

**Appalachian State University
Master of Public Administration Program
Writing Guide**

Introduction

Students should use the following guidelines to complete written assignments in the Appalachian State University Masters of Public Administration program. In graduate school, as in most professional settings, written works are intended to convey an analysis of important information to readers. The author should focus on making the written work interesting and meaningful so that the audience pays attention to this important information.

In most classes, students find that journal articles serve as examples of exceptional writing. Students may find that modeling the style of public administration articles is helpful to write concise term papers, capstone projects, and other reports. In certain classes, however, faculty may need to add special requirements for particular assignments. In all cases, students should follow any special instructions from the professor in addition to, or in lieu of, the following guidelines.

Style

- Write from a guiding **research question**.
 - You may find it helpful to include the research question in the header during the draft writing phase. This will serve as a reminder that all information should be related to the research question. Remember to change the header before submission.
- **Include an introduction** that clearly states the purpose and general outline and a **conclusion** that restates the purpose and findings.
 - Writers often find writing or re-writing the introduction and conclusion at the end of the drafting process allows them to clearly state the purpose and outline in the introduction and restate the purpose and findings in the conclusion.
- Ask **“so-what?”** Evaluate every sentence by asking yourself why the piece of information is important. If it is not important, consider rewriting or deleting the sentence.
 - To evaluate the “so what” of each sentence, you may find it helpful to make a bulleted list of the key information in each paragraph. If your list does not follow a logical order or excludes key information, you may need to add or delete sentences, paragraphs, or sections.
- Written works of more than two to three pages should have **headings and subheadings** to guide the reader through the paper.
- **Define key terms** for the reader.
- Use **active voice** rather than passive voice. You clearly identify the subject in the active voice, which makes the statement less confusing for the reader.
 - For example, “Boone’s town manager proposed a budget to the city council,” is a clearer statement than “A budget was proposed to the city council.” Why? The first statement specifies that the town manager took an action, but the second statement requires the reader to determine who proposed the budget.

- Use citations from **scholarly, peer reviewed research** in academic journals or books. Do not cite Wikipedia, which can be edited by anyone, unless the paper is about Wikipedia.

Paragraphs

- Thoughts and ideas should be organized into paragraphs.
- Each paragraph should contain **one main idea**.
- Paragraphs should be **short but have at least three sentences**. Paragraphs that are almost 1 page long (or more than 1 page long) should be edited because it is likely you have presented more than one main idea in the paragraph.
- Paragraphs should be **ordered from general to particular** information.
 - Paragraphs should begin with an opening sentence that states the general idea of the paragraph. The first sentence should be followed by supporting statements.
 - To avoid choppy writing, there should be a transition statement from one paragraph to another.

Sentences

- **Avoid writing numerous long sentences** when shorter sentences convey the information.
- Use **quotes sparingly**. Quotes are reproductions of another author's work. Most often, the reader wants to understand your interpretation of others' work and the importance of the cited work to your project.
 - Proper citation includes quotation marks, the author's name, page number, and year of the source material.
 - Quotes are not stand-alone sentences. For example, a proper quotation would be: According to Bradbury (2011), "The Appalachian State University Master of Public Administration Program has achieved..." (p. 10). The following is not proper: "The Appalachian State University Master of Public Administration has achieved..." (Bradbury, 2011, p. 10).
 - **Do not use block quotes**.
 - Changing a few words is not paraphrasing. Failure to use proper citation and punctuation in this case is plagiarism.
 - To make the work your own, incorporate the ideas into your own words and into the organization of your paper.
 - The APA guidelines encourage you to provide a page number after paraphrased material.
 - Rather than quoting or paraphrasing one author, you may find it more meaningful to consider the meaning of several works when taken together. In other words, a particular understanding may be drawn from thinking about the scholarship of more than one author. In this case, you write your understanding of previous research and cite all works that contributed to that understanding. This helps to avoid the need for quotations and may add meaning to your own work.

Word choice

- Proper **word choice** can add clarity to your paper.

- **Use transitional words** such as “first,” “second,” “finally,” “in addition,” and “furthermore” as appropriate. These can often help you transition between related, but distinct, ideas and give clues about important information to the reader.
 - **Use simpler words** when possible. For example, substitute the word “use” for “utilize.” If the meaning of a word is unclear to you, avoid using the word.
 - **Avoid clichés.** Phrases such as “by the same token,” “when push comes to shove,” “at the end of the day,” and other clichés add little to no value to the meaning of the sentence and may irritate or bore the reader.
 - **Avoid generalizations.** Phrases such as “research has shown,” “everyone knows,” or “everyone agrees” are inappropriate unless you have specific citations to support your claim.
 - **Do not use contractions** in formal writing (for example, use “do not” instead of “don’t,” “is not instead of “isn’t,” etc.)
 - **Avoid unnecessary clauses** such as “in order to” at the beginning of sentences.
 - **Delete extra words**, such as “very.” Rather than “very good,” you could choose the word excellent, for example.
 - **Avoid vague words** such as “it” or “there.” These words are often empty introductory language that add little value to the sentence.
 - **Avoid the use of jargon** whenever possible. This type of language or terminology may confuse readers who are unfamiliar with your field of study. For example, “red tape” is often used to criticize or describe bureaucracy. Specifying that procedures, rules, paperwork is an important, but frustrating, feature of bureaucracies would be clearer to readers who may be unfamiliar with the phrase “red tape.”
- **Carefully consider verb choice.**
 - Use **strong verbs** in writing to keep the reader’s attention. For example, “The research question generated discussion” is more interesting and clearer to readers than “The research question was interesting.”
 - Use a **consistent verb tense** throughout the document. Past tense is probably most appropriate.
 - Make sure verbs **match the plurality of the noun/subject** of the sentence. For example, “they are” not “they is,” “data are” not “data is,” or “he is” not “he are.”
- **Spell out the full phrase for an acronym.** The first time an acronym appears in a paper, it should be in parentheses immediately following the full phrase. For example, use “United Nations (UN)” rather than “UN” the first time.
 - Each time you refer to the UN thereafter, “UN” should be used. Be consistent and do not switch back and forth between the full phrase and the acronym.
- Avoid beginning sentences with “and,” “but,” “because,” or “however.” These words imply a continuation of the previous sentences main thought and are often mis- or over-used.
- **Numbers have different rules**, depending on the use of the number.
 - The numbers zero through nine should be spelled out, except when referring to data or measurements. For example, “I ordered three reams of standard paper measuring 8 inches by 10 inches,” is correct but “I ordered 3 reams...” is not.

- Use Arabic numerals for any number greater than nine, such as 10, 11, or 12.
- Always spell out ordinal numbers, such as tenth.
- Spell out any number at the beginning of a sentence, such as “Sixteen students passed the Seminar course.”
- If discussing a percentage, spell out “percent” instead of using “%.”
- **Check all punctuation.**
 - Note that semicolons are typically used incorrectly. The correct use of a semicolon is to connect closely related ideas. For example, “The town infrastructure is old; it is also historic,” is correct.

Editing

- Expect to **write and re-write** your own work **several times** before giving it to anyone else to read. Writing is an iterative process that takes time; there is no short-cut to writing well.
- Use Microsoft’s **spelling and grammar check** before submitting your work.
 - This should be one of several tools you use to check your work because it is not always accurate. Microsoft often does not detect the inappropriate use of a word if it is spelled correctly. For example, if you had “dessert in the desert” and instead typed “desert in the desert,” Microsoft does not note the error. Similarly, “public mangers” are not as common as writing in our field would suggest. Moreover, the check often offers suggestions you might not wish to take, such as changing the spelling of authors’ names.
- **Read** your paper out loud and backwards. These processes will help you identify grammatical, typographical, and content errors.
- Share your paper with peers for substantive content. Peers can identify any points that may require further clarification. Peers can also help to identify grammatical and typographical errors.
- Proofread. Revise. Proofread again. Revise. Proofread again. Revise. Proofread once more.
 - Once you submit your written work, the reader has no choice but to assume that it is your best possible effort. Make sure that it is.

Formatting

- **Follow length requirements**, including minimum and maximum page length.
- The following formatting requirements typically apply:
 - **Double-space** research papers
 - **Number all pages** of text, beginning on the first page of text. Do not start numbering on title page, abstract, table of contents or executive summary
 - Use a **basic, 12 point font** such as Arial, Courier or Times New Roman
 - Use **1 inch margins** on all sides
 - Use **one space between sentences** and **one carriage return** after paragraphs
 - **Indent the first line** of a paragraph

- Include a **running head**, per APA guidelines
- Include a **title page and staple** written works of more than one page.
 - Title page should include: Title, student’s name, course title, professor’s name, assignment name (if appropriate), and date
 - Running head is not required

References Format

- Learn how to correctly cite, paraphrase, and quote to **avoid plagiarism**.
- **Take the time to become extremely familiar with American Psychological Association (APA) format.** You want your professor to be focused on the content of your writing, not fixing formatting and citation issues. Citation resources can be found online at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>.
- **Avoid writing the title of the source** in the text.
 - Do not attribute a point to a source rather than an author. For example, rather than “According to *Ethics for Bureaucrats*,” write “According to Rohr...” Publications do not have ideas, scholars share ideas through books and articles.
- **Do not trust citation generators.** These tools often provide a citation format that includes numerous mistakes.
- **In text citations** should:
 - Include all references indexed in the reference list at the end of the paper.
 - Include the last name of the author(s) followed by the year of publication at the end of the sentence. See below for examples, including proper punctuations.
 - Include the page number for direct quotations. Although APA allows for some flexibility with paraphrasing, include the reference’s page number for any paraphrased material.
- **Reference lists** should:
 - Include all references cited in text.
 - Be alphabetized by the first author’s last name
 - Have a left-justified first line for each source. If the citation wraps beyond one line, each line beyond the first line should be indented one-half inch from the left margin. This is called a hanging indentation
- The following are examples of the most **common citation formats** in the Appalachian State University Public Administration program:
 - Single author:
 - In-text: (Bradbury, 2011).
 - Reference:
Bradbury, M. D. (2011). Representation and diversity in the federal government: A critical review of government reports. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 31(4), 424-431. doi: 10.1177/0734371X11420910

- Two authors:
 - In-text: (Hur & Strickland, 2012).
 - Reference:
 - Hur, Y. and Strickland, R. A. (2012). Diversity management practices and understanding their adoption: Examining local governments in North Carolina. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 36(3), 380-412.
- Anthology:
 - In text: (Rohr, 1979/2012).
 - Reference:
 - Rohr, J. A. (2012). Ethics for bureaucrats: An essay on law and values. In J. M. Shafritz and A. C. Hyde (Eds.), *Classics of public administration* (7th ed., pp. 361-369). Australia: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning. (Original work published 1979)

Other Resources

To assist you in editing process your own work, please consult the following resources:

APA

- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. (2010). Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 6th ed.
- *APA Formatting and Style Guide*, OWL Materials from The OWL at Purdue
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

Grammar

- Any edition of Diane Hacker's and Nancy Sommers *A writer's reference*. The eight edition was published in 2014.
- Strunk, Jr., W. and White, E. B. (2009) *The elements of style*. New York, NY: Longman. Available online at:
<https://faculty.washington.edu/heagerty/Courses/b572/public/StrunkWhite.pdf>
- <http://www.webgrammar.com/grammarbasics.html>

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Author's Checklist:

(Includes checks for many, but not all, of the guidelines presented above)

- Cover page
- Introduction provides purpose and outline of paper
- Research question is clear
- Headings and subheadings included
- Quotations used sparingly and properly attributed
- Conclusion provides summary of main findings
- All sections structured into paragraphs that are not approaching one-page in length
- Sentences are clear and concise
- Key terms defined
- Acronyms spelled out first time and used consistently thereafter
- Reference list uses APA format and includes information for all in-text citations
- Multiple drafts read and edited
- Shared with a peer for feedback
- Spelling and grammar check used
- Uses active voice
- Uses strong verbs
- No contractions or clichés
- Standard 12-point font
- 1" margins on all pages
- Page numbers included
- Read and edited again
- Stapled

Reviewer's Checklist

(Includes checks for both content and stylistic quality)

- After reading the introduction, you understand the purpose and outline of the paper
- Research question is clear to you
- Headings and subheadings match the information in the sections
- Minimal quotations with proper attribution
- Conclusion provides a clear summary of findings
- Includes definitions for all key terms
- Paragraphs have one main idea and do not approach one-page in length
- Acronyms spelled out first time and use is consistent
- Reference list uses APA format and includes information for all in-text citations
- Free of grammatical errors
- No contractions or clichés
- Standard 12-point font
- 1" margins on all pages
- Page numbers included