Session 6:

Teaching skills: Reading and writing

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Highs and lows

- What has gone well in the past two weeks?

- What challenges have you faced?

Objectives

In this session, we will <u>explore</u>:

- What skills we assess when we evaluate writing
- Principles for teaching writing
- The connection between teaching skills and inclusion

Agenda

Why teach skills?

Expos

Five principles of teaching writing

Five principles of teaching reading
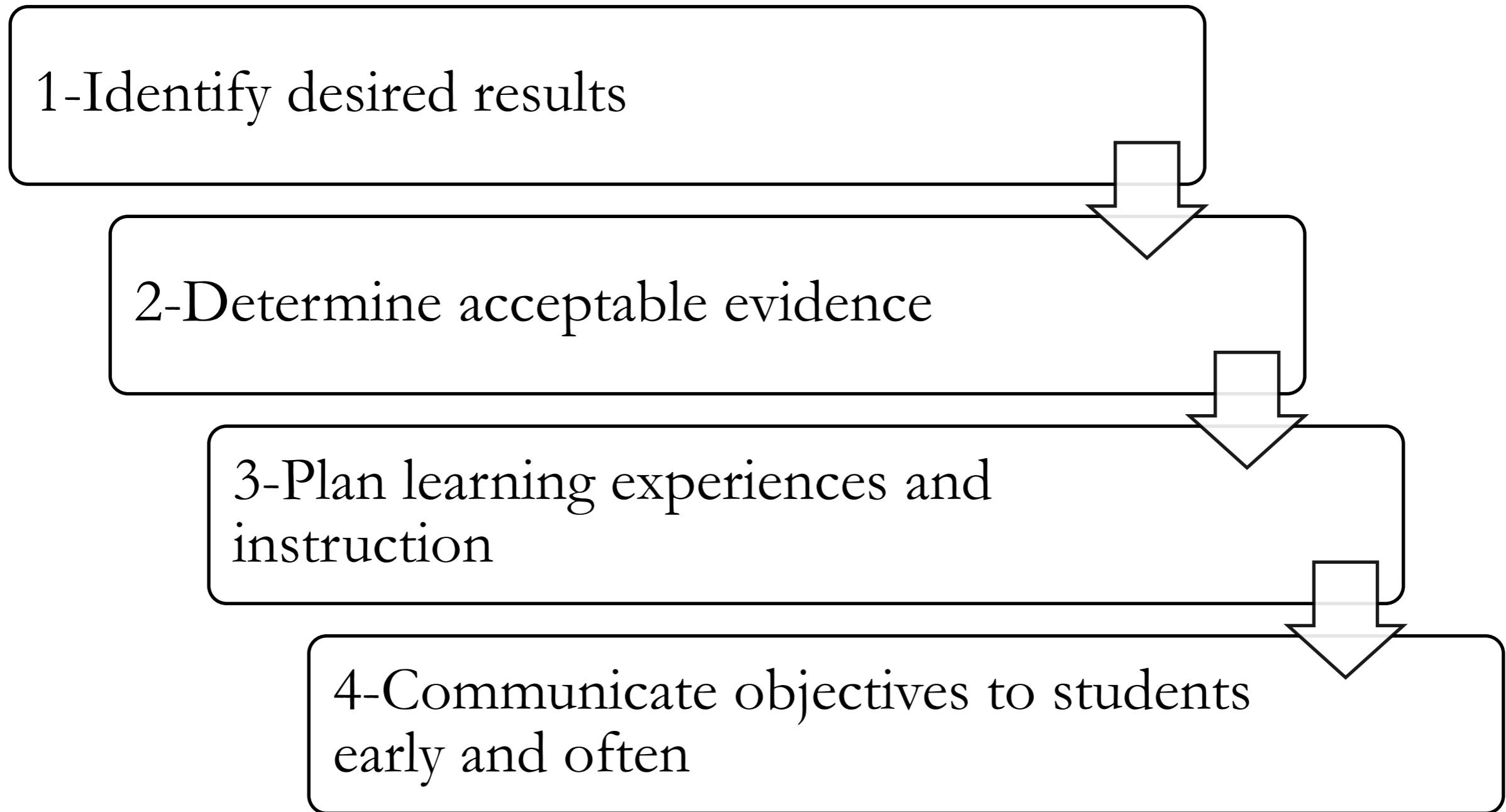
Wrap-up

Why teach skills?

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Learning goals:
- making and defending an argument
- evaluating evidence
- forming ethical judgements

Inclusivity:
- Students' prior experiences vary

Learner-centered design occurs in 4 stages*

1-Identify desired results

2-Determine acceptable evidence

3-Plan learning experiences and instruction

4-Communicate objectives to students early and often

Source: Wiggins, G. P., Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*. Ascd.
*Wiggins and McTighe (2005) propose the first 3 stages; the fourth is Sarah's addition

Who is best prepared to perform well on this assignment?

Write a review essay of at least three recent articles with implications for democratic theory. The review should revolve around some shared theme across the articles and should provide a springboard for exploring a theoretical issue or empirical puzzle that interests you. Examples of review essays can be found in the Annual Review of Political Science. The review essay should be no more than 25-30 pages double-spaced, in Times New Roman Font, and is due XXX. Citations should use Chicago style format.

Assignment design & grading practices influence who can be successful in our classrooms

Students need to know up front **what good work looks like**, along with the expectation that they can achieve it. **If students have to engage in a guessing game** about what the teacher wants, that **gives an advantage to students whose backgrounds are similar to their teacher's.**

"Strong Teams, Strong Results: Formative Assessment Helps Teacher Teams Strengthen Equity" by Nancy Love and Michelle Crowell in *The Learning Professional*, October 2018 (Vol. 39, #5, p. 34-39)

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What is Expos?

- Introduction to college-level writing

- All students take Expos 20 in their first year

- Some students also take Expos 10, based on the results of a summer writing exam

What your students learn in Expos

substance
pose an analytical question/problem
craft a thesis that is arguable, not self-evident or descriptive
anticipate and respond to objections to an argument
structure an argument logically
substantiate the thesis with thoughtfully analyzed evidence

sourcing
summarize and paraphrase a source accurately
locate and evaluate sources in Harvard's libraries
use primary and secondary sources responsibly

style
develop coherent paragraphs
craft clear and concise prose

application
transfer what they have learned in Expos to other courses
be alert to the fact that different disciplines may have different styles of
argument, standards of evidence, modes of analysis, citation conventions, and
prose styles

What your students write in Expos

- a close reading of a text or careful analysis of data

- a paper that assesses the validity of a source's extended argument, or a comparative analysis of two or three sources

- a research paper in which students either intervene in a scholarly debate, or contextualize a source or phenomenon, using 3-10 sources

The Expos Lexicon

Read through "Elements of an Academic Argument."

Are any of these elements different from what you look for in the class you teach?

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Principles for Teaching Writing

(1) Identify the implicit skills being assessed

(2) Communicate skills being assessed

(3) Prioritize criteria for evaluation

(4) Model skills before the assignment

(5) Practice skills before the assignment

Identifying implicit skills

Write a short essay (roughly 5-7 pages, double spaced) in response to one of the following questions. You may rely entirely on the course reading materials. Make sure you establish a clear thesis and defend it with references to readings and cases.

(1) Alexander Gerschenkron argued that there are certain advantages to backwardness when it came to economic development, as later industrializers could borrow technologies from early industrializers. Could a similar argument be made about late democratization? Is it easier (or harder) to democratize when major world powers have already democratized?

Identifying Implicit Skills

- Forming an argument

- Exploring logical steps, mechanisms

- Substantiating with evidence

- Tying evidence to argument

- Posing a question

- Making a comparison

- Reviewing a literature

- Evaluating an argument

- Synthesizing a literature

- Constructing a debate

- Interpreting a text

- Drawing implications from an argument

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Use Prompt/Rubric

- **Purpose:** Why are you writing this paper? In other words, what do you want students to learn by doing this assignment?

- **Argument:** Should students present an argument or do you want them to simply provide information? What does an argument in this field look like?

- **Evidence:** What kind of evidence should students rely on to support their ideas? What usually counts as evidence in this discipline? What makes evidence better or worse?

- **Audience:** Who is the intended audience? This influences how much orienting students should do at the beginning of an essay.

- **Style:** What kind of writing style (e.g., be formal, casual, objective, creative) is acceptable? What disciplinary norms do you want students to follow? What kind of style tendencies are **worth it** to encourage or discourage?
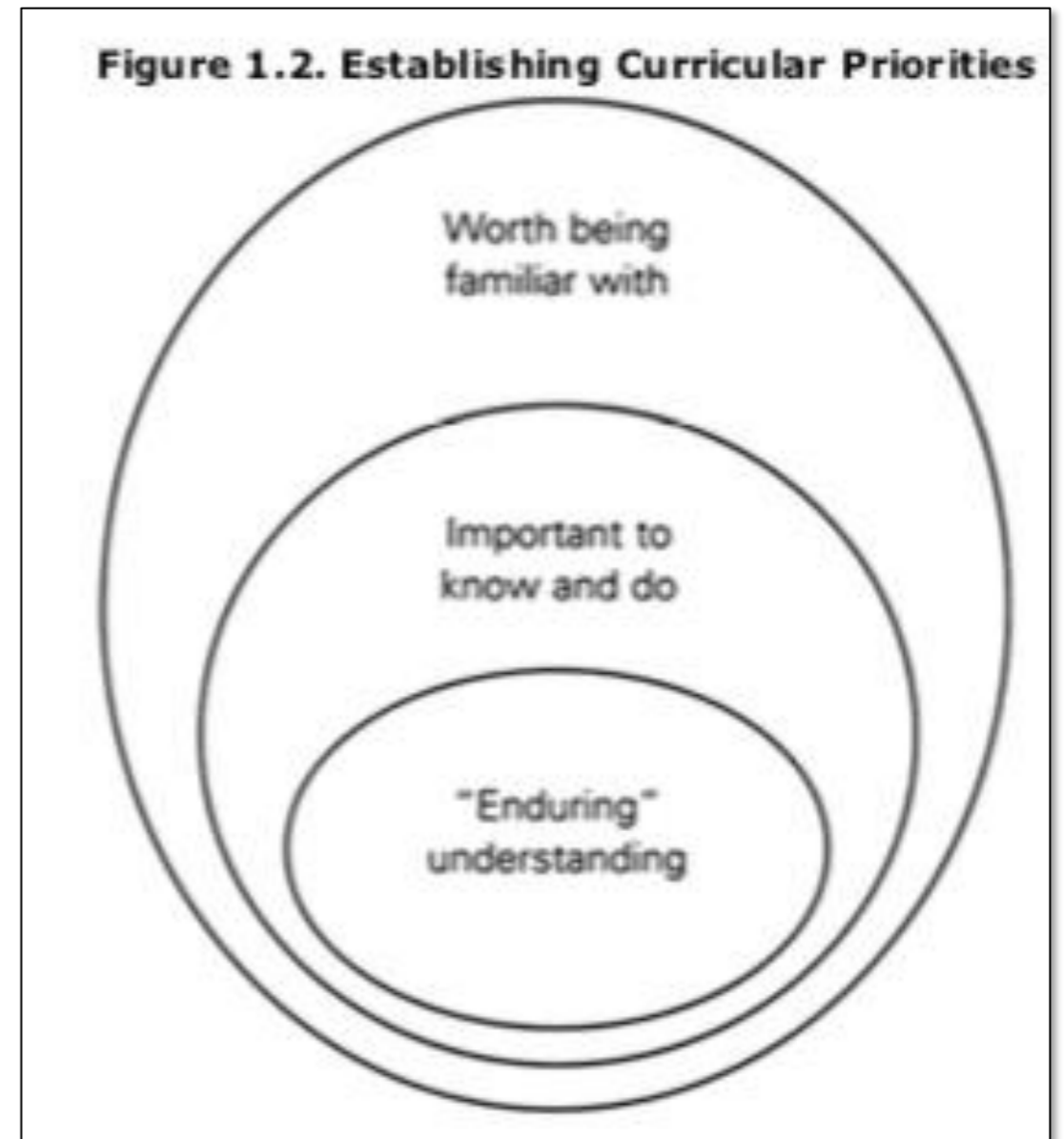
Principles for Teaching Writing

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Prioritizing Criteria for Evaluation

Criteria for evaluation should be explicit and consistent with learning goals.

Figure 1.2. Establishing Curricular Priorities

- Worth being familiar with
- Important to know and do
- "Enduring" understanding

Prioritizing Criteria for Evaluation

Are there criteria that you might value **more** in a particular class context? Are there criteria that you might value **less**?

What about for particular students?

Principles for Teaching Writing

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Modeling and Practicing Good Writing

In your class, what opportunities do students have to **see and recognize good writing** before they are evaluated?

In your class, what opportunities do students have to **practice the implicit skills** that they are being asked to demonstrate in their writing?

Modeling: General Strategies

- Example papers

- Example paragraphs, thesis statements, topic sentences

  - or formulas; e.g. "I argue that X brings about Y because Z"

- Walk through a revision

- Discuss or narrate the writing process

Modeling Example #1: Topic Sentences

A

First, it is important to address Lipset's theory of democratization.

B

First, it is important to establish the role of the middle class in existing theories of democratization.

C

Existing theories of democratization that fail to explain China assume that a growing middle class will demand democracy.

Modeling Example #2: Introductions

While scholars like Lipset would expect an economically growing country like China to democratize, China seems to have bucked this trend. I argue that nationalism is key to understanding why China will remain durable, even with economic growth. When the Chinese regime uses nationalism to make itself appear legitimate, the middle class – a key actor in Lipset's theory – no longer makes demands for democracy. Only when the Chinese regime fails to use nationalism to legitimate itself should we expect the middle class to make democratic demands. In the following section, I explain the importance of the middle class in existing theories of democratization. Then I show how the middle class behaves differently in China when the regime uses nationalism. Finally, I use another Communist country, Poland, to show how Lipset's theory still works when the regime fails to use nationalist rhetoric.
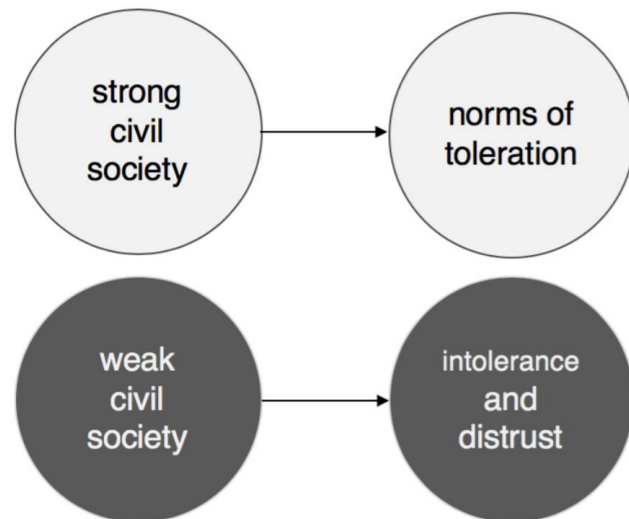
Modeling Example #3: Arguments

Example:

"I argue that democracy can be stable only with a strong civil society, because a strong civil society encourages norms of toleration that help political opponents work together."
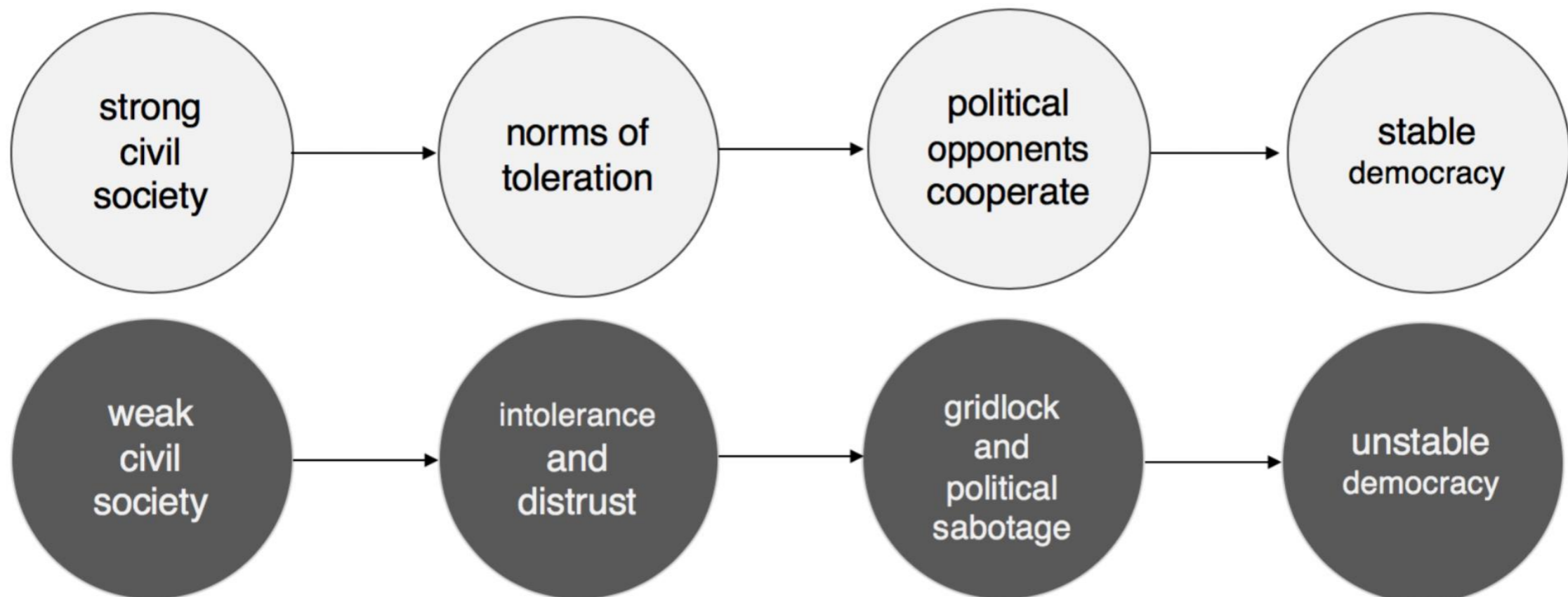
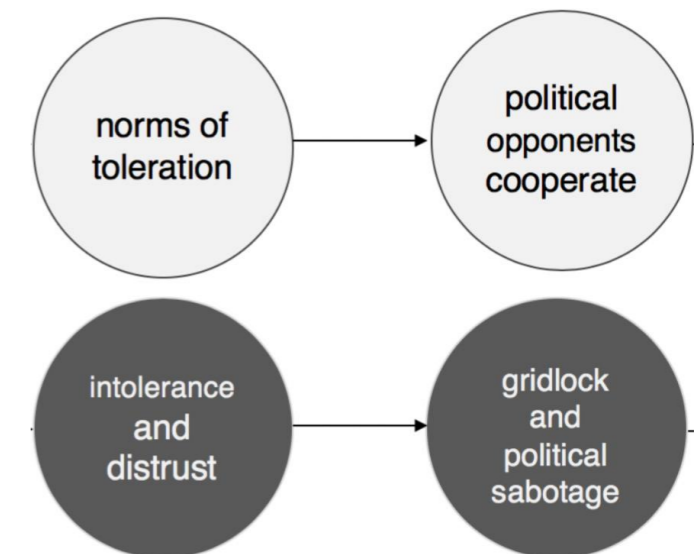# Modeling Example #4: Evidence

Section 1

- **How** a strong civil society generates norms of toleration

- **Other routes** to norms of toleration without civil society

- Evidence from paired case comparison, with focus on the positive case

Section 2

- **How** norms of toleration encourage political opponents to cooperate
- **How** political opponents behave without norms of toleration, and why this is unlikely to lead to cooperation without such norms
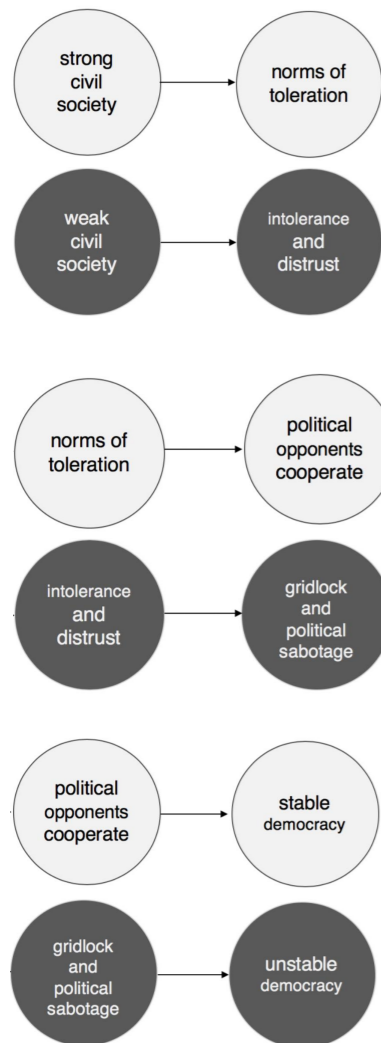- Return to my same paired case comparison, attention on both cases

Section 3

- **How** the absence of cooperation between political opponents can generate democratic failure

- Illustration of this mechanism from the negative side of my case comparison
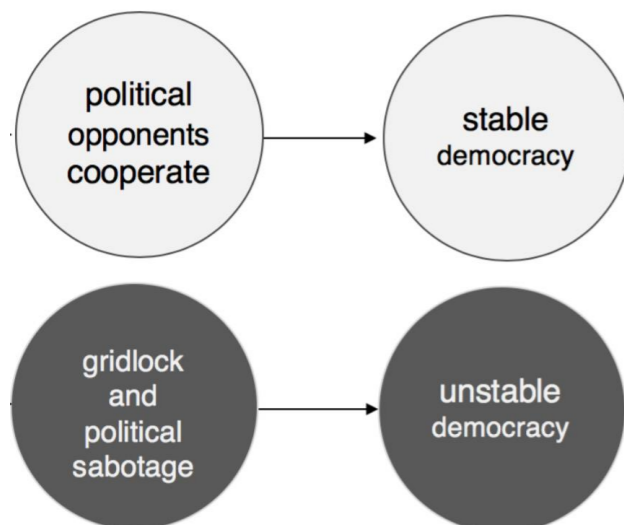
Modeling Example #5: Structure

Section 1: existing literature (1 ¶)

  a) motivating case: India

  b) why conventional Lipset wisdom didn't give us sufficient story to explain democratic stability in this case

Section 2: civil society → norms of toleration (3 ¶)

  a) role of everyday interactions and fostering trust

  b) other ways we might get trust

  c) how everyday interactions work in India

Section 3: norms of toleration → coop. in politics (3 ¶)

  a) a tolerant constituency incentivizes politicians to cooperate

  b) without a tolerant constituency, politicians are incentivized to compete

  c) cooperation in India vs. turmoil in Bangladesh

Section 4: coop. in politics → democratic stability (1 ¶)

  a) intensely competitive politics can undermine democracy because it creates higher willingness to change rules

  b) how this happened in Bangladesh

Section 5: counter-argument (1 ¶)

  a) democracy may survive intensely competitive politics when institutions are strong and hard to change

  b) e.g. wealthy western democracies

Modeling: Making your Lessons do Double-Duty

- Identify exemplars of strong or weak arguments, evidence, topic sentences etc. in course readings
  - Highlight, note page numbers, ask students to identify or assess

- Call out good writing and bad writing
  - In addition to asking "what is the core argument?", follow with "and how do you know that is the core argument?" or "where did you find it in the text?" or "was the core argument easy or hard to derive?"
  - When a text is difficult, discuss or ask **why** it is difficult

- Teach content using the terminology/structure of strong writing
  - E.g.: an end-of-section "takeaway point" can be an opportunity to model a strong thesis statement
  - E.g.: board-work can become a model essay outline

Practice: General Strategies

- Use low-stakes writing assignments (minute-papers, discussion posts, memos)

- Provide opportunities for drafts and revisions (even if just of components or even sentences)

- Write reverse outlines

Reverse Outline

Step 1: Read your first paragraph.

Step 2: Ask: What is the function of this paragraph? What is its goal? Write this down in 1 sentence.

Step 3: Repeat for each paragraph in the essay body

Step 4: You now have an outline of your paper as-written. Move through each line in your outline and ask: how does this help the reader understand my argument?

Step 5: Use what you've made to make decisions about:

- How/whether to rearrange your structure
- What to make more concise / more detailed
- What to cut, what to add

Practice: Making your Lessons do Double-Duty

- Turn content-focused active learning into writing skills practice

  - Developing an argument → developing a thesis statement

  - Evaluating an argument → collecting evidence

  - Comparing two authors → outlining a formal comparative analysis

- Narrate your choices! Make sure students know they're practicing a writing skill.

GovWrites

- Written instruction in prose format

- Written instruction in note format

- Visuals and diagrams of writing structures

- Statements on why writing is important, what it achieves

- Short instructional videos on specific writing skills

- Longer video lessons on larger writing components

- Short exercises in which students practice and receive feedback

- "Play-by-play" demonstrations of revisions to model good/bad writing

- Annotated example writing for students to emulate

- Downloadable PDF "memos"

Modeling and Practicing Good Writing

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Principles for Teaching Reading

- **Identify the purpose of asking students to read**
  - Is it for the argument? Is it for other parts of the content? Is it to practice a skill? Are there different readings with different functions on your syllabus?
- **Share purpose with students**
  - Help students identify what to prioritize
  - Help students identify how to read different portions differently
- **Model good reading**
  - Explain why, and how, you read a certain text a certain way. How did you know that was the argument? Where did you find it? Reference the physical text.
- **Practice good reading**
  - Ask students to tell you how they found the argument, evidence, etc.
  - Give students time in class to practice strategies
- **Track reading**
  - Monitor your students, check in, and narrate growth mindset

Logistics and next steps

- Complete your peer observation (Nov. 30th)

- Keep in touch!