General Paper Comments

Below are some paper-writing suggestions based on the rough drafts I graded:

* Strive for strong opening and concluding paragraphs that clearly state your thesis/argument. Try to grab the reader's attention and explain why she should care about your topic. Aim for specificity in stating your main point, and make sure it's an argument/thesis and not just a description. Work with the writing tutor on developing an argument. She is available six hours per week.

* Use subheadings to guide the reader through longer papers.

* Watch your verb tenses. Use the same verb tense consistently throughout the paper. (Past tense is usually best for events like elections and policy developments.)

* Tighten every sentence and cut out all unnecessary words. Use active not passive verbs.

* Break up long paragraphs by topic, and flesh out paragraphs with less than three sentences. Make sure each paragraph completes a point/subpoint that supports your argument/thesis.

* For those students researching a congressional race and a policy issue, don't introduce your policy issue too late in the paper. Integrate the policy issue up front with your analysis of the campaign.

* Cite class readings and lecture notes to bolster your analysis.

* Use a proper citation format in your bibliography (e.g. APA). (For a paper with lots of websites and newspaper cites rather than scholarly articles or books, footnotes usually work better than in-text citations.)

Good luck!

Jillian Dickert