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**The  
WRITING  
REQUIREMENT  
in the  
Department of  
Government**

Revised: October 7, 2009

## The Writing Requirement in the Government Major

The Government Department at Skidmore College is committed to helping its students become skilled writers. Recognizing that an important part of learning to write well in political science and government is learning to write well overall, the Government Department places considerable emphasis on both quantity and quality of writing opportunities in our courses and has adopted a wide-reaching and thorough set of Standards and Expectations for Written Assignments in Government and a Uniform Code of Notation for Providing Feedback on Written Work. Students in Government Department classes can expect to be held to the expectations and standards established in these documents. Thus, by successfully completing the requirements for the Government major, students fulfill the Writing Requirement in Government.

### 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.

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.

Government Department Checklist for Grading Written Work	Grading Standards	Criteria	Uniform Code of Notation for Grammatical Errors	
Course/Semester	A – Distinguished	1. Assignment completed according to schedule	Note: Chapter (Ch) and Section (Sec) are noted for the 17 <sup>th</sup> edition of the Hodges Harbrace Handbook:	
	B – Superior Work	2. Accuracy of information	1. Sentence Fragments (Ch 2)	15. Ungrammatical Incorporation of Quotations (Ch 16)
Student Name	C – Satisfactory	3. Relevance and use of evidence to support arguments	2. Comma Splices and Run-On Sentences (Ch 3)	16. Anachronisms
	D – Passing but not satisfactory	4. Coherence and internal consistency	3. Subject-Verb Agreement Errors (Ch 6, Sec a)	17. Jargon/Slang (Ch 19, Sec c)
Paper Structure	F – Failure	5. Extent to which an argument or thesis is supported with appropriate evidence, examples, and detail	4. Pronoun-Antecedent Disagreement (Ch 6, Sec b)	18. Unidiomatic Expressions (Ch 20, Sec c)
	1. Introductory Paragraph	6. Appropriateness of statistical analysis (if applicable)	5. Ambiguous Pronoun Reference (Ch 28, Sec a)	19. Unnecessary Words (Ch 21)
	2. Body of the Paper	7. Depth, sophistication, and intellectual rigor	6. Parallel Constructions (Ch 26)	20. Hyphen v. Dash (Ch 18, Sec f and Ch 17, Sec e)
	3. Conclusions	8. Originality of insight	7. Incorrect Pronoun Case (Ch 5, Sec b)	21. Incorrect Word Choice (Ch 19, Sec c)
	4. Standards and Expectations for Grammar and Composition (see Uniform Code of Notation)	9. Organization	8. Overuse of Passive Voice (Ch 7, Sec c and Ch 29, Sec e)	22. Incorrect Possessive Case Formation (Ch 15, Sec a)
	5. Formatting		9. Misplaced, Dangling, and Unattached Modifiers (Ch 25)	23. Apostrophe Errors (Ch 15, Sec a)
	6. Citations and Bibliography		10. Misplacement of Modifier “Only” (Ch 25, Sec a(1))	24. Quotation Mark Errors (Ch 16)
			11. Mixed Metaphors (Ch 23, Sec b)	25. Misuse of/Failure of Capitalization (Ch 9)
			12. Subjective Verbs	26. Lack of Reference or Footnote Marks
			13. Inconsistency of Verb Tense/Sequence of Verb Tense (Ch 7, Sec b)	27–29. Paper Structure (Ch 33 – 35)
			14. Incorrect Use of Common Abbreviations (i.e., pp 749, and etc., p. 748)	30–51. Incorrect Usage (pp. 739-757)
				52–56. Common Spelling Mistakes (Ch 18, Sec c and pp. 739-757)
				57–68. Use of Irritating Terms and Phrases

**Common Spelling Mistakes:** *Hodges*, Chapter 18, Section c and pp. 739-757

No. 52: Capital/Capitol

No. 53: Cite/Site

No. 54: Complement/Compliment

No. 55: Principal/Principle

No. 56: Borders/Boarders

**Use of Irritating Terms and Phrases**

(most provided by Jeremy Butterfield in *Damp Squid: The English Language Laid Bare*)

No. 57: At the end of the day

No. 58: Fairly unique

No. 59: I personally

No. 60: At this moment in time

No. 61: With all due respect

No. 62: Absolutely

No. 63: It's a nightmare

No. 64: Shouldn't of

No. 65: 24/7

No. 66: It's not rocket science

No. 67: The fact of the matter is

No. 68: Let me be perfectly clear

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.

**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* (17<sup>th</sup> 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* (17<sup>th</sup> 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?)

**Incorrect Usage:** *Hodges*, pp. 739-757

No. 30: Affect/Effect

No. 31: Among/Between

No. 32: Bad/Badly

No. 33: Double Negative (*Hodges*, Chapter 4, Section c)

No. 34: Farther/Further

No. 35: Fewer/Less

No. 36: Imply/Infer

No. 37: In Regards To or In Terms Of

No. 38: Its/It's

No. 39: Lead/Led

No. 40: Lie/Lay

No. 41: Like/As

No. 42: Precede/Proceed

No. 43: Respectfully/Respectively

No. 44: Than/Then

No. 45: That/Which

No. 46: There/Their/They're

No. 47: To/Too

No. 48: Unique

No. 49: Who/Whom

No. 50: Who's/Whose

No. 51: Your/You're

**No. 23: Apostrophe Errors: *Hodges*, Chapter 15, Section a**

Incorrect: Roosevelts patrician upbringing gave him all the intellectual heft of a feather duster.

Correct: Roosevelt's patrician upbringing gave him all the intellectual heft of a feather duster

**No. 24: Quotation Mark Errors: *Hodges*, Chapter 16**

Incorrect: Louis XIV said, "I am the state".

Correct: Louis XIV said, "I am the state."

**No. 25: Misuse of/Failure of Capitalization: *Hodges*, Chapter 9**

Incorrect: The united states senate operates according to rules drafted by Gilbert Gottfried.

Correct: The United States Senate operates according to rules drafted by Gilbert Gottfried.

**No. 26: Lack of Reference or Footnote Marks**

Incorrect: A melancholy John F. Kennedy once averred, "There is always inequity in life. Some men are killed in war and some men are wounded, and some men never leave the country."

Correct: A melancholy John F. Kennedy once averred, "There is always inequity in life. Some men are killed in war and some men are wounded, and some men never leave the country."<sup>1</sup>

**Paper Structure: *Hodges*, Chapters 33-35**

No. 27: Introductions

No. 28: Transitions between Sentences and Paragraphs

No. 29: Conclusions

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

Correct: Webster continued to question Hayne's argument, despite the latter's statement that he was committed to reconciliation.

No. 18: Unidiomatic Expressions: *Hodges*, Chapter 20, Section c

Incorrect: Senator McCain says that I am green behind the ears.

Correct: Senator McCain says that I am wet behind the ears.

No. 19: Unnecessary Words: *Hodges*, Chapter 21

Incorrect: Indeed, the fact that there is no capitalism without failure means that there is no religion without sin.

Correct: Capitalism without failure is like religion without sin.

No. 20: Hyphen v. Dash: *Hodges*, Chapter 18, Section f and Chapter 17, Section e

Incorrect: Stalin had well-- thought--out ideas- including many that Beria thought were whacky- for directing the kulaks "toward the light."

Correct: Stalin had well-thought-out ideas-- including many that Beria thought were whacky-- for directing the kulaks "toward the light."

No. 21: Incorrect Word Choice: *Hodges*, Chapter 19, Section c

Incorrect: William Jennings Bryan told the Democratic Convention that he would not be tacked to a cross of gold.

Correct: William Jennings Bryan told the Democratic Convention that he would not be crucified on a cross of gold.

No. 22: Incorrect Possessive Case Formation: *Hodges*, Chapter 15, Section a

Incorrect: If you fail to protect farmers rights, then a guy named Goober will run the gas station on every corner of every city in this country.

Correct: If you fail to protect farmers' rights, then a guy named Goober will run the gas station on every corner of every city in this country.

No. 12: Subjective Verbs

Incorrect: I feel that Moby Dick is white.

Correct: Moby Dick is white.

No. 13: Inconsistency of Verb Tense/Sequence of Verb Tense: *Hodges*, Chapter 7, Section b

Incorrect: Gandhi was fond of salt. He thinks that by marching to Dandi to protest the British salt tax he would gain the upper hand on both “perfidious Albion” and unpalatable popcorn.

Correct: Gandhi was fond of salt. He thought that by marching to Dandi to protest the British salt tax he would gain the upper hand on both “perfidious Albion” and unpalatable popcorn.

No. 14: Incorrect Use of Common Abbreviations (e.g., i.e., pp., etc.):  
*Hodges*, i.e., pp. 749, etc., p. 748

Incorrect: Castro did not accept Kennedy’s gift of a herbicide-lined wet suit (e.g., he wanted to maintain his smooth, rosy-hued skin).

Correct: Castro did not accept Kennedy’s gift of a herbicide-lined wet suit (i.e., he wanted to maintain his smooth, rosy-hued skin).

No. 15: Ungrammatical Incorporation of Quotations: *Hodges*, Chapter 16

Incorrect: Lincoln said to Herndon that he was, “go to Gettysburg on the same train that broke John Henry’s heart.”

Correct: Lincoln said to Herndon that he was “going to Gettysburg on the same train that broke John Henry’s heart.”

No. 16: Anachronisms

Incorrect: Thomas Aquinas loved to turn back the clock.

Correct: Thomas Aquinas would have loved to turn back the clock but the clock had yet to be invented.

No. 17: Jargon/Slang: *Hodges*, Chapter 19, Section c

Incorrect: Webster kept dogging Hayne, despite the latter’s statement that he subscribed to synergistic approaches to reconciliation

## The Uniform Code of Notation for Providing Feedback on Written Work

### Introduction

The Government department has adopted a uniform code of notation for providing students with feedback on their written work. Your instructor will employ the following numbering system to identify unclear constructions and grammatical, punctuation, and usage errors. If, for example, your paper includes a sentence in which the subject and verb fail to agree either in number (singular or plural) or in person (first, second, or third), your instructor will underline or circle the offending sentence and place in the margin the number “3.” This notation will direct you to the #3 in the code below, where you will find the chapter(s), section(s), and, in some cases, pages in the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook* (referenced below as *Hodges*) that both describe this error and offer instructions for how to correct it.

### The Uniform Code

*Clarity, Grammar, and Punctuation*

#### No. 1: Sentence Fragments: *Hodges*, Chapter 2

Incorrect: When the president gives a press conference.

Correct: When the president gives a press conference he tries to sound like

#### No. 2: Comma Splices and Run-On Sentences: *Hodges*, Chapter 3

Incorrect: “We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord,” this statement causes modern audiences to think of mushroom clouds, though Roosevelt was merely trying to persuade his supporters that a Bull Moose could not be domesticated by an effete; woolly headed Princeton political scientist.

Correct: “We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the lord”; this statement causes modern audiences to think of mushroom clouds. Roosevelt, however, was merely trying to persuade his supporters that a Bull Moose could not be domesticated by an effete, woolly headed Princeton political scientist.

**No. 3: Subject-Verb Disagreement: *Hodges*, Chapter 6, Section a**

Incorrect: High levels of pollution causes damage both to the respiratory tract and to Los Angeles' campaign to be featured in the AMA's "Black Lung Prevention" public service announcement.

Correct: High levels of pollution cause damage both to the respiratory tract and to Los Angeles' campaign to be featured in the AMA's "Black Lung Prevention" public service announcement.

**No. 4: Pronoun-Antecedent Disagreement: *Hodges*, Chapter 6, Sec b**

Incorrect: The American government years ago abandoned their effort to rule the Philippines.

Correct: The American government years ago abandoned its effort to rule the Philippines.

**No. 5: Ambiguous Pronoun Reference: *Hodges*, Chapter 28, Section a**

Incorrect: Jed Clampett and Mr. Drysdale were neighbors in Beverly Hills; he had moved there after finding oil on his Tennessee homestead.

Correct: Jed Clampett and Mr. Drysdale were neighbors in Beverly Hills; Jed had moved there after finding oil on his Tennessee homestead.

**No. 6: Parallel Constructions: *Hodges*, Chapter 26**

Incorrect: *The Secret* is not to be tossed lightly aside, but it was hurled with great force.

Correct: *The Secret* is not to be tossed lightly aside, but to be hurled with great force.

**No. 7: Incorrect Pronoun Case: *Hodges*, Chapter 5, Section b**

Incorrect: Just between you and I, "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman was raised in Crackerbox Palace.

Correct: Just between you and me, "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman was raised in Crackerbox Palace.

**No. 8: Overuse of Passive Voice: *Hodges*, Chapter 7, Section c and Chapter 29, Section e**

Incorrect: The British Expeditionary Force was shredded by the German Luftwaffe.

Correct: The German Luftwaffe shredded the British Expeditionary Force.

**No. 9: Misplaced, Dangling, and Unattached Modifiers: *Hodges*, Chapter 25**

Incorrect: Upon entering the symposium, the buffet table enticed Socrates.

Correct: Upon entering the symposium, Socrates first noticed the buffet table.

**No. 10: Misplacement of Modifier "Only": *Hodges*, Chapter 25, Section a(1)**

Incorrect: The lonely only know the way I feel tonight.

(Placement of "only" suggests that the lonely know nothing other than the way that "I" feel tonight; that is, "the lonely's" SAT verbal score is "I")

Correct: Only the lonely know the way I feel tonight.

(This placement of "only" suggests that no people other than the lonely can understand my despair, which is the meaning that the "celebrated Orbison" wished to convey to his auditors)

**No. 11: Mixed Metaphors: *Hodges*, Chapter 23, Section b**

Incorrect: Leaders of developing countries cannot eat their seed corn without gumming up the wheels of commerce.

Correct: Leaders of developing countries cannot eat their seed corn without reducing economic yields.