

## Tabrizi Writing Guidelines That You Should Read

Effective written communication is essential to success in the professional world. Your written words do more than just demonstrate your ideas, they reflect your competence and, in many cases, are the only direct contact your colleagues, contacts and customers have with you. Developing solid communication skills is as important as the substantive components of your education.

This writing guide is designed to alert you to common pitfalls and problems students encounter when writing papers for courses in political science. In addition, this guide specifies the minimum requirements necessary for acceptable written assignments in this course.

### Minimum Requirements

All written assignments are expected to demonstrate:

- proper sentence and paragraph structure
- proper grammar and spelling
- proper citation of sources

These standards, in conjunction with the substantive merit of your work, affect your grade. Serious and repeated errors in mechanics and citations will cause you to lose credit as follows:

- Generally good: some minor issues including capitalization, word use, punctuation, minor citation, etc. -2 points
- Needs attention: Poor sentence structure and awkward phrases, poor paragraph structure, major citation, etc. -5 points
- Problematic: Major problems with sentence, phrase and paragraph structure, paper organization, major citation, etc. Writing Center referral -10 points

If you are unsure about your writing or the rules for citations in this class, go to the writing center or come to me and ASK (preferably before you hand in your paper).

You should proofread all of your work. Typographical errors and inadvertent mistakes happen to everyone but your work is a reflection of your effort and your attitude so do everything you can to make a good impression. Excessive sloppiness will affect your grade (see above).

Format for all written assignments:

- Typed, 12 point font
- double-spaced
- pages numbered
- maximum 1.5 inch margins

### Organization

A good written assignment will be **well organized**. Be sure that your reader can easily follow your argument or the point that you are trying to make. Begin your paper with a paragraph that includes the topic of the paper and an overview of what you will be talking about. There is no magic recipe for the perfect organization and it will change as your topic changes. The following guidelines might be useful to keep in mind as you write:

1. Start out broadly by telling the reader what you will be talking about.

2. Develop the specifics of your topic in the body of your paper with a series of paragraphs that build upon one another and make connections to your overall topic.
3. End your paper with a return to the broad themes you introduced at the beginning as a means of summing up and concluding your argument.

Consider employing an outline before you actually start to write your paper in order to help you lay out the order in which you want to discuss the relevant issues. This might also help you to see any connections between issues that you want to highlight and the most effective way of doing so. Once you have written a draft, consider using a reverse outline to check on the organization of your paper. Read through what you have written and try to write an outline from only what you have down on paper. This will help you to see what information might be missing and where you have been redundant. It will also expose the structure of your paper as it exists, not as you envision it in your head. Remember that having good ideas is only half the battle; you have to be able to communicate those ideas in order to demonstrate them to others.

Finally, consider sharing what you have written with a friend outside of class. The extent to which someone who does not know the course material understands what you are trying to say is a testament to the ability of your paper to get your point across effectively.

### **Citing Sources**

Whenever you use words or ideas that are not your own you must give credit to the source. There are no exceptions to this rule. Anytime you fail to give credit where it is due, you are committing plagiarism. The tough thing about plagiarism is that it does not have to be intentional; you can plagiarize without even knowing it. For example, when you are taking notes from a book and you copy a sentence or a phrase and later use it in your paper without realizing that it was a quote, you have plagiarized. When you pick up on ideas from something you have read and include them in your paper without acknowledging that you didn't come up with them on your own, you have plagiarized. The thing with plagiarism is that it is very easy to commit by accident; the problem is that, no matter why it happened, you are still guilty and you are responsible for the offense. At Wells, we take academic integrity very seriously; in this class you will be held to the highest standards. How can you protect yourself from getting caught in what seems to be a no win situation? Adopt the motto: "When in doubt, cite it."

You will be required to utilize the author-date style of citation approved by the American Political Science Association for all of your written work. Examples of the APSA guidelines for in-text citations and for bibliographic references are detailed below.

In-text citations: (giving credit to others when you use their words or ideas):

As you are writing, you need to acknowledge your sources. In political science, we use the author/date method detailed below; we do not use footnotes or endnotes for this purpose. Footnotes and endnotes are used if additional explanatory material is needed for clarification but does not belong in the main text. You are not required to include footnotes or endnotes in your papers but if you choose to do so you should use either one form or the other and keep them to a minimum.

*Citing ideas from an outside source including books, articles, webpages. Include the author or authors and the date:*

- Jones (2003) argues that democracy has come under attack since the advent of economic globalization.
- Political values are the foundations of political attitudes (Rokeach 1973).

*If there is no author listed, include an abbreviated title and the date:*

- The importance of younger voters in the 2004 election will hinge on turnout (“The Youth Vote” 2004).

*When you use a direct quote, paraphrase or borrow a specific idea from one section of a book/article give the page number where the information is found:*

- “Cultural issues represent the new political conflict of the twenty-first century (Smith 1999, 24)”.
- As one scholar has argued, presidential politics in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century may have been entering an era of “perpetual preemption” (Skowronek 1997, 444).

### Reference Page

Your papers must include a reference page that lists the sources you have used alphabetically (not in the order that they were cited in the text of the paper). Your references should not be numbered.

*Book with one author:*

- Smith, John. 2003. *Politics Rules*. New York: Jones Publishing.

*Book with two authors:*

- Smith, John and Sally R. Johnson. 2003. *Politics Rules*. New York: Jones Publishing.

*Chapter in an edited book:*

- Sinclair, Barbara. 2001. “The New World of US Senators.” In *Congress Reconsidered*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., eds. Lawrence Dodd and Bruce Oppenheimer. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

*Academic journal article (note volume and (number/date) in parentheses followed by page numbers:*

- Smith, John. 2003. “Assessing Political Ideology.” *American Political Science Review* 74 (September): 429-460.

*Article in a popular magazine (note date and page numbers):*

- Zakaria, Fareed. 2004. “Assessing the New Iraq.” *Newsweek*. 20 January, 45-49.

*Newspaper article (print, author given):*

- Smith, John. “Assessing Political Ideology.” *New York Times*, 24 June 2000, sec. C

*Newspaper article (print, no author given):*

- “Interrogating the Protesters,” *New York Times*, 17 August 2004, sec. A.

*Newspaper article (internet, author given. Note that the first date is the date the article originally appeared (if available) and the date at the end is the date that you accessed it online):*

- Smith, John. 24 June 2000. “Assessing Political Ideology.” *New York Times*, (<http://nytimes.com/national/3462496.html>) Accessed: June 26, 2000.

*Newspaper/magazine article (internet, no author given)*

- “Assessing Political Ideology.” 24 June 2000. *New York Times*, (<http://nytimes.com/national/3462496.html>) Accessed: June 26, 2000.

*Website: here you should be as detailed as possible, giving the exact page (not just the homepage) the address and the date accessed. If you cite multiple pages from a website you must reference them individually. If a webpage does not have a title use the heading/name given to it at the top of your browser*

For example, to cite a specific page from the webpage of the Democratic National Committee, include the title of the specific page, the date it was created or last updated, a reference to the overall site, the URL and then the date it was accessed. In-text citations should follow the format for a newspaper article with no author given (a truncated title and the date the information was written, created or updated, if available. If not, use the date accessed.)

- “The Bush Record: Homeland Insecurity.” Democratic National Committee.  
<http://www.democrats.org/security/index.html> Accessed: August 24, 2004.

#### A Caution About URL and Online Databases

If you access an article through an online database (Lexis-Nexis, Proquest, Articlefinder, etc.) do not provide the database url in your citations, use the original publication information. As a rule, url should not be used in in-text citations.

#### Frequently Asked Questions:

- *How do I cite and reference multiple works by the same author from the same year?* Place a different letter after the year of each reference page entry from the same author-year (1981a, 1981b, etc.), and cite in-text accordingly (Smith 1981a) to differentiate.
- *What if all of the information in a paragraph is from the same source?* You can simply cite that source once at the very end of the paragraph, unless you are referencing different specific pages through the paragraph.
- *How do I cite multiple sources for the same idea?* Include all of the sources in the same parenthetical citation, and order them alphabetically (Allen and White 2004; Auletta 2004).
- *What if a source has multiple authors? Do I have to include all of their names?* For three or fewer, use all of the names in the citation. For four or more, you can abbreviate (Smith et al. 2003). But always include all of the authors’ names in the reference page listing.
- *Does punctuation go before or after the parenthetical citation?* At the end of a sentence, the period (question mark, etc.) goes after the citation. However, if you are citing at the end of a quotation, the closed-quotation marks go before the citation and period.
- *What if there isn’t a title for a web source?* If you are citing a page that does not have a title or obvious heading, use the title/heading that appears in the window bar at the very top of your screen.
- *What about court cases?* Cite in-text using the case name and year of decision (*Baker v. Carr* 1962), and include full legal citation information (volume, source, and page) in the reference page: *Baker v. Carr*. 1962. 369 U.S. 186.

#### **Avoiding common pitfalls** (otherwise known as Professor Tabrizi's pet peeves):

- Democrat (meaning party member) versus democrat (meaning someone who believes in democracy)
- Republican (meaning party member) versus republican (meaning someone who believes in the form of government known as a republic)
- The Democratic party (*not* the Democrat party)
- bias (the noun) versus biased (the adjective). People are not bias. Biased people have bias.
- Congress and congressional (know when to use the proper noun and when to use the adjective). The same goes for Senate, Senator, senate and senator, etc.
- President and president (see above)
- U.S. Supreme Court, the Court, court (ditto)

- Constitution and constitutional (use the proper noun when referring to the U.S. Constitution, the common noun when referring to constitutions or the writing of a constitution and the adjective, constitutional, when describing something that pertains to a constitution or the Constitution of the United States)
- We versus I: Write in the first person (use "I"). The APSA manual notes that "we" is artificial and awkward. Political scientists use "I" and in this class you should too. However, your papers are generally not about you and, therefore, your use of the first person should be minimal.
- "I feel..." It's ok to express your opinion, and in fact it is often desirable for you to do so. However, avoid relying on your "feelings" when you are trying to make an argument. Be analytical: tell me *why* something is right or wrong not simply that you *feel* a certain way.
- "It's obvious..." Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't. The point here is that you should not avoid explaining a difficult topic by stating that it is obvious when it might only be obvious to you. For example, it might be obvious to you that democracy is the best possible type of governing system but you need to be able to say *why* or else your assertion falls flat.
- Then and than (Then is temporal: "Read the book and then write your paper." Than is comparative: "This paper is better than the one you wrote last week.")
- their and there (people and place)
- To, too and two (preposition/direction, also or excessive, 2) There are two houses in Congress that must approve a bill before it becomes law. In addition, the Constitution requires that, for a bill to become law, it must be sent to the president for his signature. In other words, Congress cannot pass laws by itself; the president is involved too. Many people say that politics is too confusing for them to understand.

### **Email communication guidelines**

You and I are involved in a business relationship. As such, our email communications should reflect the formal nature of our interaction. When you send me an email, it should:

- Include a greeting (Professor Tabrizi, Dear Professor, Hello Professor, etc. Hey, is for horses)
- Use proper sentence structure. (I am not your roommate or your mom. The notes you write to me don't need to be a work of fine literature but they do need to be in proper form. What you write in an email is analogous to what you would say in person and the impression it makes is important. You should take care to write business email in a professional manner)
- Include capital letters where appropriate (and not all capital letters)
- Include a salutation (Thank you, Sincerely, See you in class, Have a good day, etc. This part is not essential, but it is a nice touch and is a good habit to get into for your future professional life)

If you send me an email that fails to conform to the first three bullet-points, I will disregard it and refer you back to this writing guide so that you can revise it for a second shot. Yes, I'm serious.