

Conventions of Writing in Government (Political Science)

The discipline of political science is traditionally divided into four subfields, American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, and Political Theory. Each Government major at Skidmore currently takes a sequence of courses in each of these four subfields. Because of this diversity of subfields, the types of writing that reflect the particular conventions of our discipline are also many and varied. Thus it was at times an challenging task to identify which conventions of writing are most important in our discipline.

Here are the conventions of writing in political science as we see them:

1. Writing in the discipline of political science is characterized by its multiple forms, which include most importantly: the traditional social science research paper, with its attendant focus on research methodology; the literature review, and the reporting of results; applied writing in the form of bureaucratic reports, position papers or legal reports; the opinion essay, designed to comment on particular political phenomena or development and sway an audience; and the critical or interpretive essay, which is central to the subfield of political theory. One of our main objectives is thus that our students become familiar with *all* of these forms as they work their way through the Government major.
2. What each of these multiple forms of writing shares is that they require students to employ clear and compelling analytical reasoning and empirical and logical evidence. Thus another of our main objectives is that we teach our students to be *clear thinkers who can make arguments that are well supported by logic or empirical evidence*, regardless of the subfield. To help students learn how to think and write in this way, we have crafted a set of Standards and Expectations for Written Assignments in Government, which may be found on the Government Department website. Individual faculty members in the Government Department may use these standards in different ways in their courses, but all Government majors should expect to be held to these Standards and Expectations.
3. All forms of writing in government rely on and conform to the standard rules of English grammar and composition. Thus we are devoted to ensuring that our students adhere to the accepted rules of English grammar and usage. For this reason, we have developed and adopted for universal use the Uniform Code of Notation for Providing Feedback on Written Work in the Government Department. This document is also available on the Government Department website. Individual faculty members in the Government Department may use this Uniform Code in different ways in their courses, but our hope is that all Government majors will benefit from a close engagement with the standard rules of English grammar and composition as presented in this document.