**Front End**

*SOC 4881 – Population Studies Research Practicum*

**DUE**

*February 25*

**INSTRUCTIONS**

Complete this assignment in your group. Be sure to agree---early---on a division of labor within the group; make sure everyone has a meaningful role and has a way to learn from the assignment. It might be a good idea to meet as a group (in person or virtually) to make a plan.

Your task is to write the front end of your research paper. As we’ve discussed in class, the goals of the front end are to:

1. Introduce the general research topic,
2. State the specific research questions,
3. Critically review previous research, and
4. Make a theoretical argument and formulate hypotheses.

Your front end should be approximately 3,000 words (not counting the title page and references). I suggest you structure the front end as follows and spend about this many words on each part:

1. Title page (no word limit; just includes title, authors, and date)
2. Introduction of general research topic (~300 words)
3. Statement of specific research questions (~100 words)
4. Critical review of previous literature (~1,500 words)
5. Theoretical argument and hypotheses (~1,000 words)
6. Wrap up / Summary of questions, argument, contributions (~100 words)
7. Reference list (no word limit)

Attached below is a (silly and) way too short example of an entire front end; its purpose is to give you a sense of what each of the sections above contributes to the overall front end.

After a reader finishes reading the front end, they should know exactly what your topic and specific research questions are; why the topic/questions are practically and theoretically important; how your new research improves upon prior research; and your theoretical-informed expectations/hypotheses about what you will find. Basically, your goal is to motivate the reader! Make them care about your topic, and convince them that your results will be both practically and theoretically important. Leave them eager to read the rest of the paper!

Of course, the front end should be clearly and logically written. The reader should never have to wonder where you are going with your argument or why they are reading certain passages. I strongly suggest you look closely at the front end of several published papers for examples; don’t focus on their substance as much as on their structure, logical flow, and organization.

Critically reviewing the literature is often the most challenging and time-intensive part of writing a front end. Below are some good online resources for writing a good critical review:

1. "[Learn how to write a review of literature](https://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/ReviewofLiterature.html)"
2. "[Guidelines for writing a literature review](http://www.duluth.umn.edu/~hrallis/guides/researching/litreview.html)"
3. "[Literature Review](http://info.wlu.edu/literature_review/literature_review.html)"

Remember, you are not just summarizing articles in a literature review! You are giving a high-level critical overview of the state of the existing research literature. You are telling the reader what we already know, and what we don’t know; what prior research has done well, but also what has not been done well; you are acknowledging those who came before you, but also explicitly saying how/why what you are doing in your new research improves upon and/or expands the state of knowledge.

**GRADING**

This assignment is worth 8 points. Everyone in the group will receive the same score unless I receive (and verify) information that some in the group deserve more/less than others in the group. In those instances, I will communicate with everyone in the group to come to a fair resolution.

To receive full credit, the front end should be about 3,000 words and should include (1) a title page; (2) an introduction of the general research topic; (3) a statement of the specific research questions; (4) a critical review of previous literature; (5) a theoretical argument and hypotheses; (6) a short wrap up or summary of the questions, argument, and contributions; and (7) a reference list. Also: After reading the front end, a reader should know exactly what your topic and specific research questions are; why the topic/questions are practically and theoretically important; how your new research improves upon prior research; and your theoretical-informed expectations/hypotheses about what you will find. If these are unclear, you will not get full credit.

Points will be deducted if the front end is not clearly written or logically constructed.

Assignments turned in late will receive half credit. Assignments should be emailed to me (in Word format) at [warre046@umn.edu](mailto:warre046@umn.edu).

**SILLY EXAMPLE OF A FRONT END**

*Title Page*

The Effects of Dog Ownership on Health

Rob Warren

January 15, 2019

*Introduction of General Topic*

Millions of Americans own dogs (Smith 2017), but we rarely think about the positive and/or negative consequences they may have for their owners’ health. Compared to expensive treatment options for major medical conditions, dog ownership may be a cost-effective way to improve public health. In this paper, we assess the effect of dog ownership on several important health outcomes among Americans. We also ask how the effects of dog ownership may vary depending on where people live and what kind of dog they have. Specifically, we ask:

*Research Questions*

1. Do people who own dogs have lower rates of obesity and fewer stress-related ailments than otherwise similar people who do not own dogs?
2. Do the effects of dog ownership depend on whether you live in the city or the country?
3. Do the effects of dog ownership depend on whether people own large or small dogs?

*Critical Review of Literature*

There is generally very little empirical evidence about the effects of dog ownership on major health conditions like obesity and stress-related ailments. The few studies on this topic are from small-scale studies of non-representative samples (e.g., Johnson 2015) and tend to only focus on whether petting a dog makes people feel relaxed (Wolf 2012). Wolf’s (2012) study is perhaps the most definitive to date, but is based on a non-representative sample of 21 college students in a sociology course in Arkansas. Although Wolf’s (2012) findings are instructive, the fact that the author failed to measure how relaxed people were *before* petting a dog calls his findings into question. Perhaps their relaxation levels actually went down?

No research, to our knowledge, has considered whether the effect of dog ownership on health depends on things like where people live or what kind of dog they have. We know that rates of urban dog ownership are higher than rates of rural dog ownership (Smith 2017), and we know that people who own poodles tend to live much longer than people who own other kinds of dogs (Johnson 2015); whether poodle owners live longer because of their dogs or because of their good taste is an unresolved question.

*Theoretical Argument / Hypotheses*

There is good reason to suppose that dog owners are healthier, especially with respect to outcomes like obesity and stress-related ailments. For one thing, dog owners have to walk their dogs---giving them twice-a-day exercise they might not otherwise get. For another, there is evidence that dogs induce relaxation (Wolf 2012; Johnson 2015) and that relaxation has health benefits (Murphy 2010).

Hypothesis 1: Dog owners will have lower rates of obesity and stress-related illnesses than people who do not own dogs.

However, the health benefits of dog ownership may not be the same for everyone. People who live in cities may walk their dogs regularly and enjoy resulting health benefits, but people in rural areas tend to just let their dogs outside.

Hypothesis 2: Dog ownership will have a larger health benefit in urban areas as compared to rural areas.

Furthermore, the health benefits of dog ownership may depend on what type of dog people own. Small “yappy” dogs stress people out (Wolf 2012), whereas bigger mellow dogs do not.

Hypothesis 3: The health payoff to dog ownership will be greater for people the more mellow their dog is.

*Wrap Up / Summary*

Although public health costs have skyrocketed in recent decades, and despite the fact that millions of Americans own dogs, we know very little---at least from scientifically sound research---about the impact of dog ownership on health. Our research will provide innovative and rigorous new evidence about the conditions under which something as simple and inexpensive as dog ownership might bring about positive effects on obesity and stress-related ailments.

*References*

Johnson, Sally. 2015. “Do the students in my class think dogs are good for their health?” *Journal of Pointless Research* 14: 201-345.

Murphy, Eric. 2010. “Being relaxed is good for you.” *Journal of Chillin’* 1: 1-17.

Smith, Sally. 2017. *Rates of Dog Ownership in America*. Boston: Hound Club Press.

Wolf, B.B. 2012. “Does petting a dog make you feel relaxed?” *Journal of Pointless Research* 11: 102-103.