

Designed for a one-quarter program – containing elements of both the longer preliminary statement and the research prospectus

## THE PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

The Preliminary Statement is designed to aid you in your initial efforts to focus and organize your research and in clarifying your thesis, framework, operating questions, and research strategies. It is a five-to-six page document that provides an early version of your research project, its guiding question, thesis or hypothesis, and links it to the themes of the program. The first seeds of your final paper should be found in this statement. It is designed to provide your preliminary focus and set the direction for your further investigations.

To do this, you need to address the following questions: What is your basic question or argument and why is it important to understanding one or more of the broad issues covered in this program? Why is it important to you as a group? Be sure to thoroughly discuss this question among yourselves to make sure that each group member has a shared understanding of the purpose and direction of your proposed research. This is critical in avoiding later confusion and misunderstanding.

Your answers to these questions should be the basis for a carefully written first paragraph of your Preliminary Statement. Remember that this statement is “preliminary,” and your research will deepen and your focus will sharpen (perhaps shift) as you proceed. It is important now, however, to provide as much information as you can in this document. The more ideas, information, focus and bibliography you provide at this state will give your group some shared data and assumptions upon which to proceed and will help us in seeing that you are well launched.

The goal of this statement is to demonstrate clearly that (a) it is possible for you to do a substantial piece of research on this topic, (b) it will answer or fully explore the questions you have formulated, and (c) it is possible to complete within the time available to you. Obviously, you can only develop a good Preliminary Statement when you have actually done a significant part of the research involved for the project. In particular, you must be able to show specifically that the basic components you need for a logical analysis are available in key sources; and the best way to do so is by actually drawing on some of them to illustrate how they will serve your needs. The Preliminary Statement is thus in part an intellectual justification for, and in part a mini version of, your project.

Your Preliminary Statement should be comprised of seven sections as described below and contain as many thoughts as you can muster. Be as precise and focused as you can in providing information to the following:

- I. TOPIC: State the general topic which your paper will explore and give the dates which mark the time span of your investigation, indicating the *significance* of your periodization.
- II. QUESTION OR THESIS: State your central question or thesis as succinctly as you can. The focusing this requires should enable you to make your topic doable by selecting a particular aspect of it and taking an initial stance on that aspect.

Remember that the question or thesis sets the agenda for your entire project; it guides you into your subject, so its wording must in some way imply the range of issues you want to explore. Contrary to popular belief, you do not need to have a thesis. A carefully worded and well-focused question is often a more interesting point of departure.

- III. SECONDARY QUESTIONS: List all the secondary questions you will need to address in order to explore your central question or thesis. These should be questions which must be discussed or answered in order to sufficiently investigate your hypothesis. It often turns out that the real thesis and focus are found in one of the “secondary” questions. Begin these questions with words such as who, what, when, where, why, and how.
- IV. OUTLINE: This section should be a preliminary outline for your paper. Think about sections II and III above. The outline should tell the reader what you intend to do and how you will do it, what points you will demonstrate and how. Don’t feel obligated to use roman numerals, lettered sub-headings, etc. It may help you to first write in a form that lets you think on paper and then arrange your thoughts a bit more formally in an organized and logical manner.
- V. RESEARCH STRATEGY: Identify the major steps you will need to undertake to complete your research. You should identify what data you will be looking for; e.g., library data, statistical data, interview data. Who will be responsible for what? What will be the division of labor within your research group?
- V. INITIAL READINGS: Indicate the shared reading all members of your group will do in order to establish a common background and agreed-upon research direction.
- VI. ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY: List all the sources you have

identified for your research so far – one section for books, one for journal articles, one for internet sources, and one for other sources. *Use proper bibliographic form* and provide a brief annotation of what each source is about.

YOUR PRELIMINARY STATEMENT IS DUE XXXXXX

Some General Principles and Specifications:

1. Demonstrate your ability/facility at interdisciplinary thinking and research. Your research should also reflect your ability to use a variety of data sources.
2. Provide an in-depth exploration and analysis of your thesis rather than a general survey of it.
3. Treat your thesis in historical perspective and, where it makes sense, according to a particular historiographical methodology.
4. Define and specify your uses of constructs, concepts, and assumptions; use them consistently throughout your argument; clarify any modifications you make in your definitions, constructs, etc. as you go along.
5. Be as clear as possible about cause-and-effect relationships. Watch your sentence construction for unintended implied causality.
6. Document all material and resources you consider with the full bibliographic citation so that you will be able to cite them appropriately in your paper. A brief annotation of every source will help you remember its contents and potential value to your work.
7. Give careful thought to the paper's title.
8. Invest yourself in this project and try to have some fun in doing it.