

Writing in the Political Science Department

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The Political Science Department is committed to fostering excellent writing among its majors. All courses above the 100 level require a substantial amount of writing as part of the expectations for the courses. It is up to the individual instructors to determine the amount of writing assigned in each course. Most of our 200 and 300 level courses would be “writing intensive” courses under the definition of the former curriculum, in that these courses have at least 20 pages of writing assigned each semester. A number of courses include an expectation for multiple drafts of papers and/or require the use of “peer editors” as part of the writing process.

Writing assignments vary across the courses but include some or all of the following:

- book reviews
- film reviews
- current events journals
- critical and analytical essays based on assigned readings
- daily or weekly reaction papers based on assigned reading
- analyses of cases or government documents
- writing policy memos or policy position papers
- traditional research papers requiring the use of primary as well as secondary sources and multiple drafts (This is especially true in Senior Seminars and 300-level courses.)

All writing assignments are designed to teach and to encourage students to think critically and to use evidence to support arguments and to substantiate observations. Various faculty members distribute models of “excellent writing” to their students and review the elements of good writing in courses. All faculty members suggest that students use the Chicago Style Manual or the APSA Style Manual for research papers, independent research projects, and honors theses.

Evaluations of all written assignments include an assessment of writing in the grade that is assigned for the paper. There is no formal assessment mechanism in place in the department beyond the grades for individual assignments.