

# Writing Guide for POLS Courses

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Below are the **requirements for all Political Science courses**. Students are expected to follow the **instructions in this guide for all of their written assignments**. Individual course instructors may provide specific instructions for their particular courses or written assignments. If they require a special modification then you will follow those instructions. Otherwise, you are required to follow the instructions in this guide.

The guide focuses on four important requirements for writing an academic paper. It is organized in the following sections: (A) Citation Style; (B) Use of Sources; (C) Structuring A Research Paper; and (D) Editing and Formatting. All of these are important for the assessment of written assignments.

## (A) CITATION STYLE

This section of the guide focuses on:

- (i) Using APA exclusively as citation style; and
- (ii) Using the citation style consistently throughout the assignment, including references imported from reference software

### APA Citation Style Guide

Students must use the **APA citation style** for all of their written assignments. The [APA style guide](#) can be found on the library website. Familiarize yourself with this guide as you will be required to follow it for both in-text citations and full citations in the reference list.

### Consistency in Citation

Students are required to **use in-text citations** to cite sources and these **must be consistent with APA throughout** the assignment. Likewise, all of the items in your reference list must follow the APA style consistently. If you are using **reference software**, always check that all of the citations are imported properly and consistently into the document.

### Citing Judicial Decisions

When citing judicial decisions, students should follow the Canadian Uniform Guide to Legal Citation (also known as the McGill Guide). The in-text citation should include the name of decision, year, and paragraph number (if applicable). If there is no paragraph number available, a page number will suffice. For example:

The Supreme Court has ruled that no level of government has the authority to act alone to change the “fundamental nature and role” of Canada’s political institutions (Reference re Senate Reform, 2014, para. 48).

In your reference list, the full case information should be included. If you are citing from a database (such as CanLII), you should include a database identifier. For example:

Good Spirit School Division No. 204 v Christ the Teacher Roman Catholic Separate School  
Division No. 212, 2017 SKQB 109 (CanLII)  
R. v. Oakes, [1986] 1 S.C.R. 103  
Reference re Senate Reform, [2014] 1 S.C.R. 704

## (B) USE OF SOURCES

This section of the guide focuses on:

- (i) Presenting and integrating others' ideas accurately into your own arguments while assigning appropriate credit; and
- (ii) Identifying and distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate sources.

### Presenting and Integrating Others' Ideas

When you **quote directly, paraphrase, or borrow specific ideas or statistics** from another source, you must include the author's last name (or last names), the year of publication, and the relevant page number(s) in the text [for example, (Mau, 2013, p. 112)] immediately following the borrowed information.

When you refer to **general ideas, arguments, or positions** put forth by others, you must include the author's last name (or last names) and the year of publication; page numbers are not necessary [for example, (Riddell, Hausegger & Hennigar, 2013)].

In either case, **you can also introduce the author or authors in the text** and include the other relevant information in parentheses. For example:

- "Future Y-PAR research should be complemented by efforts to embed young mothers' contributions into community development and policy development more broadly" according to Levac (2013, p. 425).
- In their examination of five Canadian social welfare programs, Koning and Banting (2013) find a range of permanent and temporary forms of exclusion affecting different categories of newcomers.
- Johnson (2010) argues that public health narratives in Honduras shape policy options.

**When you wish to claim that an argument or hypothesis is widely supported by several scholars, or when you wish to point to general fields of study**, you need to include several sources. For example:

- It is commonplace to note that the introduction of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has resulted in an increased policy role for the Supreme Court of Canada (Baker, 2009, p. 171; Hausegger, Hennigar and Riddell, 2015, p. 353; Snow, 2012, p. 172)
- Many scholars have written about new forms of activism in the Middle East (Clark & Yaghi, 2014; Schlaim, 2014; Shukor, 2014; Sreberny, 2015).

You do not need to source easily verifiable facts (e.g., Halifax is the capital of Nova Scotia).

Overall, it is your **responsibility** to know exactly what constitutes plagiarism. It is considered academic misconduct whether you intend it or not. If in doubt, ask your instructor or someone at the Library's writing services desk. You can also check out the library's website for [more details on plagiarism](#). Most importantly, start your work early, to avoid the pressure that can lead you to making bad decisions.

### Identifying Appropriate Sources

You use sources to support the argument you are trying to make. When you are identifying and using sources, you need to evaluate their quality.

Peer-review is a "collaborative process that allows manuscripts submitted to a journal to be evaluated and commented upon" (Taylor & Francis Editor Resources, 2016). Two or more independent experts check the quality and contribution of the scholarship presented in **peer-reviewed or 'refereed' work**. Most scholarly journals are peer-reviewed. Peer-reviewed work is especially rigorous. You should use as much of it as possible.

Other forms of scholarly work, such as **conference papers or conference proceedings**, may have been **editor-reviewed**, but have not been peer-reviewed. You have to be more diligent with this literature to make sure that the arguments being presented make sense.

A lot of work that we rely on in political science is **non-reviewed, or undergoes an alternative review process**. Government documents (policy papers, legislation, etc.), community organization publications (e.g., research reports by the United Way, the Girls Action Foundation), and research or papers produced by think tanks and research institutes (e.g., the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Fraser Institute, the Institute for Research on Public Policy) fall into this category. In some cases, advisory groups work together to review publications. In other cases, there is no review at all. You need to know what type of review has occurred so you can determine whether, and how, to use a source. If in doubt consult your instructor.

**In all cases, the author(s) matter.** For example, drawing from Random Rita's blog to help you make a point about intergovernmental relations is not appropriate, whereas Dr. Pamela Palmater's Indigenous Nationhood blog and website may serve as an appropriate source of contemporary discourse around Indigenous issues. On the other hand, if Random Rita gives an account of an *experience* of dealing with intergovernmental relations, and her experience is relevant to your argument, it may be useful as a supplemental source.

## (C) STRUCTURING A RESEARCH PAPER

This section of the guide focuses on structuring a research paper.

### Structuring Your Paper

Your paper should begin with an **introduction**, and should be followed by the **body**, in which you present your points of argument. In the **conclusion**, you sum up your argument, including insights that you have gained. In the body of the paper **each point of argument should have its own paragraph**. There is no such thing as a three-paragraph essay. You **will need as many paragraphs as it takes** to write an introduction, present the points of argument you need to make your argument and write a conclusion.

Your **introduction should accomplish three things**: introduce the relevance of your paper, state the main argument or thesis, and provide a roadmap of the remainder of the paper, identifying the main steps of the argument. The **main statement needs to be specific and argumentative in that it takes a specific perspective** on the question at hand. This does not mean that your paper should be completely one-sided. As you develop your argument you will want to acknowledge counterarguments – always disarm your critics by doing so! This will make your argument more convincing.

In the **body of your paper you will present your points of argument**. Do not try to make more than one point of argument in a paragraph. **Each paragraph should start with one point of argument** followed by the evidence for this specific point. The first sentence of the paragraph is very important so ask yourself why you are presenting the material in this paragraph. If your first sentence does not make that clear, rewrite it. This way you can also avoid repetition of arguments. Make sure that everything in the essay directly helps you to defend your main thesis.

Your conclusion should **summarize the main thesis** and the most important supporting arguments and **discuss the implications of the thesis and the insights you have gained**. Never introduce new evidence into the conclusion.

## **(D) EDITING AND FORMATTING**

This section of the guide focuses on:

- (i) Editing your paper before you submit it; and
- (ii) Using the required format for written assignments.

### **Editing Your Paper**

Students are expected to proofread and edit their papers before handing them in. Multiple grammatical and spelling errors detract from the overall quality of the paper.

Clarity in your writing is crucial. Unclear writing detracts from the overall quality of the paper. Work on your style of writing to keep it simple. For [advice on improving your style consult the library website](#).

### **Formatting Your Paper**

All papers should be double-spaced and use a well-readable font (e.g. Times New Roman, Arial, Cambria) of size 11 or 12.

Margins should be 1 inch/2.54cm on the sides and 1.25 inches/3.17cm on the top and bottom.

All pages must be numbered.

All papers should have a title that reflects the content of the paper. The title page should include the paper's title, student name and number, course number, instructor's name, and assignment deadline.

If handing in a hard copy, the paper should be stapled.