

## Using Headings and Subheadings in Social Science Writing

For longer papers (>10 pages), it may be helpful to break the text into sections in order to avoid unnecessarily strained transition sentences. Headings can help by keep the reader informed about where they are in the paper: i.e., headings and subheadings are like directions or signposts that orient the reader. They may also act as organizing structures for the writer, however: you can always start with headings that you later remove. Doing so may help you stay on topic and provides a more clear structure for the paper in the initial rough draft.

Headings can be used in papers of most length (but you really don't need them for papers under 10 pages). Subheadings are usually reserved for shorter sections within a larger section. So if your paper has three main points, but the first point has three main subpoints, you might use subheadings for the subpoints under main point 1.

### 1. Headings should correlate to the preview of the paper.

Headings only help organize the paper if they correspond to the preview that has explained how the paper is organized. The preview usually consists of a few sentences after the thesis statement that explains how you will organize the paper (the preview is the “roadmap”; the headings and subheadings are the “signposts” you encounter along the way).

Thus, if the preview reads: “To support this argument I will first consider the background of Japanese military policy, and then discuss how the external security environment influences that policy. Finally, I will speculate about what this means for Japanese military policy in the future: I foresee three possible outcomes.” Subheadings for the ‘three possible outcomes’ would only be necessary if each of them required substantial elaboration (a page or more for each). Then the headings and subheadings should look something like...

#### **Background of Japanese Military Policy**

#### **External Environment and Japanese Military Policy**

#### **Future of Japanese Military Policy**

- 1) **Outcome 1**
- 2) **Outcome 2**
- 3) **Outcome 3**

**2. Formatting of headings and subheadings should remain simple.** Don't introduce new fonts or other jazzy tricks. Headings can be bolded or italicized (be consistent, and there is no need to do both). There is no hard and fast rule regarding left justified or centered (it depends on what kind of writing you are doing), but whatever you do should be consistent.

Usually, papers require only one level of headings. These headings are generally set apart from the previous paragraph using an extra line (or lines, depending on the spacing of the paper overall). The

following paragraph should stay in the same spacing pattern as the overall paper. That is, use an extra return/”enter” between the end of a paragraph and a heading, and then just one space between the heading and the paragraph that begins that section

...Finally, I will speculate about what this means for Japanese military policy in the future: I foresee three possible outcomes: outcome 1, outcome 2, and outcome 3.

### **Background of Japanese Military Policy [heading]**

To properly understand the current policies of the Japanese military, we must first quickly review the role of the Japanese military in Japanese society over the past century.

If you do need subheadings, be sure to differentiate these from the headings, i.e. by bolding one and italicizing the other. Also, subheadings are not generally in a larger font than the text.

*The Japanese Empire: Rise of an Industrial Japanese Military (1868-1945) [subheading with this section]*

Although the Japanese Empire slowly modernized the military beginning in 18XX, it was only in 19XX that military industrialization reached full-stride.