

# “Elements”

## The 5 Vital Sections of Your Senior Project Paper

\*\*\*Your Senior Project paper must contain the following five elements. Each element should get an independent section, and these sections should be clearly marked by a header in centered, bold-faced type (below).

*Above the introduction heading, state your full research question in italics.*

### **Part I: Introduction**

- *Goal: Your intro should be short, succinct, and to the point. Only in rare circumstances should an introductory paragraph exceed half a page (ds)*
- Put your research into context: what is happening right now that spurred your research, or created an important angle for you to pursue? (not too much, more of this in part II).
- Why does your research matter? Why is your topic urgent, important, or vital to the world or scholarly community?
- **Thesis Statement:** answer your research question in one short, clear, succinct sentence.

### **Part II: Historical Context**

- *Goal: To make your research make sense in historical context (for example: you are researching gun control in the wake of multiple shootings and aggressive gun control legislation).*
- Provide brief but necessary background information on your subject/topic
- This section can vary from 1 – 3 paragraphs or so depending on the amount of context needed for your topic. *1.5 pgs max for honors*
- Do not get bogged down in giving tons and tons of context here – just the vitals and move on! If you go over a page here, it is too long.

### **Part III: Summary of Past Research**

- *Goal: To thoroughly address the primary arguments researchers have put forward regarding your topic.*
- Part III should be approximately 2 pages (ds). *3-5 for honors*
- There should be opposing arguments (if there aren't any you probably need to revise/reframe your research topic, or do some more quality research).
- Most or all of your main sources used for your research should be cited during this section.
- This section should draw out and explain the nature of the controversy or topic you are researching.
- You should not layout the organization of this section by source, but rather by argument. This means you shouldn't have a separate paragraph for each source. Instead, you should organize these sources into the *kinds* of arguments they are making and deal with those arguments in turn.

## Part IV: Findings+ Analysis

- *Goal: To present your findings to your audience, and share the results of your own research.*
- Briefly discuss your methodology in several paragraphs. HOW did you go about collecting your data? Were there any unique or interesting challenges associated with the research process? Explain.
- This section should be evidence-based, and draw on arguments presented in part III. Be sure to reference your data and sources (with citations) directly and repeatedly.
- Lay out your research findings clearly and concisely.
- This should be the bulk of your paper, 3-4 pages is about right for this section

“This is how other people’s research is conclusive and this is how your research is different”

\*\*\* Note: many of you writing this section will not connect with the above points because you did not do your own research or did not write a 'scientific' paper. **Didn't do your own research? Fear not.** In part 3, you presented multiple arguments and perspectives from your research. You did not place any value judgments on these arguments, only presented them. Now, your task is to analyze these arguments. They don't all agree, so tell us about the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments. By doing this, you will eventually conclude Part IV with your own argument, which will transition nicely to your Conclusion section.

For you, this section must:

- Address the major argumentative themes presented in Part 3
- Acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments: Say why certain arguments are stronger than others – where are the strong/weak points, what did/didn't the author consider in their studies
- After you have addressed the strengths and weaknesses of both arguments, you must address why you favor certain kinds of arguments/approaches/authors over others – you **MUST** justify your decision to weight one argument – what are the strengths of some arguments over others? What are the weak aspects of the other side? You must justify your claim in order for it to be true and believable in part 5.

Remember to consider the following as you write:

- Part IV is *your own* voice.
- If you need a lot of citations, you're probably not doing it right.
- Your reader should be able to resolve the differences in arguments presented in Part 3.
- You should have convinced your reader of your case.
- By the end, your argument should decisively emerge; your readers should agree.
- You should be ready to answer your research question in Part 5: Conclusion.

## Part V: Conclusions

- THIS IS NOT A CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH, it is a part of the body of your essay
- *Goal: Use the research presented above to draw meaningful conclusions about your research question in a convincing way.*
- This section should be 2-3 pages. 3-4 Honors
- Your question should be definitively answered in this section
- This section primarily will consist of YOUR independent analysis. Very little work from others (such as your sources) should be used in this section. If you are citing lots of sources in this section, it is a sure sign that your essay is lacking analysis.
- What does past research, your findings/interpretation of data have to say about your research question?
- What are the implications of your research and/or conclusions going forward?