

Standards and Expectations for Written Assignments in Government

I. We expect papers to have these basic parts:

Introductory Paragraph

What to do: Briefly introduce the reader to the subject of your paper. Your introduction must include a thesis statement that presents the argument of your paper, and specifies how you will prove this argument or how you will organize your paper. Address yourself to an intelligent reader with a general knowledge of whatever your class is about.

What to avoid: Broad or sweeping claims, especially those that are trite, patronizing, and not important to your argument, do not belong here (or anywhere in your paper). An opening such as "Throughout time, Socrates has been justly admired as a great philosopher" should be avoided.

Where to look for help: Ch. 33: Planning and Drafting Essays (especially 33b and 33c), and Ch. 34: Revising and Editing Essays (especially 34b) in *Hodges Harbrace Handbook* (17th ed.).

Body of the Paper

What to do: Paragraphs spell out the arguments that will move your reader to the conclusion you yourself have drawn from your thoughtful reading or research. They contain evidence to support your thesis statement, and proceed logically, in a compelling or inevitable way (step-by-step) to your final conclusion. Each paragraph should therefore be a coherent unit with its own topic. The first sentence of each paragraph should state the main theme of the paragraph, and each subsequent sentence of the paragraph should follow logically and smoothly one from another. The concluding sentence may summarize the paragraph.

What to avoid: Blind transitions and disorder force your reader to work hard, and often leave the reader guessing at your meaning. Consider whether you have prepared your reader for each sentence, or have instead left gaps in your argument—something you were thinking (and needed to think) but neglected to say, or said later on, in the wrong place. Cut from your argument anything that is unnecessary to it or repetitious.

Where to look for help: Ch. 33: Planning and Drafting Essays (especially 33d, 33f and 33g), Ch. 34: Revising and Editing Essays (especially 34c, 34d, and 34f), and Ch. 35: Writing Arguments, in *Hodges Harbrace Handbook* (17th ed.).

Conclusions

What to do: Having gone through your argument and evidence, your reader will be fully prepared for, and even anticipate, your conclusions. You will therefore present no new material or arguments, but will briefly summarize your principal arguments.

What to avoid: While it is sometimes necessary, especially in research papers, to spell out unanswered questions or topics for future inquiry, it is important to avoid the temptation to throw in your unsubstantiated personal reflections or mere feelings, especially if they contradict what you have just presented. (If you have not been moved by your argument, why should the reader be?)

Where to look for help: Ch. 34: Revising and Editing Essays (especially 34b) in *Hodges Harbrace Handbook* (17th ed.).

II. Standards and Expectations for Grammar and Composition

Students will be expected to submit papers that conform to the accepted rules of English

grammar and composition. We recommend that all students in Government Department classes purchase a copy of *Hodges Harbrace Handbook* (17th ed.), which the department uses as the basis for its *Uniform Code of Notation for Providing Feedback on Written Work in Government*.

Where to look for help: Chapters 1-30 in *Hodges' Harbrace Handbook* (17th ed.) will be of particular use for students seeking help with grammar and composition questions.

III. Formatting

We expect papers to be properly formatted. Papers should include a title page, and should be properly paginated. The body of the paper should be double-spaced, with quotations longer than three lines indented and single-spaced.

IV. Citations and Bibliography

All appropriate information in body of paper and footnotes is cited fully according to MLA or Chicago Manual of Style format. Complete information on all sources, including web-based sources, must be provided in a bibliography, which should also follow MLA or Chicago Manual of Style format.

Where to look for help: Chapters 37-40 of *Hodges Harbrace Handbook* (17th ed.) will be of particular use for students with questions about citation standards and guidelines.

V. Grading Standards.

The Government Department maintains these grading standards:

- A — Distinguished work. An "A" paper is a polished, intellectually sophisticated work.
- B — Superior work. A "B" paper generally meets above criteria, but lacks polish and intellectual sophistication and may have some relatively minor errors or flaws.
- C — Satisfactory work. A "C" paper reads like a working draft.
- D — Passing but not satisfactory. A "D" paper reads like a rough draft written with some effort.
- F — Failure. An "F" paper reads like a rough draft written with minimal effort.

Note that an A grade recognizes work that is not simply good or even superior, but rather work that is distinguished.

In addition to all the standards and expectations listed above, we also consider the following criteria when we grade student papers:

- Assignment completed according to schedule.
- Completeness in addressing the assignment.
- Accuracy of information.
- Relevance and use of evidence to support arguments.
- Coherence and internal consistency.
- Extent to which an argument or thesis is supported with appropriate evidence, examples, and detail.
- Appropriateness of statistical analysis (if applicable).

Depth, sophistication, and intellectual rigor.

Originality of insight.

Organization.

Depending on the paper assignment, your instructor may depart from one or more of these criteria, may weight some more heavily than others, or may introduce additional criteria. Be sure to discuss particulars with your professor.