

## **Making Hypotheses**

### **Step 1: Find a puzzle**

- Not a topic, but a question/puzzle/dilemma

- Where do you look for a puzzle?

\* When you read about a topic, pay attention to:

- Questions that are persistently asked.
- Assumptions that are made, but not explained.
- Moments when the logic doesn't seem clear.

*Ask yourself why the logic isn't clear, or why the statements are confusing. Do they not make sense given what the author has previously said? Are they inconsistent with information you have read elsewhere?*

- The evidence the author provides to make his/her case.

*Is the author making a large claim based on one example/case?*

*Do you think you could do a better job by looking at other cases?*

\* At first, look for summary articles that examine an entire literature, multi-book book reviews, and introductory chapters to edited volumes

### **Step 2: Make your best guess...create a hypothesis**

- A hypothesis is a guess about the cause of the differences, anomaly, or puzzle you want to explain.

- Can you phrase it in a way that can be tested?

\* Be specific. For example, if you think you want to explain the "strength of opposition" what do you mean? The number of people in the streets protesting? Votes against the government's platform in parliament? The percentage of public opinion against the regime? A combination of these? etc.

\* What is the dependent variable and what is/are the dependent variable/s?

Dependent variable: thing you want to explain

Independent Variable: thing/s you think explain it.

- Is the relationship you predict in your hypothesis clear? Don't say "A effects B", say **how** it does.

Make a strong statement; you can worry about the exceptions later. For example:

- A causes B (direct relationship)
- A causes C which causes B (indirect)
- A makes B more likely
- A makes B less likely.

**Step 3: Identify potential rival hypotheses**

- Look at the literature more closely to see what other authors say is the cause/explanation for your puzzle. (You may need to revise your hypo in response.)
- Sometimes authors do not clearly state their argument, so you may need to take some time to find it.

**Step 4: Think of evidence you would need to decide which of all the contending explanations is best. This is how you develop your test.**

- First think of all the *observable implications* of your hypothesis.  
“If my hypothesis is true, I expect to see ..., but I would not expect to see this...”

- \* Brainstorm

- \* Then, think of what data you would need to in order to demonstrate that one or more of these implications can be observed in the world?

- Think of all the *observable implications* of the rival explanations.  
“If this hypothesis is true, I expect to see ..., but I would not expect to see this...”

- \* Then, think of what data you would need to in order to demonstrate that one or more of these implications can be observed in the world.

- This is where it is crucial to be specific about your terms and to think carefully about what you mean. Ex. I suspect that as Islamist threats increase, states try to seek greater religious legitimacy. To figure out what evidence I would need to support my claim/hypothesis, I would first need to decide what I mean by “religious legitimacy” and “Islamist threat”. Can these terms be reduced to mean something else that is more specific, without changing the object of study? What could I observe that would indicate that an Islamist threat is increasing? What could I observe that would show that a regime is “seeking religious legitimacy”?

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