**Activity Instructions:**

Empirical research writing in the social sciences is a genre of writing that might feel very different from what you’ve been taught in other courses. Importantly, there are patterns to this type of writing. In this activity you will work through the following questions as you read through a published political science article. Unless your instructor provides an alternative article to read, use your library resources to access the following article:

Valdini and Shortell (2016) “Women’s Representation in the Highest Court: A Comparative Analysis of the Appointment of Female Justices.” *Political Research Quarterly­*. Vol 69(4).

The goal of this activity is to help you become more familiar with the pieces of information (and the ordering of those pieces of information) typical of this genre of writing so that you can model your individual projects off the same “template.”

1. Skim through the article looking for how they labeled their sections and sub-sections. Record each section below (there are five). Skim each section (no need to read super closely, read to get the main point. For each section, briefly describe the main point?

|  |
| --- |
| **Section Name** |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

1. Read the abstract on the first page. There are four sentences. Copy and paste each sentence into the table below next to the main point/purpose of that sentence listed in the left column.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Point of the text** | **Text copied from the abstract** |
| One sentence motivates the project/tells why it is important |  |
| One sentence summarizes their question (in a statement format) and research method |  |
| Two simultaneously sentences summarize the results and their theory. |  |

(Hint: these are the four things that need to go into your abstracts for the final paper: motivation, question (either in a question or statement form), argument, and method. You would include findings, but you will not have any findings in your papers.)

1. Read the Introduction.
   1. How many paragraphs are in the intro?
   2. What is the main point/purpose of the first paragraph?
   3. What is the main point/purpose of the second paragraph?
   4. The authors’ “roadmap” (that is, the section at the end of the introduction that outlines the order of the rest of the paper ) here is subtle, but they have all the parts. Copy and paste the sentences from the second paragraph that accomplish the following roadmap-y goals.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Goal | Copy/pasted text |
| Two sentences summarizing their theoretical argument |  |
| Two sentences summarizing their methodology |  |
| One sentence summarizing their results |  |

1. How did they label the section in which they begin their literature review?
2. Read the first paragraph of the literature review.
   1. Is there consensus about the effect of selection institutions on the presence of women in high courts?
   2. Copy/paste the sentence that tells you whether or not there is consensus in the field.
   3. Copy and paste the authors’ use of the “Some have found…. Others have found” structure.
3. Look what the authors do with the first sentence of the second paragraph: After telling us that there is disagreement in the field, they offer a reason why results may be mixed.

What is that reason?

(*Importantly, their project addresses that reason they give for explaining the inconsistent results in previous literature.)*

1. Rather than having a literature review section and then a theory section, the authors chose to merge their literature review and theory sections in the section labeled “The Effect of the Selection Mechanism.” This is largely a style choice. Even so, the structure of their lit review/theory section is effective.

Below are summaries of the main points of each paragraph. Read through the “Effect of the Selection Mechanism” section, then copy/paste the paragraph summaries in the table directly below into the table titled “Organization” next to the corresponding paragraph number.

|  |
| --- |
| **Main point of each paragraph** |
| Summarize what we know (i.e., existing literature) about credit claiming, *broadly* (beyond the judicial context) |
| Narrow in on one way in which courts vary (visibility) |
| Explain why visibility is relevant to the selection of women judges (the ability to claim credit) |
| Broad review of existing literature on the role of selection mechanisms and the selection of women (this is the broader topic within which their specific question fits) |
| Summarize what we know about credit-claiming and the selection of women officials. |
| Describe the observable implications we would expect *if their theory is correct* |
| Explain why existing literature is split (variety among courts) and offer support for their explanation |
| Summarize their argument by describing how visibility and credit claiming can affect the selection of women judges. |

**Organization**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Paragraph Number** | **Main Point** |
| 1 |  |
| 2 |  |
| 3 |  |
| 4 |  |
| 5 |  |
| 6 |  |
| 7 |  |
| 8 |  |

1. Draw a path model of the authors’ argument. Label the independent and dependent variables.
2. The authors do not explicitly identify their hypothesis at the end of their theory section, but it is there (twice actually). Copy and paste one sentence (or both, if you want) that communicates their hypothesis.
3. The authors test their theory using two different methods. What are the two methods?
4. For the regression analysis, what is the dependent variable? What kind of variable is this? (Ratio, Interval, Ordinal, Nominal, or Dichotomous).
5. For the regression analysis, what is the **main** independent variable? What kind of variable is this (Ratio, Interval, Ordinal, Nominal, or Dichotomous).

(\*Note, the authors include several “control” variables, which we have not discussed. These variables are -- more or less-- alternative independent variables that the authors are not theorizing about but that might affect the dependent variable.)

1. The regression analysis identifies a relationship between the authors’ main independent variable and dependent variable, but the regression analysis does not directly test their mechanism (mediating variable). What do the authors do (in general) to test the mechanism?

Exercise Debrief:

This is a pretty typical empirical political science paper that demonstrates the patterned writing of this genre. The paper follows the steps we have discussed in class:

* 1. Motivation for the project
  2. What we already know
  3. What we don’t know
  4. How our project will help clarify what we don’t know
  5. What our argument is
  6. Research design
  7. Conclusion

There are **four** differences between this paper and what you will turn in at the end of the quarter.

1. They complete the research by collecting and analyzing data. You will not.
2. They merge their theory and lit review. You will be asked to separate the theory and lit review sections (or, if you prefer to develop your argument while you summarize existing knowledge, like the authors do here, you will *restate* your theory in the theory section.)
3. They do not include a path model of their theory. You will.
4. They do not specify their hypothesis explicitly. You will.

Think about your project. What part of the project (that you’ve done so far), do you think is the weakest?

What part of your project do you think is the strongest right now?

What is one question you have about the research design project?