



**ISI** | **International Security  
and  
Intelligence Programme**

Guidelines for ISI Essay Projects

**CSi** The Cambridge Security Initiative &  
The Department of War Studies, King's College London

# ISI Projects

- What is your essay topic?
- What got you interested in your essay topic?
- What is your academic or professional background?
- Have you had any personal/professional experience relevant to your essay topic? Or is this just a nagging intellectual itch?
- Are you preparing for an undergraduate thesis or MA or other advanced study?

# Research Question & Thesis

- What is a good research question?
- How does it differ from a thesis?
- How do I formulate a research question that is assumption and bias free?
- How to approach a topic from a methods perspective?
- Is your essay question answerable? Can we actually know/find out the answer? (Ontology)
- Can you reasonably answer this question within the given timeframe, word count and with the sources available to you? (Epistemology)

# Research questions

## Iffy questions

- How important was intelligence in the Second World War?
- What is the current state of the relationship between the North Korean intelligence service and the leadership?

## Better questions

- Was good intelligence the decisive factor in the success of Operation Overlord?
- Have the structural reforms to the US intelligence community since 9/11 yielded a more effective CT organisation?

# Types of research question

- ‘Why’?
  - E.g. why did X happen / what explains X / what caused X? OR did X cause Y / does X explain Y? Will need to explain on what basis making causal links
- ‘To what extent’?
  - E.g. to what extent has X happened / did X happen? Asking about amplitude / the amount that something has happened (in relative or absolute terms): will need to explain on what basis measuring ‘amount’
  - E.g. ‘to what extent has X cooperated with Y?’
  - Can combine with a why question – what explains the trend you identify?
- ‘How effective’?
  - E.g. how effective has X been / was X? Will need to explain on what basis measuring ‘effectiveness’
  - Can combine with a why question: what explains this effectiveness?
- ‘With what impact’?
  - E.g. what impact did X have on Y? Similar to a why question, but can also combine with a why question: what explains this impact?

# Sources and Methodology

- What is ‘research methodology’?
- What sources can you use?
- Where will you find them?
- Articles in the journals **Intelligence and National Security (INS)** and **International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence (IJIC)** are available through the Library’s E-Journal access.
- Articles from CIA’s journal ‘**Studies in Intelligence**’ (CIA/Studies) are available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/index.html>.
- **CREST: 25-Year Program Archive** is available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/collection/crest-25-year-program-archive>
- **The Foreign and Commonwealth Office** documents can be found at: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110505102943/http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/our-history/historical-publications/documents-british-policy/>.

# Podcasts

- Spycast, <https://www.spymuseum.org/multimedia/spycast/>
- Cold War Conversations, <https://coldwarconversations.com/>
- War on the Rocks Podcasts, <https://warontherocks.com/podcasts/>
- Intelligence Matters Podcast,  
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/intelligence-matters-a-cbs-news-original-national-security-podcast/>

# Literature Review

- Provides a survey and summary of dominant/authoritative concepts/arguments directly linked to the problem you are addressing
- Assesses strengths and weaknesses of this debate
- Identifies gaps & clashes in the research and uses this to justify the essay argument
- Shorter literature reviews usually have around 10 or less cited studies. They are often organised by AUTHOR, but THEMATIC organisation is preferable
- **Why do we need a literature review?**
  - Helps spot patterns in literature
  - Enables to situate our main argument within the wider literature – schools of thought?
  - And thus provide context for our argument which helps the reader understand its relevance and relationship to other arguments in the field or to a particular problem



# Essay structure

- **Introduction**

- What is the problem?
- Summary of **argument**/s and how this relates to the essay title
- Definitions of key/ambivalent terms
- Literature review – what schools of thought are out there and where do you fit into the literature?

- **Main essay body**

- Sub-Argument #1
- Sub-Argument #2
- Sub-Argument #3 (*the number of sub-arguments depends on the breadth of your essay and word count*)

- **Conclusion** – summarise what you **argued** and how this relates to/answers the essay question