

---

---

CHECK LIST FOR TERM PAPERS AND THESES

JAN HELMDAG

Doctoral researcher

Department of Political Science, University of Greifswald

Address: Baderstr. 6/7, 17489 Greifswald

Email: jan.helmdag@uni-greifswald.de, Phone: +49 3834 420 3173

---

---

## General remarks

The text at hand is a check list that should be used by students who want to author a quantitative empirical study in comparative politics. It is recommended to use the check list for assessing whether or not the work on a particular research question is feasible. Students who want to author either a term paper or a thesis should make use of the check list before seeking advice in the consultation hour or the colloquium of the Chair of Comparative Politics. Below, eleven aspects are discussed that should be included in a exposé or presentation.

---

## 1 Research question

*What is your research question and which causal relationship do you want to investigate within your paper?*

Your research question should be a genuine question, that has to be written-out and ends with a question mark. As a general rule of thumb, your research question should be simple and not include any conditions, because that almost always results in difficult research designs and sophisticated application of statistical methods.

*Note: Examples for research questions can be found at the bottom of the document.*

## 2 Research design

*Is your research design centered on describing the influence of an independent variable (x-centered) or does it focus on the comprehensive explanation of a phenomenon (y-centered)?*

In most cases, it is recommended that you choose a design that is x-centered, meaning that you concentrate on the explanation of why one certain independent variable is crucial in explaining the variance of outcomes of a dependent variable. In contrast, y-centered designs look at all possible independent variables that could influence outcomes in the dependent variable.

*Note: Y-centered approaches are not feasible for term papers and should only – if at all – be chosen by students authoring a master thesis.*

### 3 Relevance

*Why is it important to answer your research question – is it a question that gets frequently tackled by researchers or is there a possible research gap?*

This section should give a concise overview of the research field and the overall consensus. It also should be a genuine self-reflective treatise that explains the nature of your intent.

### 4 State of research

*Who has already worked on that particular research question? Is there a general dissent on the causal relationship and are there any contradictions that you identified? Are there certain aspects that researchers recommended on investigating, but haven't been investigated, yet?*

For this purpose, it is recommended that you compile a tabular overview of empirical studies and the cornerstones of their findings (sample, method, dependent variable[s], independent variable[s], short description of overall findings). As a general rule of thumb, the following number of empirical studies should be evaluated by each specific paper:

- **Undergraduate (bachelor)**, term paper: 8–10, thesis: 12–15
- **Graduate (master)**, term paper: 12–15, thesis: at least 25

### 5 Theory

*What is the theoretical basis for your research and which different explanatory approaches are there?*

Outline the theoretical basis of your argument. Formulate hypotheses that can be derived from your theory and can be empirically tested. Do not formulate hypotheses, that you will not (or cannot) test in your paper. If possible, try to visualise your assumed relationship between the variables mentioned in the hypotheses. Try not to formulate as many hypotheses as possible, but rather try to keep it simple (sometimes even one hypothesis can be sufficient).

### 6 Dependent variable

*Which dependent variable you want to use in your model?*

Briefly discuss whether your dependent variable captures an *outcome* or *output*, and whether it is manifest or latent. Describe which indicators can be used to measure the dependent variable and its operationalization. Name ready-made datasets that you can use or describe some (manageable) data gathering that can be conducted by you. Use descriptive statistics and plots that show the deviance/variance of your dependent variable.

### 7 Independent variables

*Which independent variables you want to use in your model?*

Describe which particular independent variable corresponds to each of your hypothesis. Again, describe which indicators can be used to measure the independent variables and how can they be operationalized. Furthermore, based on your theoretical considerations, discuss which control variables should be implemented into your model.

## 8 Sample of analysis

*What is your sample for analysis?*

Describe your sample regarding  $i$  (countries, governments, municipalities, individuals, etc.) and  $t$  (time period, point in time). Describe why do chose that particular sample and the advantages and disadvantages of investigating it.

*Note: As a general rule of thumb, your sample should be as big as possible, since you are conducting a quantitative empirical analysis using inferential statistics.*

## 9 Method

*What statistical method are you using?*

Describe the statistical method you are using for evaluating the hypotheses. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of that method. If you are using an uncommon method, then you should elaborate more on it.

## 10 Data sources

*What data sources are you using?*

Name the data sources you want to use and if these are openly accessible. If you are not sure how to access the required data, name a backup plan (or alternative operationalization) you want to proceed with.

## 11 Empirical results

*What are your empirical results? Which hypotheses can be accepted or rejected according those results? Are your findings in line with previous results of other researchers, or do they differ in some respects?*

It is expected from you that you extensively present your results with the help of tables and graphs. Since in most cases your results are regression results, do present them in the form that is commonly practiced. Also, try to present predicted values/probabilities and marginal effects that help in assessing the importance of certain independent variables.

*Note: This is by far the most important section on the check list and should be thoroughly discussed. It is most helpful to you if you can present results, since it makes supervision more expedient.*

---

## **Appendix: List of research questions**

*Note: The provided research questions below are exemplary ones that are suitable for supervision.*

1. How do social policies diffuse within the OECD?
2. How does economic policy and growth influence welfare policies?
3. What influence had the recent financial crisis on welfare state reforms?
4. What is the impact of trade unions and corporatism on unemployment replacement rates?
5. How do parties influence social policy reform?
6. Which institutional factors do prevent parties from implementing social policy reform?
7. What are driving factors of increases in female employment?
8. Does the generosity of social insurance influence turnout on elections?
9. Which countries do react more comprehensive on demands and needs created by new social risks?
10. To what extent can welfare policies create more gender equality?