
MPA WRITING GUIDE AND STYLE MANUAL

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Guide to the MPA Program's Expectations for Formal Written Work

As MPA students, you are expected to produce high quality written work on all your assignments.

Our stated learning goals that relate to writing and communication are:

- Effectively communicate and productively interact with diverse teams and diverse communities;
- Articulate and appreciate the value of diversity in the public sector the communities it serves;
- Synthesize relevant information to address public problems using the major theories underlying the field of public administration, including those related to governance structures, federalism and intergovernmental relations, and intersectoral relations;
- Articulate and apply a public service perspective in the demonstration of knowledge related to the structures, components, goals, and objectives of the public sector;

With respect to sources and citation, well-written papers should demonstrate consistently accurate formatting of credible sources that are appropriate for the discipline, with little to no errors.

Papers and essays should have a focus, thesis, theme, point of view, approach or statement of purpose. This should be clear, strong, and consistent, expressing a specific approach or point of view, and should be supported by the ideas presented in the body of the assignment.

Content, theoretical basis, framework, or analysis of written work should be fully comprehensive and well-articulated. It should provide compelling support to the focus.

Source(s) of information or source material should be used, interpreted, and evaluated to develop a comprehensive, sophisticated, and insightful synthesis of ideas.

Papers and essays should demonstrate sophisticated sequences of paragraphs and sentences to support seamless idea transition. Assignments should be delivered in a tone appropriate for the audience.

Language use skillfully communicates meaning to readers, with no errors or minor errors that do not affect readability (e.g. spelling, grammar, syntax, diction, or punctuation).

Citation Guide

Writing styles and guidelines include many rules for writing, formatting and citing. The purpose of this section is to provide guidance in the formatting of citations and references only.

Acceptable Styles

There are a number of different citation styles used in academic writing. In the field of Public Administration, the two most commonly used are the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS Social Sciences Style and the American Psychological Association (APA) style. CMS Social Sciences Style is in use by the American Political Science Association (APSA). As you will see below, CMS/APSA and APA and styles are quite similar and generally require the same information about the source being cited, usually just with slightly different ordering and punctuation. The field of Public Administration generally does not use the Modern Languages Association (MLA) citation style.

Faculty will inform you of which style you should use in your work. Unless otherwise directed by your instructor, you should use one of these two citation styles in your writing. Whichever one you use, you must be consistent throughout a single document.

In-Text Citations

There are two ways of using in-text citations. In the first, the authors' names are grammatically part of the sentence, as in:

According to Kiewiet and Szakaly (1996), legislative supermajority requirements have no effect on debt levels.

Note that the parenthetical citation comes *immediately* after the authors' names rather than at the end of the sentence.

In the other form of in-text citation, the citation is not grammatically part of the sentence:

Legislative supermajority requirements have no effect on debt levels (Kiewiet and Szakaly 1996).

Though both forms are acceptable, the second is more compact and elegant. Also note that the authors' last names and year of publication are presented within a single set of parentheses. You should not separate these into separate sets of parentheses. And note that regardless of the method, authors' first names are never used.

Publication Types

For each publication type listed below, there is a full reference entry (as you would find in the “references” section or bibliography of a paper) followed by the parenthetical in-text citation in both of the aforementioned styles.

Books, One Author

Unless you are referencing the main thesis of the entire text (this would be unusual) you must include a page number in the in-text citation whenever you reference material from a book.

CMS/APSA

Simon, Herbert A. 1997. *Administrative Behavior*, 4th Edition. New York: The Free Press.

(Simon 1997, 84)

APA

Simon, H. A. (1997). *Administrative Behavior*, 4th Edition. The Free Press.

(Simon, 1997, pg. 84)

Books, Two Authors

CMS/APSA

Miller, David Y. and Raymond W. Cox III. 2014. *Governing the Metropolitan Region: America's New Frontier*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

(Miller and Cox 2014, 101)

APA

Miller, D.Y. and R.W. Cox III. (2014). *Governing the Metropolitan Region: America's New Frontier*. M.E. Sharpe.

(Miller and Cox, 2014, pg. 101)

Books, Three or More Authors

CMS/APSA

Johnson, Craig L., Martin J. Luby, and Tima Moldogaziev. 2014. *State and Local Financial Instruments*. Northampton: Edward Elgar.

The very first time this work is cited: (Johnson, Luby and Moldogaziev 2014, 84)

Every subsequent time this work is cited: (Johnson et al. 2014, 84)

APA

Johnson, C. L., M. J. Luby, and T. Moldogaziev. (2014). *State and Local Financial Instruments*. Edward Elgar.

(Johnson, Luby and Moldogaziev 2014, Pg. 84)

Every subsequent time this work is cited: (Johnson et al., 2014, Pg. 84)

Edited Volumes (the entire work)

CMS/APSA

Perry, James L. and Robert K. Christensen, eds. 2015. *Handbook of Public Administration, 3rd Edition*. San Francisco: Wiley.

Perry and Christensen 2015 or (Perry and Christensen 2015, 63)

APA

Perry, J. L. and R. K. Christensen, eds. (2015). *Handbook of Public Administration, 3rd Edition*. Wiley.

Perry and Christensen (2015) or (Perry & Christensen, 2015, p. 63)

Chapters in Edited Volumes

Note that for all of these, the authors of the chapter are the ones cited rather than the editors.

CMS/APSA

McGuire, Michael and Chris Silvia. 2015. "Managing Effective Collaborations." In *Handbook of Public Administration, 3rd Edition*, eds. James L. Perry and Robert K. Christensen. San Francisco: Wiley, 293-311.

(McGuire and Silvia 2015)

APA

McGuire, M. and C. Silvia. (2015). Managing Effective Collaborations. In J. L. Perry and R. K. Christensen (Eds.), *Handbook of Public Administration, 3rd Edition* (pp. 293-311) Wiley.

(McGuire and Silvia, 2015)

Journal Articles

Note that unless you are referring to something very specific, it is generally unnecessary to include a page number in the in-text citations for journal articles.

CMS/APSA

Loveridge, Ronald O. 1968. "The City Manager in Legislative Politics: A Collision of Role Conceptions." *Polity* 1(2) 213-236.

(Loveridge 1968)

APA

Loveridge, R. O. (1968). The City Manager in Legislative Politics: A Collision of Role Conceptions. *Polity*, 1(2), 213-236.

(Loveridge, 1968)

Statutes

CMS/APSA

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Publ. L. No. 111-148, 124 Stat. 119 (2010).

(The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act 2010)

APA

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Publ. L. No. 111-148, 124 Stat. 119 (2010).

(The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 2010)

Court Cases

CMS/APSA

Obergefell v. Hodges, 135 S. Ct. 2584 (2015).

(*Obergefell v. Hodges* 2015)

APA

Obergefell v. Hodges, 135 S. Ct. 2584 (2015).

(*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015)

Institute, Government, and Technical Reports

CMS/APSA

United States Government Accountability Office. 2019. *Performance and accountability report: Fiscal year 2019*. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/702715.pdf>

(United States Government Accountability Office 2019)

APA

United States Government Accountability Office. (2019). *Performance and accountability report: Fiscal year 2019*.
<https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/702715.pdf>

(United States Government Accountability Office, 2019)

Reports from Agencies by authors

CMS/APSA

O'Malley, Marianne and Michael Cohen. 2000. *Reconsidering AB 8: Exploring Alternative Ways to Allocate Property Taxes*. State of California: Legislative Analyst's Office.

(O'Malley and Cohen 2000)

APA

O'Malley, M. and M. Cohen. (2000). *Reconsidering AB 8: Exploring Alternative Ways to Allocate Property Taxes*. State of California: Legislative Analyst's Office.

(O'Malley and Cohen, 2000)

Websites

CMS/APSA

League of California Cities. 2020. "Charter Cities." League of California Cities, March 10. https://www.cacities.org/Resources-Documents/Resources-Section/Charter-Cities/Charter_Cities-List.

(League of California Cities 2020)

APA

League of California Cities. (2020). Charter Cities. League of California Cities, March 10. https://www.cacities.org/Resources-Documents/Resources-Section/Charter-Cities/Charter_Cities-List.

(League of California, Cities 2020)

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

CMS/APSA

Atkinson, Robert D. 2020. "Technology Assessment for Government: It Worked Then, It's Needed Even More Today." *Governing*, March 9.

(Atkinson 2020)

APA

Atkinson, R. (2020, March). Technology Assessment for Government: It Worked Then, It's Needed Even More Today. *Governing*.

(Atkinson, 2020)

In-text Citations for Multiple Authors and Works in CMS/APSA

When more than one study is cited, arrange the references in alphabetical order and separate them with semicolons as necessary:

(Atkinson 2020; Loveridge 1968; Simon 1997)

If two or more authors have the same last name, a first initial should be used to distinguish between them:

(B. Ripley 1988; R. Ripley 1964)

When citing two works by the same author, use the author's name just once and separate the publication years with a semi-colon:

(Stillman 1977; 1978)

If works by the same author(s) are also published in the same year, add lowercase letters to the dates of publication and make sure to repeat these for the full citations in the reference section:

(Perry 1997a; 1997b)

Pages, chapters, and so forth follow the date, preceded by a comma; p. and pp. are omitted:

(Parks 1975, 121–125)

(Ostrom et al. 1985, chaps. 6, 7)

Writing Dos and Don'ts

Do . . .

- Proofread your work before turning it in.
- Cite sources properly.
- Indent paragraphs.
- Be direct.
- Outline your ideas before turning them into an essay.
- Write formally.
- Use third person.
- Sound authoritative.
- Be pithy and succinct.
- Try to keep the subject before the predicate.
- Always use the correct preposition.
- Be consistent with verb tense.

Don't . . .

- Use contractions.
- End sentences with prepositions.
- Mix up “there,” “they’re”, and “their.”
- Use bullet points in the text of a paper unless an instructor specifically tells you that you may.
- Start too many sentences with “However.”
- Use cliché phrases (e.g., “the task at hand”).
- Use informal speech (slang, colloquialisms, etc.).
- Add extra words to make a sentence longer.
- Use direct quotes unless absolutely necessary. Quotations should be used when *the way* that something is written is important to convey (this is rarely the case in PA).
- Write “according to the author. . .”
- Use authors’ first names in in-text citations.
- Use first (“I” or “we”) or second person (“you”).
- Use any word that does not absolutely have to be used.
- Use the built in thesaurus tool.
- Be concerned about repetition. Using the correct or appropriate word or phrase is *always* preferable to using an incorrect or inappropriate one, even if you (or Grammarly) think you are being repetitive.
- Use longer words just to take up more space or sound more official (think “utilize” vs “use”).
- Use pseudo legalistic sounding language (like “said” to reference something that has been mentioned before).

Proofreading Tips

1. Allot sufficient time for proofreading and editing. Proofreading is not something you do *after* the paper is written; it is *part* of the writing process itself.
2. Print out a hard copy of your paper.
3. Read your paper aloud (yes, aloud) and mark it up with a red pen. You will catch many spelling and grammatical errors by reading your paper aloud. You will also catch awkward sentences and duplicate passages. Perform this step all the way through your paper before returning to your computer.
4. Delete as many unnecessary words and sentences as possible. It is always better to say something in as few words as possible. If a word or phrase does not absolutely have to be in the paper, delete it.
5. Make the changes to the actual Word document. Pay attention to spell check and grammar check. Review every suggestion that they make and consider accepting it.

Formatting Tips

Different types of documents require different types of formatting. Context should be your guide. For most academic papers that you will submit in your classes, “invisible” formatting is usually the best approach. This means that you should format your papers in such a way that the content is prioritized, and the formatting does not distract from it. In the absence of any specific instructions from your instructor, the most effective way to do this is to use:

- Times New Roman font (the font used in this document, which you have not noticed until now because it is “invisible”)
- 12-point font size
- Double-spaced line spacing
- Left-aligned (rather than justified) text
- Page numbers
- Hanging indentation for the entries on the references page
- First line indentation for paragraphs in the rest of the text

It is also generally a good idea to avoid using borders, colors, backgrounds, and other effects when writing a standard academic paper. Your instructor will tell you whether you must have a cover page.

A Well-organized Literature Review

Over the course of the program, you will be asked to write literature reviews and other similar assignments. At its heart, a literature review is a summary of the existing research on a particular topic. You will, however, typically be expected to provide *more* than just a summary. A good literature review offers at least some analysis in which the literature is compared and contrasted and put into context with other research. The purpose of this twofold. You are learning about the findings and results of research in Public Administration, *and* you are engaging in critical thinking about those works.

In order to accomplish these goals, a work-by-work summary of the literature is not sufficient. Not only does this produce dry and unexciting papers, but it does not demonstrate the organization of thought and critical thinking skills that we are trying to promote. Consider the passage below. It accomplishes the task of summarizing literature on the topic of debt restrictions, but it is not actually organized (except chronologically) and does not provide us with any additional insight.

Passage 1: Serial Summaries (how NOT to write)

McEachern (1978) predicts that when some fraction greater than a majority is required for referendum approval then observed debt levels in the community will be lower. The empirical evidence confirms this prediction. Finally, state imposed debt ceilings appear to be an effective curb on the level of debt issued by localities.

According to Farnham (1985) state-imposed local debt limits have a significant depressing effect on local per capita gross debt levels because they result in both lower general obligation debt and decreased non-guaranteed debt. This effect occurs even though there is some substitution of non-guaranteed debt for general obligation debt in those debt-limit communities subject to the most stringent restrictions. It can also be concluded that voting referenda either simple majority or with greater than majority requirements generally have no effect on local debt levels.

Nice (1991) finds that state policies intended to limit debt financing, either by requiring a balanced budget or by establishing constitutional limitations on debt, have been adopted in many states. Analysis reveals that stricter constitutional debt limitations are associated with lower levels of full faith and credit debt but show little relationship to overall state debt.

Bahl and Duncombe (1993) examine the level and determinants of the use of long-term debt by state and local governments during the 1980s. They find that changes in the level of debt burdens in the 1980s can be partially attributable to increases in the demand for capital intensive services and the preference of a state for a generally larger role for its governments.

According to Kiewiet and Szakaly (1996) levels of debt depend upon the type of restriction in place. States that either prohibit guaranteed debt or require referendum approval to issue it have less guaranteed debt than those that require a supermajority of the legislature to issue debt or those that have revenue-based

limitations. Although the issuance of state nonguaranteed debt does not appear to be generally motivated by the aim of circumventing constitutional limitations on guaranteed debt, restrictive provisions at the state level do result in the devolution of debt issuance to governments at the local level.

Simonsen and Hill (1998) find that respondents say that avoiding a referendum was a primary factor in the choice of non-guaranteed over guaranteed debt. In a survey of government finance officers, this was ranked even higher than circumventing debt limits.

Hur (2007) examines whether tax and expenditure limitations (TEs) and borrowing limits, as well as the way in which they interact with one another, affect the structure of state revenue and indebtedness. The results of the study indicate that these limits influence the finances of the state government and that an interaction exists between state TEs and debt limits. More specifically, TEs have resulted in reducing the tax burden but also in increasing non-tax revenue and debt issues. However, debt limits have not slowed the growth of debt but have reduced tax revenue. It appears that states with fiscal limits find less constrained ways of financing in order to make up for a reduction in tax revenue.

Denison, Hackbart and Moody (2009) find that limited economic resources create constraints that force trade-offs among desired objectives. Likewise, state-balanced budget requirements force policy makers to make budgetary trade-offs among competing state programs. Constrained state resources have also encouraged states to issue bonds to finance infrastructure and capital assets rather than using pay-as-you-go financing for such investments. However, the expanded use of debt financing often faces another constraint known as debt capacity. As a result, states may be required to make trade-offs among the competing demands for debt financing similar to the trade-offs they must make for operating program expenditures. The authors' empirical findings indicate that tradeoffs occur between highway project—related debt and other state debt in those states with formal restrictions on total general obligation and revenue-backed debt (umbrella debt limits). In states without umbrella debt limits, there is no evidence of a trade-off between the highway debt and all other state debt.

Instead, literature reviews should be organized by topic, findings, results, or positions. One tool for assembling the literature review in this way is a table. The first step is to extract the relevant findings from the readings in the form of bullet points. The bullet points can then be rearranged in a way that highlights their similarities or differences. Then they can be organized in a table. In the table below, the same literature presented above is grouped by topic and finding.

Question	Conclusion	Findings
What effects do debt limits and restrictions have on the level, type, and locus of debt issuance?	Debt limits reduce guaranteed debt, have no effect on non-guaranteed debt.	At the state level, constitutional debt limits reduce levels of GO debt, but have no relationship to levels of revenue debt. And growth in any kind of debt is unrelated to debt limits (Nice 1991)
		In a survey of government finance officers, respondents say that avoiding a referendum was a primary factor in the choice of non-guaranteed over guaranteed debt (Simonsen and Hill 1998)
	Debt limits reduce both GO and revenue debt	On the other hand, debt limits reduce both GO and revenue debt overall, but each type of debt is substitutable for the other (Bahl and Duncombe 1993)
	Debt limits resulted in the issuance of more non-guaranteed debt	State debt limits resulted in the issuance of more non-guaranteed debt (Hur 2007)
	Tradeoffs occur between debt related to highway infrastructure and other purposes	In states with umbrella debt limits, tradeoffs occur between debt related to highway infrastructure and other purposes, but not in states without these types of constraints (Denison, Hackbart and Moody 2009)
Effect that debt restrictions have on debt levels	No link	no link at all between bond referenda requirements or supermajority requirements and debt levels (Farnham 1985)
	Referenda Minimize, No effect of supermajority	legislative supermajority requirements have no effect on debt levels either. But they do find that referenda seem to be the most effective provisions at minimizing the issuance of guaranteed debt (Kiewiet and Szakaly 1996)
	Only Supermajority requirements minimize	While simple majority referenda requirements have no discernable difference on debt levels than no referenda requirements at all, supermajority requirements do result in much lower debt levels (McEachern 1978)

The next step is to use the organization created in the table above and construct an essay around it. This helps us write about the topics and findings (which is the point of the exercise) instead of about the works themselves. The passage below demonstrates this. After reading it, go back and read the first passage and see the difference.

Passage 2: Integrated Summaries

As to the question of what effects debt limits and restrictions have on the level, type, and locus of debt issuance, the results are mixed. Most of the work in this area has been to investigate the effects of limits rather than restrictions, so we start our review of the literature there. Two studies find that debt limits reduce guaranteed debt, have no effect on non-guaranteed debt. At the state level,

constitutional debt limits reduce levels of GO debt, but have no relationship to levels of revenue debt and growth in any kind of debt is unrelated to debt limits (Nice 1991). Government finance officers have said that avoiding a referendum was a primary factor in the choice of non-guaranteed over guaranteed debt (Simonsen and Hill 1998). This was ranked even higher than circumventing debt limits. On the other hand, debt limits may reduce both GO and revenue debt overall, but each type of debt is substitutable for the other (Bahl and Duncombe 1993). In contrast, state debt limits resulted in the issuance of more non-guaranteed debt (Hur 2007). In states with umbrella debt limits, tradeoffs occur between debt related to highway infrastructure and other purposes, but not in states without these types of constraints (Denison, Hackbart and Moody 2009).

There are also mixed results in the handful of studies that examine the effect that debt restrictions have on debt levels. There is no link at all between bond referenda requirements or supermajority requirements and debt levels (Farnham 1985). Legislative supermajority requirements have no effect on debt levels either (Kiewiet and Szakaly 1996). But referenda seem to be the most effective provisions at minimizing the issuance of guaranteed debt. While simple majority referenda requirements have no discernable difference on debt levels than no referenda requirements at all, supermajority requirements do result in much lower debt levels (McEachern 1978).

You can see that the second passage can get away with being much shorter because the focus is on the findings that are relevant to the questions we are asking. More work goes into creating the table, which then makes it easier to construct the paragraphs. The other thing you should notice is that the citations are no longer grammatically part of the sentence. Again, this helps us focus on the findings rather than who found them. It also dispenses with a lot of extra words.

Reference List for Literature Review Example

Note that entries are in alphabetical order and that the indentation style is hanging. Also be aware that in an actual paper, there would be a page break between the text and the references section.

- Bahl, Roy and William Duncombe. 1993. "State and Local Debt Burdens in the 1980s: A Study in Contrast." *Public Administration Review*, 53(1) 31-40.
- Denison, Dwight V., Merl Hackbart, and Michael Moody. 2009. "Intrastate Competition for Debt Resources." *Public Finance Review*, 37(3) 269-288.
- Farnham, Paul G. 1985. "Re-examining Local Debt Limits: A Disaggregated Analysis." *Southern Economic Journal*, 51(4) 1186-1201.
- Hur, Myungsoon. 2007. "Fiscal Limits and State Fiscal Structure: An Analysis of State Revenue Structure and Indebtedness." *Municipal Finance Journal*, 28(3) 19-35.

- Kiewiet, D. Roderick and Kristin Szakaly. 1996. "Constitutional Limitations on Borrowing: An Analysis of State Bonded Indebtedness." *Journal of Law, Economics, & Organization*, 12(1) 62-97.
- McEachern, William A. 1978. "Collective Decision Rules and Local Debt Choice: A Test of the Median-Voter Hypothesis." *National Tax Journal*, 31(2) 129-136.
- Nice, David C. 1991. "The Impact of State Policies to Limit Debt Financing." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 21(1) 69-82.
- Simonsen, William and Larry Hill. 1998. "Municipal Bond Issuance: Is There Evidence of a Principal-Agent Problem?" *Public Budgeting & Finance*, 18(4) 71-100.

How to Summarize

Summarization is an important writing skill that we often take for granted. One common mistake that students often make when summarizing literature is providing a list of topics covered without actually explaining or describing specific findings. The passage below provides an example of this kind of writing mistake.

Passage 1: List of Topics without Real Content (how NOT to write)

In the early years, Bahl and Duncombe (1993), borrowing from the literature on the demand for local public services, considered how demand for services, government spending, the composition of debt, and historical debt influence the use of long-term debt by state and local government during the 1980s. Ellis and Schansberg (1999) focused on the way in which the demographic, political, and institutional factors, controlling for income and capital spending, impact debt accumulation at the state level. Wang, Hou, and Duncombe (2007) developed a model with demographic, socioeconomic, political, and institutional variables to capture the behavioral patterns of voters and politicians when making capital financing decisions (pay-as-you-go financing). More recently, Kim and Lim (2018) employed a political market framework to explore the mediating role of political institutions in state financing decisions within different institutional settings. Particularly, Schneider (2019) examined determinants of debt financing for highway capital spending in the states by using a variety of socioeconomic measures representing the median voter model, controlling for political and institutional factors, and others.

As you can see, the passage provides a list of what the studies were *about* without explaining what their findings actually were. We learn nothing from it and the passage, therefore, just takes up space without moving the paper along. The passage below skips these unnecessary lists and presents the actual findings of the literature.

Passage 2: Description of Actual Findings

Population growth and density result in a higher demand for debt (Ball and Duncombe 1993). The age of the population is also a factor with older voters demonstrating a preference for less debt (Ellis and Schransberg 1999), though younger voters also have a higher preference for public debt (Schneider 2019). Wealthier voters tend to favor tax finance relative to debt finance because of preferences in state and local tax codes (Wang, Hou, and Duncombe 2007). Debt issuance increases in anticipation of an election year as elected officials use capital projects as evidence of accomplishments for political gain (Kim and Lin 2018).

The above passage cites all of the same literature as the previous one but conveys the actual content of that literature rather than just listing its topics. This is much better writing.

Reference List for Literature Review Example

Note that entries are in alphabetical order and that the indentation style is hanging.

- Bahl, Roy and William Duncombe. 1993. "State and local debt burdens in the 1980s: A study in contrast." *Public Administration Review*, 53(1): 31.
- Ellis, Michael. A. and D. Eric Schansberg. 1999. "The determinants of state government debt financing." *Public Finance Review* 27(6): 571-587.
- Kim, Koomin and Seunghoo Lim. 2018. "Determinants of state long-term debt: The political market framework." *The Social Science Journal* 55(3): 359-368.
- Schneider, Ann L. 2019. *Determinants of debt financing for highway capital spending in the States*. University of Illinois at Springfield.
- Wang, Wen, Hou, Yilin, and William Duncombe. 2007. "Determinants of pay-as-you-go financing of capital projects: evidence from the states." *Public Budgeting & Finance*, 27(4): 18-42.