Writing in POLITICAL SCIENCE

A Practical Guide

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Second Edition

Diane E. Schmidt

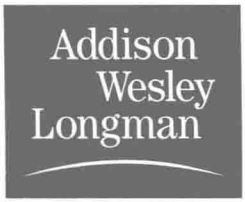
WRITING IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

A Practical Guide

Second Edition

by

Diane E. Schmidt
California State University, Chico



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Writing in Political Science: A Practical Guide, Second Edition
Diane E. Schmidt

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ISBN: 0-321-06998-6

2345678910-VG-01040000

PREFACE

As political scientists, we are rarely directly involved in politics; instead, we write about it the same way sports commentators report on baseball games. We theorize and conjecture but rarely play the game. Some of us keep statistics about our players, some of us just provide the color commentary while the players are in the arena, and some of us analyze the actions of the players to see how the winners won and the losers lost. Mostly, we study and learn by observing and providing a reasoned perspective about political activities.

What political scientists do best is write. Part of what this book is about is writing in political science. It is not a formal book of style nor is it a tome on what it means to think critically about politics or to be a political scientist. It is a practical, sometimes irreverent, and usually serious guide to becoming a color commentator, armchair quarterback, or an expert on politics. It is about becoming a professional in political science and communicating with a community of students and scholars of government and policy. In other words, this book is a guide to communicating about political events, about political ideas, about political passions, and about political agendas. It is not just about writing; it is about thinking about politics, reading about politics, and arguing about politics.

There are many reasons why I wrote this book. I noticed early in my teaching career that students in my courses, regardless of their major or class standing or grade point average, exhibited a general confusion about what and how to communicate in political science assignments. My first response was to condemn the public high school system and the English department for not training students to write coherently. But that was too easy. Upon investigation, I found that there was a different approach to writing among political science, English composition, and the hard sciences. Approximately at the same time I discovered the Writing Across the Curriculum approach, I received the best, most instructive assessment of the problem from a retiring English composition professor. She said, "I'm not surprised that your students are having problems. We teach them to write for us. If you want them to write well in political science, teach them to write for political science." That, in a nutshell, is what Writing Across the Curriculum promotes. That, in a nutshell, is what this book is intended to accomplish.

I wrote this book for political science majors and for students who are passing through the discipline as an elected activity. But this guide is more than an abridged writer's guide with explicit references to political science writing assignments. In addition to outlining the standard form for student assignments, the guide provides practical information and advice about criteria used to evaluate student assignments. It provides and uses the vocabulary of the political science discourse community while keeping the directions and formats simple enough to understand and execute without guidance from an instructor. Anyone who can follow a recipe in a cookbook, read an auto repair manual, or use an automatic teller machine at a bank, can follow the instructions in this book and turn out a professional level, high quality manuscript concerning politics.

Unfortunately, this book is not a jump-start for writing and the directions must be followed closely. The advice in this book cannot compensate for poor effort or preparation. Although many parts of this guide mirror sections of general stylebooks and English composition textbooks, it is not a substitute for a comprehensive style guide or a course in composition. This guide stresses the application of general principles of expository writing to common projects and assignments given to students in political science classes. The style and composition sections are designed to enhance and refresh skills already acquired through introductory composition coursework. These sections build on standard writing forms while applying them to the kind of study and investigation conducted in the discipline of political science.

In many ways, this guide is an extended information sheet, not unlike those given to students by their professors. In addition to stating criteria for assignments, it includes gen

thinking, research habits, and general formatting of manuscripts. The guide provides the instruction and examples of political science writing assignments that help students begin and end in the right direction for meeting the instructor's expectations.

More importantly, the guide provides examples, yes, examples of actual student manuscripts written for the sole purpose of getting a grade. None of the student papers were (was) written expressly for the book. Some were written before I ever conceived the idea of writing the book. With a few exceptions, the papers were written by students in my courses and reflect some of the best examples of papers produced by following the format and structure directions for the particular type of writing assignment required in those courses.

In fact, the examples in this guide are some of its most distinguishing and beneficial aspects. Unlike standard guides for writing research papers or even guides to writing in political science, this guide provides, in exhaustive detail, an explanation about the difference between writing an analysis of legislation or an analysis of a public policy and how to write them both. Because it is important for students to see, not just told, that different courses and different subfields in political science have different forms and expectations for written research, there is an example for every exercise and every assignment listed in the book.

Because the book includes both the directions concerning form and examples that exhibit an application of such forms, students will, with or without an instructor's help, be able to choose and narrow a topic, formulate a research agenda, execute a study, write about the findings, and learn something about politics at the same time. The examples in this guide, though very good, are not necessarily the most spectacular work performed concerning the topic or assignment requirements. Those standards are difficult and almost impossible for most people to achieve. No, the examples reflect the efforts of good, hard-working, conscientious students who followed directions, researched their topics earnestly, and produced fine manuscripts which encompass a reasoned perspective on their topics. With the instructor's help, students can use the advice and examples as templates for classroom work. Without the instructor, students may reasonably assume that some approximation of an example related to the course focus will be a good approach.

There is one aspect of this book that may not seem obvious at first that I should explain. The examples in this guide are particularly skewed toward American government, public policy, public law, and public administration. There are several reasons for this. Although I am cross-trained in all these areas, I teach American government and public policy. The examples come from my students because I know their potential. I set the goals, structured the incentives for achieving them, and measured how closely they were achieved. The examples are testimony to the utility of providing the students a clear statement of goals, of expectations, and of standards for assignments. I know these techniques work because they have worked for me at every course level from introductory to graduate classes.

Because the techniques used in this guide are based on a Writing Across the Curriculum perspective, they have also worked for colleagues and students in several subfields, several disciplines, and several institutions who adopted this book in draft form. My book was used to help train Lithuanian masters students in a Masters in Public Administration program, in Lithuania! From freshman to graduate level, from history to anthropology, this guide has been helpful for instructors and students alike. Just like a recipe for cheesecake or barbecue, the application of these techniques varies between users. Instructors put in their own personal touches, accents, and emphasis. In contrast, my students sent copies to friends and siblings and taken the guide along to law or graduate school because of its versatility and straightforward, understandable advice.

Nonetheless, the principles and advice in the guide can be applied to political theory, comparative government, and international relations. Wherever possible and appropriate, I have provided instruction and

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advice about using the materials in these fields. The topic section has examples of choosing subfield specific topics for all subfields. The section on enhancing comprehension and synthesis as well as the section on handling and processing class materials are standard. The section on conventional papers includes a short discussion of how such papers are used in other subfields. The advice concerning assignments requiring special analytical techniques and assignments in applied political science can be utilized for any institutional level regardless of the country on which or in which it was performed. Finally, the section on managing and preserving achievements for career development is not subfield specific.

Thus, what the guide lacks in discipline breadth, it makes up for in depth and comprehensiveness related to instructing on the discourse, the professional standards, and the method of discovery in political science as a profession. The examples were taken from a cross-section of student writing styles and issues of interest to many students. While each paper exhibits a unique perspective, the thread that ties them together is the salient and controversial nature of each topic. As with any work, some gross errors were made by students and thus corrected. Some typographical errors are my fault. I have never been a good copy editor for my own work. For the most part, the papers clearly reflect the students' efforts. Small mistakes in logic as well as some usage errors were preserved to maintain the personality and spirit of the writers. As teaching tools, they are instructive. As statements on political events, they are interesting and well reasoned. As examples, they set standards that are attainable. This combination makes these student papers assets to the guide and makes the goals of the guide attainable.

For the second edition, I added sections on Internet research, Internet source evaluation, reading tables and graphs, creating tables and graphs, writing editorials, writing case studies, and referencing. The section on Internet research was co-authored by one of my students. Unlike other Internet guides that are written by technicians or scholars in the field, this new section provides practical techniques *actually used by students* for student research. So much of the advice is written for users who actually enjoy "surfing" the net. I have found that my students prefer direct practical advice for locating information fast. This section provides the minimum information on Internet terminology while focusing the student's attention on efficient Internet use.

I also added an expanded section on research methods and statistical research. Because the Internet provides a dearth of data, and because spreadsheet technology is so user-friendly, I added a section to locating and using data. I included a section on primary research for conducting interviews, creating surveys, and analyzing surveys. Included in this new section is advice on reading and constructing tables, graphs, and figures. I also included a section on finding secondary sources and data on the Internet. I provided Web site addresses and advice for using Web based information.

I also expanded and improved the referencing section. I added a formats for Internet citations both in the text as well as in the bibliography. I also provided comparative formats for *MLA, Chicago Manual of Style*, and *APA styles*. For each type of source, I provided an example from each of the three styles.

Finally, I added new material on case study approaches and editorial writing. Editorial writing is a skill that helps students participate in the process after leaving their educational institutions. Further, unlike concept or position papers, the case study approach to the study of politics provides opportunities for students to apply what they learned in class to a specific agency or entity. I included two types of case studies. The first type is an academic case study approach where students learn to evaluate an analysis problems in organizations. The second type is a problem solving case study where the student chooses a particular problem, researches it, and provides an a recommendation for resolving the problem.

In sum, this is not just another writing guide. It is a complete guide for being or becoming a professional in political science. It can be used from freshman to graduate level coursework, from entering a student career to graduating and pursuing a professional career after graduation. It is a style guide, a class

handout, a writing manual, an organizing guide, and a resume guide. It is everything students need to begin their research, their writing, and their careers. Enjoy!

****

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to the many people who encouraged me and helped me in the preparation of first or second edition of this book, including Bruce Appleby, Bob Lorinskas, Terry Plain, Sari Ramsey, Jerry Hostetler, Amy Andrews, Leila Niehuser, Cecilia Lause, Mark Toews, and Beth McMillin. I am also indebted to my students especially Mary Andrews, Annette Allison, Susan Toomire, and Judith Ferrer, who have been complementary and supportive of my efforts in this second edition to help them develop professionally.

Finally, I am indebted to friends for their unconditional support of this project including Kay Heidbreder, Marji Morgan, Suzy Parker, Teresa Murphy, Cindy McKinney, Cindy McGee, Jim Mallien, Joan Brown, and Bonnie Hallman for their supporting friendship. They have been friends when I needed them. I also want to thank my family, especially my mother Margie Brown for her support and pride in my accomplishments. Last, but not least, I wish to thank sons Casey and Jonathan for being patient during my never ending string of projects and my husband, Alan, for his contributions to the text and his support and understanding when I was too involved in this project to worry about less pressing matters. These people have stayed close to me as I recuperate from life's trauma. These are the people I cherish most and have been my greatest inspiration. Thank you.

Diane E. Schmidt
Chico, CA
January 2, 2000

DEDICATION

TO ALAN, CASEY, JONATHAN, AND MARGIE
AND
IN MEMORY OF MARGARET AND AUSBY

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SECTION ONE

POLITICAL INQUIRY

INTRODUCTION

This writing guide is designed to help students sharpen, reinforce, and develop good writing and research habits in political science. Writing is a process through which we learn to communicate with others. No one expects students to be perfect writers. We all learn and help each other learn. Through organization, writing and re-writing drafts, and logical presentation of our ideas, we engage in an intellectual process which helps us grow and be a part of the discourse community of political science.

What the guide is supposed to do:

1. Sharpen writing skills particular to political science.
2. Provide information to students about standards and expectations concerning political science writing.
3. Help students differentiate between writing for political science and other disciplines.

What the guide cannot do:

1. This material does not teach primary writing skills.
2. This material is not intended to be a substitute for a formal class in writing.
3. This material will not teach grammar, spelling, or punctuation.
4. This material cannot substitute for poor preparation.

THE POLITICAL SCIENCE WRITER'S BOOKSHELF

Students are encouraged to purchase at least one general stylebook and one writing supplement. Students should have a variety of writing aids on their bookshelves regardless of their level of writing proficiency. While this book is a complete guide to writing political science manuscripts, it is not a substitute for a reference text in basic writing techniques. This book offers practical advice and techniques for effective, efficient, and professional level research and writing in political science. It is structured to introduce students to the discipline and discourse of standard political science writing styles and formats. The books listed below cover non-standard formats or routine general style problems more directly. The selection of these texts is based on the author's library of writing aids. Although the books listed below are quality aids, there are substitutes available for many of these in the campus or local community bookstores.

Standard English Writing Style Books and Supplements

Aaron, Jane E. 2000. *The Little, Brown Essential Handbook for Writers*. 3rd ed. NY: Addison Wesley.

American Heritage Dictionary. 1994. NY: Dell Pub., Co.

Brittain, Robert. 1990. *A Pocket Guide to Correct Punctuation*. Revised by Benjamin Griffith. 3rd ed. Hauppague, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

Chicago Manual of Style. 1993. 14th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ellsworth, Blanche and John A. Higgins. 1997. *English Simplified*. 8th ed. NY: Addison Wesley.

Fogiel, M. 1998. *Handbook of English*. Piscataway, NY: Research and Education Association.

Follett, Wilson. 1998. *Modern American Usage*. NY: Hill and Wang.

Hacker, Diana. 1997. *A Pocket Style Manual*. 2nd ed. NY: Bedford/St. Martin's Press.

Hopper, Vincent, et al. 1997. *A Pocket Guide to Correct Grammar*. 3rd ed. Hauppague, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

Lester, James. 1990. *Writing Research Papers*. NY: Addison Wesley.

Obrecht, Fred. 1999. *Minimum Essentials of English*. 2nd ed. Hauppague, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

Silverman, Jan. 1999. et al. *Rules of Thumb: A Guide for Writers*. 4th ed. NY: McGraw-Hill.

Strunk, William Jr. and E.B. White. 2000. *The Elements of Style*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Yates, Jean. 1996. *Master the Basics—English*. Hauppague, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

Methods and Statistical Guides

Cleveland, William S. 1994. *The Elements of Graphing Data*. Monterey, CA.: CRC Press

Cole, Richard L. 1996. *Introduction to Political Science and Policy Research*. NY: St. Martin's Press.

Creswell, John W. 1994. *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cuzzort, R. P. and James S. Vrettos. 1996. *The Elementary Forms of Statistical Reason*. NY: St. Martin's Press.

Fowler Jr., Floyd J. 1993. *Survey Research Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Jones, Laurence F. and Edward Olson. 1996. *Political Science Research: A Handbook of Scope and Method*. NY: HarperCollins.

Melone, Albert P. 1990. *Researching Constitutional Law*, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co..

Stokey, Edith and Richard Zeckhauser. 1978. *A Primer For Policy Analysis*. NY.: W.W. Norton & Co.

Weisberg, Herbert F. 1996. *An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling, and Data Analysis*. NY: Sage Publications.

Internet Guides

Ackerman, Ernest and Karen Hartman. 1998. *Searching and Researching on the Internet and the World Wide Web*. Wisonville, OR: Frankin, Beedle, & Associates, Inc.

Harnack, Andrew and Eugene Kleppinger. 1998. *Online!: A Reference Guide to Using Internet Sources*. NY: St. Martin's Press.

Stull, Andrew T. 2000. *Political Science on the Internet*. Adapted for Political Science by James A. Puetz. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Wedding, Ken and Doug Gotthoffer. 1999. *Quick Guide to the Internet For Political Science*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Political Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

Bealey, Frank. 1999. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science*. NY: Basil Blackwell.

Miller, David Janet Coleman, William Connolly and Alan Ryan. Editors. *1991 The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Political Thought*. NY: Basil Blackwell.

THE ART OF POLITICAL INQUIRY DEFINED

Many students are unaware that writing assignments for political science classes requires different skills from those required for English composition, creative writing, and journalism courses. Although the basic skills are the same, political scientists, as members of a discipline:

1. ask different questions and seek different answers to questions than those of the humanities and physical sciences.

2. are interested in more than a description of what happened, where something happened, or when something happened.
3. are interested in the political process or the causal connections between political events.

An event or a phenomenon must be politically relevant for it to be of interest to political science scholars. Of course, the standard definition of what is politically relevant is often in the eye of the beholder!

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