

## Writing Assignment General Guidelines PSCI 2000 – National Government Spring 2008

There are four short writing assignments that will be due through the course of the semester. While each one is different in its topic, there are some general guidelines that should be followed when writing each paper.

- ***The quality of the writing matters!*** Poorly written papers are not able to convey the ideas of the author, and thus will not be able to meet the substantive requirements of each assignment. Since I am not psychic, I am not able to discern what you “meant” if you do not clearly express it. Grammatical errors, sentence fragments, and misspelled words will cause your paper to be graded down.

That being said, I also recognize that not every student is F. Scott Fitzgerald or William Faulkner, nor do I expect each of you to be. The things noted above are basic writing skills that you should already have. These assignments are designed not only to help you develop your critical thinking skills, but also to help you build on your already existent writing skills. If you realize that you are a weak writer, the University provides resources to help you improve. You can visit the Writing Center in Moore Hall Room 1071 (387-4615) for individualized help on your assignments. This is a free service for students. Also, it is not cheating if you ask another student to proofread your paper and offer suggestions for cleaning up your writing. However, the substance of the paper must remain your own; otherwise you violate the student code of conduct.

- Because I understand that this may be the first class that you have taken with such writing assignments, and because I know that I am a tough grader, I will replace the lowest assignment grade with the average grade of your other three assignments. So, if you make a 95, an 87, a 79, and a 50, the 50 will be replaced with an 87.

This offer comes with a caveat, however. If your lowest grade is a zero because you did not submit one of the assignment, that zero ***will not*** be replaced with the average of the other grades and you will receive the grades that you have earned. You must complete all four assignments in order to have the lowest grade replaced. In addition, grades that have been lowered because they are more than two (2) days late (that is, they have been lowered by more than 20 points) will not be eligible for this replacement policy. Like the quality of your writing, ***punctuality matters!***

- Outside sources are not necessary for any of the assignments, but they are not off-limits, either. However, a word of caution about sources is necessary here. Not all sources are equal, especially in academic writing. We live in a world where information is available at our fingertips with very little effort, thanks to the Internet, but much of that information can be misleading, misinterpreted, or worse, blatantly false. Even such venerable organizations as the New York Times and CBS have been rocked in recent years by charges of plagiarism and forgery, respectfully. Still, you are much more likely

to find reliable information at these outlets than you are at a non-mainstream outlet, such as a far left or far right Internet site. If you choose to use an outside source (that is, one beyond what is assigned), be sure that you use a respected, mainstream source.

**Wikipedia is not an acceptable source, though it may provide you with a good starting point.**

If you choose to use outside sources, you *must* cite them properly both within the text of your writing as well as within a works cited page. For the purposes of this class, the Chicago style (also known as Turabian) will be used. If you have questions about this style, please consult the library's webpage as it contains style guides for all of the major styles. If you have any further questions, be sure to see the instructor.

- When formatting your papers, you should include a title page that has your name, the assignment number (e.g., Assignment #2), the name of the class, and the date. In addition, you should set your margins at one inch all around (this can be done in MS Word by opening File, Page Properties, and adjusting the margins) and the body of the paper should be double-spaced. In the header of each page, you should include your last name and the page number. The font should be Times New Roman and the font size should not be larger than 12 nor smaller than 10. Finally, the minimum page requirement means full pages, not portions. In other words, if the assignment asks for a paper of three to four pages, a few sentences on the third page does not meet the requirement. It must be three *full* pages. Providing less than is required will result in a significant drop in the grade you receive. The title page does *not* count toward your page total.
- Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you must provide original work. These assignments blend research and opinion on your part. In each assignment, you will report the facts of the readings in your own words, but then you will provide your own critical evaluation of what you have read. As such, this must be your own work. You are responsible for knowing and understanding what plagiarism is. If you have a question about whether your work is on the right side of the plagiarism line, be sure to ask the instructor *before* you submit your work. Once it is submitted, it is too late and there will be no excuse for any case of plagiarism that is detected.

While it may seem as though these guidelines are tough, they are not meant to be. They are more like the warning signs that you see on items that make you think, "Shouldn't that be common sense?" I am aware of the ingenuity and effort that some students put into getting out of work (I, too, was an undergrad). Hopefully, by closing some of the loopholes that some students have tried to discover in the past, that effort can be directed toward the assignments themselves.