Student Resources Worksheets

# Theses, Models, and Hypotheses (TMH) Worksheet

Because the thesis or model and hypothesis are so central to moving forward on your research paper, important to comprehending the work of other political scientists, and a great challenge for many students, this handout spends some time helping you better understand them. To help demystify the process of creating them, you will see various examples and have the opportunity to practice developing some on your own.

Very practically, this worksheet is also intended to be used in conjunction with the recipe at the end of Chapter 5 so that you can develop your thesis or your M&H section. I recommend that all students read and try to do virtually *all* of the exercises on these pages regardless of which type of research you are doing because I can guarantee that at some point or another, you will encounter the “other” type of work and you’ll want to be conversant in asserting and breaking down theses into constituent parts, as well as in stating models and appropriate hypotheses.

**Theses:**

Remember, I define the thesis as an answer to a research question that is contentious and nontrivial. It is a declaration or description with which knowledgeable people could disagree. A thesis guides your research, but for a research paper it is typically rather complicated, so you need to break the thesis down into its constituent parts.

Again, let’s take a look at Hannah’s thesis and its sub-points from Chapter 5:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thesis | Sub-points |
| “[T]he Court has generated social change by making incremental progress through independent, well-argued legal precedent [based on social science research], which has acted as a catalyst of action for social movements, legislation, and [the] generation of public support.” | **Eskridge**: Academic research, litigation strategies, and previous rulings influence the Supreme Court |
| **Epstein and Kobylka**: The Court rules in an incremental fashion (reacting to that environment) |
| **McCann**: Its decisions generate other actors to change their behavior, thus putting additional pressure on the justices |
| **Eskridge**: The Court reacts to these developments in *subsequent* rulings |
| ***Contrary to* Rosenberg**: Besides a few hard-core opponents, people generally support these social reforms, and they last. |

Here, we see Hannah thinking about the temporal process of social change using the Courts. She goes back to the school that she thinks is more accurate (Incremental Change) and takes pieces from each of the “big books” under that perspective, all of which she read for her class. She notes in her literature review that Eskridge, who came last, had the benefit of learning from the previous two works and that they were all arguing against Rosenberg.

This exercise makes Hannah a bit nervous because she can see that she has five subclaims to evaluate. She remembered the admonition to have a “goldilocks” number and five seems like too many. So, she takes the time to think more about what she has above, and she notices: her temporal focus will have her go back and forth between actors (advocates, the Court, and the opponents). How about if she took an actor-based look (and simplified the way she refers to them): The “ecosystem,” the Court (yes, also part of the environment, but the key actor whose role Hannah wants to isolate), and the opponents (those working to maintain JLWOP could also be in the ecosystem, but the way Hannah is thinking about them here is to show that in the end, they are demobilized).

So, in her seeking to simplify as well as to think conceptually (with a focus on actors), Hannah can arrive at:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thesis | Sub-points |
| “[T]he Court has generated social change by making incremental progress through independent, well-argued legal precedent [based on social science research], which has acted as a catalyst of action for social movements, legislation, and [the] generation of public support.” | Various advocates protest and provide research, pressure, legal reasoning, and legal strategies that call for change in the law. |
| The Court reacts positively and in an incremental fashion to the evidence, popular desires, and legal reasoning that changes are warranted. |
| Opponents to these changes (elites and citizens) are demobilized and accept the reform in social policy as legitimate. |

Thus, considering her claims carefully helped Hannah both simplify and, ironically, make her argument more conceptually sophisticated (i.e., simple sophistication). With this transformation of her subclaims, her organizing principle is no longer time but actors and their behaviors. Thus, Hannah leaves this thesis-writing process (after spiraling through) in better shape than she began.

Now, let’s take a look at other thesis statements from two highly influential works and see what clues we can get in breaking down the thesis into its sub-points. Robert D. Putnam is one of the most important political scientists today. In learning about plagiarism, paraphrases, drop-ins, and transcripts back in Chapter 3, we saw an excerpt from his 2015 book published by Simon & Shuster called *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. Let’s use this book to think about how to break down a thesis. In investigating whether the “American dream” has been lost, Putnam inquires whether opportunity for young people “from different social and economic backgrounds . . . [to] have roughly the same life chances” still exists, or if it is now gone, whether that development is relatively new (31–32). He answers that yes, the dream *is* in crisis because parental and social supports (private and public institutions) “no longer serve poor kids as well” (229).[[1]](#footnote-1) What if you had adopted a similar research question to Putnam, performed your literature review so that you found alternative viewpoints, but ultimately agreed with Putnam. Then, you would be proceeding with a similar thesis. But how might you break it down into its constituent parts? To start, we need to think through the logic of the argument by going back to the key source(s). (We saw Hannah take this step, too.) Not including his notes and index, Putnam has almost 300 pages of text. I can already hear you groaning. How are you going to subdivide this argument without rereading all that? Well, if this were a key source in your research paper, you would have notes on this book and a good summary in your AB. But still, trying to state your thesis carefully might show you that you don’t understand his arguments as well as you need. So, what can you do besides reread everything? Both his thesis and organizational structure give you clues. We know from the thesis that Putnam believes that parents and institutions, private and public, are failing the economically disadvantaged and, if we turn to his chapters, in between his introduction (called “The American Dream: Myths and Realities) and his conclusion (named “What Is to Be Done”)--notice both of them have substantive and not generic names--are his chapters: Families, Parenting, Schooling, Community. Hmmmmm. Given what we know about the argument, what do you think these chapters are? Well, these are the supports (family and social) that serve the privileged well and the poor badly. So, if you wanted to take his argument as your guide, you could break down the argument this way (if you also knew the key content from each of the chapters):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thesis | Sub-points (thinking through thesis and chapter titles and arguments) |
| The American dream is in crisis because both **family and social** **supports are failing the poor**. | **Families** fail poor kids because they are less likely to be stable and have two adults |
| **Families** of poor kids are themselves often troubled or disadvantaged; therefore, these parents fail their children because they either cannot or do not give children the support or the experiences to help them succeed. |
| **Schools** fail poor kids because those in economically segregated schools have much lower academic outcomes (test scores, completion rates, college attendance) than their privileged counterparts |
| **Communities** fail poor kids. With class-based housing segregation, the poor live in neighborhoods of predominantly impoverished people. These areas lack churches with their various support structures, libraries, community centers, and other recreational facilities. In addition, the communities are dangerous; crime and drugs are rampant. |

You might complain, “but Putnam started with a simple statement of his argument; why would I want to complicate it with all these sub-points?” The answer is that his simple statement is based on these four points, and you need them all to evaluate this argument. Now, you could say that investigating all four of these components is beyond the scope of your paper (what you can manage in a semester), and make an argument that you would still have a worthwhile study by investigating two of them. If your professor agrees with the pared down analysis, great. Go forward. Still, before you eliminate some zones of the argument, be sure you understand precisely what your school is saying and how much of it is useful to you. Later you can substantiate what is reasonable for you to study based on the constraints of your project (and with your instructor’s approval).

Lastly, let’s take a look at a work by one of my favorite scholars in IR, Cynthia Enloe. She is known for using extremely accessible language but making sophisticated arguments that many students often have trouble understanding in their entirety. I think the reason for that difficulty is that her theses are based on complex concepts that have to be unpacked and understood. Take this central contention from the 2016 edition of her University of California Press book called *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link*:

“Today’s world is remarkable for its level of globalized militarism . . . [, and there are] gendered dynamics behind the globalization of militaristic ideas and practices.”

Perhaps students have trouble identifying that central argument of the book because, in addition to dealing with difficult concepts, the contention is spread out over two pages (1, 2) and the two parts of it are separated by five paragraphs of text. But a careful reader would be expecting a multipart thesis because of the book’s title. Notice it; Enloe names globalization, militarism, and feminists. Here, globalization and militarism are the “what” and feminists are the “who” who see gendered dynamics, the final “what.” To be clear, Enloe is not arguing that feminists are acting in global affairs to create more globalized militarism. No, they are the scholars advancing one school of thought (like Hannah’s Incremental Progress approach). Students still have to discover who the actors are that are creating gendered, globalized, and militarized politics. Interestingly, for Enloe, who is responsible for this outcome (gendered, globalized militarism), this does not seem to be a central concern, but showing that feminists perceive these developments while other scholars don’t is part of the thesis. So, we can identify the subparts of this thesis even without reading the book and being acquainted with Enloe’s precise definitions of these terms:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thesis | Sub-points (thinking through thesis and book title) |
| “Today’s world is remarkable for its level of globalized militarism . . . [, and there are] gendered dynamics behind the globalization of militaristic ideas and practices.” | **Militarism** today is **globalized** |
| The **level** of globalized militarism today is remarkable |
| **Gendered dynamics** are behind this globalized militarism |
| **Feminists** understand these interconnected processes, but other experts miss them and that is why most scholars and policy makers do not discuss or remedy them. |

Maybe after looking at this chart, you are thinking, “Big deal. You haven’t told us anything much because you are simply repeating parts of the thesis.” *Au contraire!* In making my box, I have highlighted the distinct parts of the thesis, all of which you will have to be prepared to evaluate. Now, of course, these sub-points are still very complex. Understanding each element and convincing a reader that these are “right” will require the author to define militarism, globalization, gendered dynamics, and feminism. In addition, the author will have to show that the “real world” provides evidence for this argument. My point here in demonstrating this breakdown is to show you that you can find a thesis and title and figure out constituent parts of the argument. If this were the thesis of your paper, you would then be looking to assess (by looking at evidence) each of these sub-points in the body of the paper.

Now it is your turn. If you are working from a thesis, can you use and or mimic the techniques shown here to map out your thesis and your subparts? Remember,

1. Be mindful of your thesis and think through its meaning *before you start.*
2. Consult your most influential source(s) for help as you proceed, paying attention to titles and section or chapter headings as you explore the full meaning.
3. To help you identify the subparts, consider any and all of the below as you ponder your thesis:
   1. the actors and behaviors asserted or the “who” and the “what”
   2. the concepts identified as important
   3. if you haven’t had success with (a) or (b), try to identify the temporal assertions (what happens first, second, third, etc.)
   4. ifyou have only a few subparts, consider whether you want to find evidence to undermine counterarguments from alternative answers to your question.
   5. if you have too many subparts, consider ways to group elements together. Look for actors or concepts.
4. Do your best to fill in the chart below. Note that this process will take time. Spend 15–30 min. at first. If you are not making progress, take a break and come back. Read the advice in the recipe for TMH at the end of Chapter 5. When you return to make progress, remind yourself of your research question and your thesis answer. Think independently about the meanings of that answer. Then, peruse your most influential work again for insight and spend another 15–30 min. on your chart below. If you make no progress, now consult your instructor.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Thesis | Sub-points (thinking through thesis, title, headings) |
|  | 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |
| 4. Counter argument to take on? |

*Add or subtract rows as needed, but remember to seek a “just right” number, not too few or many.*

**Models and Hypotheses:**

Some students have trouble constructing a model and a hypothesis. Remember, the model should **link concepts** (often a cause and an effect) and each concept should be able to **take on different values**. The hypothesis should tell the reader something about the way that the concepts are related. The hypothesis is where you can plug in values to show the nature of the relationship. For instance, in an earlier and another very influential work, *Making Democracy Work*, Robert Putnam advanced the following model:

**Level of 🡪 “Robustness”**

**Social Capital of Democracy**

I want you to notice a few things here: First, look how this model appears on the typed page (and this is how the models in the sample papers look too). The concepts are lined up on each side of the arrow. There are blank lines around the model. Second, besides these aesthetics, notice that I haven’t defined my concepts here. Anyone who has read the literature review of a paper with that model should know what “social capital” and “democracy” are. In the Research Design, the writer will also discuss what these concepts are in great detail. Third, notice there is some kind of word or phrase to connote a level or a quality that modifies the big concepts.

Now, what would Putnam’s hypothesis on democratization be?

*The more social capital a society has, the more robust will be its democracy.* (That also means that the less social capital a society has, the less robust will be its democracy.) See how the hypothesis suggests values: ***high*** social capital is linked with a ***very*** robust democracy?

Let’s turn next to Scott Sagan who has an older (1995) but still highly relevant Literature Review article in *International Security* that asks “Why States Develop Nuclear Weapons.” Although he puts forth three approaches, we will concentrate here on his security model. The outcome he is investigating is nuclear proliferation and the cause identified in this model is security threats. We can conceive of the actual model like this:

**Level of Material Level of Nuclear**

**Threat to a 🡪 Proliferation**

**State’s Security in That State**

The hypothesis that follows from this model is *the greater the material threat to a state’s security, the greater the nuclear weapons production that that state will engage in.* (In other words, we’d expect nonnuclear states to build nuclear weapons as the security threats they faced increased to high levels, and we’d expect nuclear states to build more weapons as their security threats increased. When threats decreased, we’d expect states not to build (or not build as many) weapons. Again, can you see how the values (“great threat,” “great production” slip into the hypothesis?)

Imagine if Gabriela from our textbook was mulling over this model and hypothesis pair, derived from Alan Abramowitz’s argument, as she was trying to decide how to proceed with her research:

**Level of Citizen 🡪 Level of**

**Engagement Polarization**

The corresponding hypothesis for this model would be *the greater the level of citizen engagement, the greater the level of polarization*.

The points here are to see how models lead to hypotheses and how the best model and hypothesis pairings use the same language. When you find that they don’t, adjust the terminology so that the words are consistent across the model and hypothesis and best communicate what appears logically true, given the analysis you have done.

Below are some opportunities for you to practice the skill of writing models and hypotheses. Suppose you had noticed that the states that had been economically most successful, transforming from underdeveloped to developed, in the post–World War II era seemed to be those that combined a “smart” strategy for economic development with a “strong action” against any domestic critics. [Think here of the “Asian Tigers.”] If I have provided the model below, what would be the corresponding hypothesis?

**Type of Strategy for**

**Economic Development**

* **Level of Economic Development**

**Level of State Suppression**

**of Political Opposition**

* **Hypothesis**:
* **Variable Values:** In addition, think about what types of values your variables might take on? Let me help you get started. The information present prior to the model gives you clues about the values. For the first independent variable, the hypothesis says “smart” strategies, which we might contrast with “not-so-smart” if we want to have a discrete (category) variable. But we could also think of “smartness” on a continuum and think about most smart to least smart (with many options in between). Ultimately, you will make decisions about the types of variables when you continue with your research design, but being aware of the possibilities is useful here.

What about working the other way? If I start with a hypothesis, can you write the model? Imagine you were puzzling over why the United States had not instituted higher fuel efficiency ratings for cars, and you decided that strong interest groups--like the oil and auto industries--had exerted effective pressure. Your hypothesis might be: *the greater the influence of domestic constituency or interest group over political leaders, the more likely that that group’s preferred policies will be enacted by that state***.** What would the corresponding model be?

* **Model**:
* **Variable Values:**

Or what would you do with the following hypothesis: *The more worried China is about its reputation as a “good state” in the international arena and the more publicity that domestic and international human rights activists gain for their cause to promote human rights, the more likely China is to implement better human rights policies.*

* **Model**:
* **Variable Values:**

**In closing,** if you are working with a causal or correlational thesis, write the **two** models ***and*** corresponding hypotheses for two arguments that you have encountered in your research for your paper. In other words, write a model and hypothesis for your preferred school *and*, for practice, write a pair for your second most preferred school:

At this point you should have a good command of writing theses and thinking through their sub-points, as well as practice developing good model and hypothesis pairings. I also hope that by the time you have completed this worksheet, you have either a thesis and sub-points or a model and hypothesis that you will use for writing your M&H section. To finish writing that section, consult the recipe at the end of Chapter 5. Once you are set with these fundamentals, you are ready to continue.

1. Putnam is actually asserting a hypothesis, saying that the lower the quality of family and social supports available to a person, the lower the life chances of that individual. For our purposes here, we will imagine that a student wanted to illustrate one aspect of his argument and pursued a thesis focusing on the conditions that disadvantage the poor. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)