

Writing Style Guide for Public Administration Classes California State University San Bernardino

Your instructors in the Department of Public Administration are here to support your success. We know that writing is critical in the field of public administration. It is how communications are formalized. Your success in this program and in your career will be, in part, determined by your ability to write. We encourage you to take this seriously and carefully consider our feedback as one of the ways we are coaching you to success.

This Guide assists students in the preparation of public administration writing assignments. Public service professionals are often asked to follow a style sheet when publishing reports, articles, or other documents. Following a precise format is a part of professional expectations. Requirements may differ for different assignments and in different professional settings. Unless otherwise advised for your assignments, please follow the following guidelines. If you fail to follow these guidelines, your writing will be marked down.

General

Always include your name, date, course name and assignment title on your papers. If you submit email attachment make sure this information is on the attached document, not just the email.

For accessibility, when the documents will be posted on Blackboard or shared with other students, please use a non-serif font such as Arial. A 12 point font should always be used unless specifically directed otherwise by the instructor.

Some instructors prefer single and others double spaced. In either event, skip one line between paragraphs and do not indent.

Make sure your paper has an Introduction, Body and Conclusion

- Introduction- tell the reader what you are going to tell them. This paragraph should be an abstract of the paper. State conclusions- don't just say "Finally, I will present conclusions."
- Body- present your points – make sure paragraphs have clear topic sentences.
- Conclusion - Summarize your main points.

Evidence

- Do not make unsupported statements of assumed fact. Provide evidence to support any argument or claim.
- Evidence can either be cited sources or presentations of data.
- Personal experiences may be evidence. Make sure you explicitly describe the experience and its relevance to your claim

Do not use conversational/informal style.

You are not talking to a friend. You are not talking on the phone or emailing or chatting or texting. You are writing an analytical paper. This means formal and professional. Avoid clichés, idioms, slang and contractions. In general, use first person only if you are presenting a personal example to support a statement or if you are reporting personal experiences or reflections.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the use of others' written or oral material without attribution or citation. Verbatim material should be enclosed by quotes and cited with the page number. Paraphrased material should also be cited. A helpful website for guidance is from Indiana University <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>. A site on paraphrasing is <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/619/1/>

Plagiarism and cheating are violations of the Student Conduct Code (see Appendix of the CSUSB Bulletin of Courses) and may be dealt with by both the instructor and the Judicial Affairs Officer. Cheating or plagiarism in PA classes will result in no credit for the assignment and an evaluation of whether the student should be given the grade of F for the course.

Definition and procedures for addressing cheating and plagiarism are found below. Questions about academic dishonesty and the policy should be addressed to the Office of the Vice President, Student Affairs.

<http://senate.csusb.edu/docs/Policies/%28FSD%2096-12.R2%29%20Academic%20Dishonesty.pdf>

If you are not certain about what plagiarism is, please talk with your instructor.

Use American Psychological Association (APA) style for citations

The point of citations is to direct the reader where to find the source if they want to read it personally. The information provided is to make that task possible (and easy). Public Administration courses use APA because it is common in the field of public administration. This Purdue University website has professional writing advice that can be helpful in school and in your professional career.

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/664/01/>

Use a bibliography for references. Use footnotes only for clarifications or addendums. For in-text citations, include page numbers for (and only for) direct quotes. Periods are placed after the in-text citation. E.g. The sky is blue (Smith, 2001). Punctuation goes **inside** quotation marks. E.g. Bob said, "The sky is blue."

Spelling

Remember that spell check does not catch a wrong word use. There are many common errors, particularly with words that sound alike (homonyms) such as accept and except. Spell check will not catch your misuse of words. If you make spelling mistakes in your papers you will be graded down. If you make spelling mistakes in the

workplace you will be seen as uneducated and unprofessional. One website for common spelling errors is <http://www.learnenglish.de/mistakes/CommonMistakes.htm>.

Grammar

You should never have grammatical mistakes. Common errors we see are lack of subject/verb agreement, sentence fragments and run on sentences.

Style

Try to use **active rather than passive voice**.

I did rather than **I was doing**

I worked rather than **I was working**

Jane worked rather than **The work was done by Jane**

For more examples see this Purdue University site

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/02/>.

Avoid starting a sentence with a subordinate clause or a prepositional phrase.

Use simple subject/verb construction when possible.

Not - In looking at the problem, I found that it was a difficult process

Rather - The problem was difficult.

Not - Regarding the internal process, the communication was found inadequate.

Rather - Internal communication is inadequate.

Not - It failed at providing..

Rather - It failed to provide

Keep your writing succinct.

While good writing includes a variety of sentence lengths, sentences longer than 25 words can be awkward. When your sentences are longer than that they sometimes lose the reader and become less effective. The shorter and more direct the more powerful and memorable the sentence.

Know your punctuation

Students tend to use semi-colons (1) too frequently, and (2) incorrectly.

PROOFREAD AND EDIT

Always carefully review your papers, reading each sentence carefully. You can often avoid awkward or incorrect wording by reading it out loud.

Try to improve wording, eliminate redundancies and simplify sentences.

Get help if you need it!

The CSUSB Writing Center will help you with your writing. Get help if you need it.

Good writing is critical. <http://www-ugs.csusb.edu/wc/>

Other worthwhile writing sites

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/624/01/>

<http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/documents/memo/>

<http://www.library.unt.edu/govinfo/browse-topics/research-and-writing-tips/government-writing/>

<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/TOC.cfm>

<http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Memo>