesis statement, sketch in briefly the line of argument to be pursued, and explain the architecture of the report. A clear and emphatic thesis statement is particularly important. The intent is to introduce the reader to the research project, thereby establishing a context for what is to come and an enticement to read the entire report.

7. The importance of the literature review component is a function of the report’s audience. Reports written as course assignments or submissions to academic journals must include a literature review, although not necessarily labelled as such. The literature review serves a number of central functions. First, readers will expect to see how your research project grew out of the existing literature. You must demonstrate how your research fits into the larger body of literature but is still unique. Second, the literature review may provide the foundation for many of the empirical measures embedded in your report. Third, readers will want to know how your findings fit into the established knowledge in the field. Have you confirmed, reinforced, challenged, expanded, or contradicted existing knowledge? Have you pushed the boundaries of knowledge or altered what we thought we knew? All these questions are important and interesting.

8. Research reports are commonly constructed so that the data findings are first presented or described and then discussed. In the findings section, you present a picture of the data you collected and what the results were. Based on the content of your research and the audience you are writing for, you should determine the level of methodological sophistication appropriate to your audience, and then determine which findings should be chosen and emphasized, and which warrant detailed presentation in the form of quotations, tables, graphs, or figures.

In the discussion section, the author steps back from the details of the data presentation and tries to explore, usually in more general language, just what the empirical findings might suggest. You should tie your findings back to the literature review and back to the study’s guiding hypotheses. As a general rule, the discussion section should be accessible even to those readers who may not be able to follow the details of your statistical or qualitative analysis. Many readers will rely upon you to make sense of the data analysis for them; they may read the literature review and research design and then skip to the discussion.

9. The conclusions should take the reader back to the report’s introduction. Recap the research problem and the thesis statement. Remind the reader what you set out to do and then discuss to what extent those objectives have been accomplished. Remember, data seldom speak for themselves. You cannot assume that the reader will draw the same conclusions from the data analysis that you have drawn. Hence, you need to provide some interpretation of the findings.

10. The concluding section of the research report frequently contains recommendations for action, for the next steps that should be taken. If the report is aimed at the scholarly community, such recommendations might be suggestions for future research. If you could do the research again, what might you do differently, and why? Has your research closed off some doors for future research while opening others? If the report is aimed more at a non-academic audience, the recommendations are more likely to be policy recommendations than suggestions for future research, such as “In light of the findings of this report, we recommend that your organization take the following steps if it wants to accomplish X.” In both instances, the same question applies: “Are your findings actionable?”

11. The list of references at the end of the research report serves two primary functions. First, it provides specific bibliographical details for any theoretical or empirical citations in your report. It therefore allows your reader, should he or she be inclined to do so, to backtrack through the literature foundation for your research. Second, it provides readers with leads they can follow if your findings spark interest. Thus, the reference section is an essential complement to the literature review.

12. A literature review discusses the relevant literature on the research question that you are addressing. It summarizes, synthesizes, and organizes the existing state of knowledge in multiple areas that are related to your area of study. However, your literature review must be linked to a reference list that includes the appropriate citations to all of the literature discussed in the review, in addition to any other research referred to elsewhere in the research report. Because the full citations are provided, readers can follow up on parts of the literature review that they find interesting, either to replicate and validate your results or to build their own research projects.

13. In planning an oral report on a research process, you should begin by considering your audience. You should tailor the material you present to their interests and methodological sophistication, in order to ensure they will understand and be interested. You should also make sure to prepare a presentation that matches the amount of time you have to present. In your presentation, you should aim to keep your material as simple as possible, because too much complex information will confuse your audience. You should also follow the maxim ‘less is more,’ particularly about visual material or words on PowerPoint slides. Finally, you should make sure that there is a clear takeaway point at the end of your talk that audiences will remember.

14. Literature reviews tend to be quite abbreviated in reports that are not targeted at an academic or a scholarly audience. For example, a report prepared for the Ontario Liberal Party on gender differences in partisan support would be unlikely to include an extensive literature review. The client commissioning the report will be more interested in the current landscape than in what came before. Even here, however, a brief summary of existing knowledge could be useful. If nothing else, it provides some handle on change over time.

15. By asking the following questions, your skill as a critical reader may be improved:

- Is the methodology adequately explained? Would you be able to replicate the research if you had the resources and inclination to do so?

- Is there a clear thesis statement? Does the author provide a road map for the analysis to come?

- Is there a literature review? Is the research project given a context within social science research on the same or similar topics conducted to date?

- Does the argument proceed logically? Is there a connection between the evidence provided and the conclusions drawn?

- Are the conclusions overstated?

- Is the analysis balanced? Does the author deal with contradictory evidence and/or alternative explanations?

**Essay Questions**

1. A well-written research report is tailored to a specific audience. Because audiences differ in many respects, there is no single, generic format that can be used across all situations. For example, audiences will vary in their methodological sophistication. What you might present to your course instructor or the assessors for a scholarly journal could be quite different than what you might present to a community group. The former will understand quantitative measures of association, whereas the latter might be best served by a more general discussion of association. It would not be enough, and perhaps not even appropriate, to present correlation coefficients to the group; the meaning of covariance must be described in a more accessible format. Matters such as tests of significance may be readily understood by one audience but require detailed explanation for another. Audiences will also differ in the extent to which they are interested in how your research findings fit into the established literature in the field. Your instructor might be very interested in how you have managed to locate your findings within established disciplinary knowledge, but a community group may want to know only the specific results in the case.

Remembering your audience’s level of sophistication and particular research interests does not imply that you should “dumb down” the analysis. It simply means that effective communication entails knowing one’s audience and writing to it in a way that clearly transmits the material. Of course, this imperative becomes more difficult if you are writing the same research report for more than one audience. In this case, appendices and footnotes can be used to convey the detail and complexity required by one audience but not another. Keep in mind that statistical or theoretical jargon is not necessarily bad; the issue is whether the vocabulary you are using is appropriate for your target audience.

Research reports will frequently have secondary audiences that may play an important role in the dissemination of research findings. Research reports are seldom written explicitly for media outlets; when they are, they convey only a fraction of the information discussed in this chapter. However, reports written for other audiences regularly find their way into the media and through the media into broader dissemination. Off-the-cuff comments or humour directed at a specific audience may provide unfortunate grist for editorial comment or news coverage. Pleading that you were misquoted or that the comment was taken out of context will not get you off the hook. It makes sense, then, to keep the potential public audience in mind, even if it is not the primary or intended audience. Before finishing the final draft of the research report, read it as if you were encountering your comments in your local newspaper. Would you be pleased with the reporting?

2. A good research report is more than a collection of findings; it presents a coherent, well-structured, and thoughtful argument. Through the research report, the author is working to provide the reader with evidence that their argument is correct. The argument may be that a particular description of the political world is accurate (a descriptive argument), or that a particular explanation of a set of relationships or patterns in the political world is accurate (a causal argument). The author also has to make a second, often more implicit argument, that the research is important and relevant, not to mention worthy of the reader’s time and attention. As the author must achieve all of this within a limited space, they must be systematic in presenting a compelling research question that is situated within existing research and theory, an explicit thesis statement that proposes an answer to that research question, and the evidence that supports that claim.

3. The research design section of any research paper should provide enough information to make sure that the research methods are replicable and transmissible. If a researcher finds X through method Y, it should be possible for another researcher to come to the same conclusions if they follow the same method. This duplication means that the research method must be clearly identified in the research report, which is done through a detailed explication of the project’s research design.

If the research project included the collection of new data, the collection procedures should be described in detail. What ethical issues were encountered, and how were they addressed? Was sampling used? If so, what were the population, sampling frame, respondent selection procedures, possible sources of bias, and response rate? Were empirical measures constructed for theoretical concepts? If so, how were they constructed? What reliability and validity checks were used? It is not enough, for example, to say that levels of political apathy were higher among native-born British Columbians than they were among recent migrants to the province unless you indicate how political apathy was measured and how recent was defined.

The research design component should cover the study’s theoretical points of departure, the hypotheses used to frame the study, and the operationalization of key concepts. It may also provide an explanation for the types of data analysis employed. Perhaps the key thing to remember is that the research design is more than a description of what you did. It is an explanation and a justification as well. If readers are to have confidence in your findings and conclusions, they must first have confidence in your research design.

4. Students should consider the components of a research report outlined throughout the chapter and critique for completeness and efficacy.

5. *Students should outline some of the broad features of a literature review and then launch into the following discussion:*

Suppose you are interested in studying the decline of youth voting in Canadian elections. You might begin the literature review by examining what we know about turnout among youth, in Canada and elsewhere. Are you the first person who has ever observed and written about this topic or have others already examined it or some aspect of it? For just about any question you can imagine, the answer will be the latter—others have already observed it and perhaps tried to explain it.

Therefore, you can seek books and articles in which youth turnout has been examined. You will find that one of the best sources for information about other studies on the topic will be the references listed in the academic studies you read. In reviewing this material, you may find that the results are quite nuanced. Some researchers might focus on youth participation in a broad range of political activities—such as protesting, demonstrating, voting, becoming a candidate for office—whereas others will focus exclusively on voting. Part of the literature review might involve an examination of different definitions of the dependent variable, either youth political engagement or youth electoral engagement. The literature review typically highlights significant trends in the dependent variable and any differences in conceptual or operational definitions.

Your literature review will also need to examine different theories regarding a decline in youth engagement. What theories have other researchers used to examine this question, and how successful have they been in explaining the decline in youth voting? This part of the literature review may look at differences in the definition or measurement of independent variables. For example, there may be studies that point to a growth in political cynicism among youth. If so, how is cynicism defined and measured in these studies? Are there differences across the studies in the definition and measurement of cynicism and in the impact that cynicism has on voting?