



NORTHERN MICHIGAN  
UNIVERSITY

**Department of Political Science and Public Administration  
Master of Public Administration Program  
Capstone Paper Format Requirements**

**Paper Formatting and Style**

The capstone paper must be submitted in Word format (.docx). Below are general guidelines, followed by specific guidelines for each element of the capstone paper.

- The minimum length of the capstone paper is 25 pages in double-spaced, 12-point font.
- The title page, table of contents, abstract, and references do not count toward the page count.
- References are from at least 20 peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books.
- Paper size: Letter.
- Margins: 1 inch all around.
- Spacing: Double line (except for texts within tables, which is a single line).
- Font: 12-point Times New Roman (all text is the same size).
- Alignment: Left.
- Paragraph indent: 0.5 inch.
- Insert page numbers in the bottom-right corner. The TABLE OF CONTENTS and ABSTRACT pages are numbered with lowercase Roman numerals (ii, iii); the body text is numbered with Arabic numbers (1, 2, 3) starting with CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION as page 1. The Title Page is page i but suppressed, so the first page number is ii on the TABLE OF CONTENTS page.
- Each chapter starts at the top of a new page. Use the “Page Break” formatting function.
- Remove spaces before and after paragraphs.
- Do not go beyond third-level headings.
- Establish your header styles as follows (only regular double space before and after):

**Level 1: Bold, centered, all-caps, double-spaced**

**Level 2: Bold, left-aligned, title case, double-spaced**

*Level 3: Italic, left-aligned, sentence case, double-spaced*

- Follow American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition guidelines for in-text citations and references. In-text citations will appear parenthetically with the author’s last name and year of publication. Page numbers are required for direct quotations.

- Tables and figures will be fully described in the text and be inserted immediately after their first mention. Key features of tables and figures are as follows:
  - Fall within margins (including the left border of tables).
  - Include sources for each table and figure.
  - Table and figure titles are bold, but there is no period at the end of the titles and sources.
  - Titles and sources are left-aligned; tables and figures are center-aligned.
  - Table titles appear at the top of the table; table sources appear at the bottom of the table.
  - Single-line spacing within tables.
  - Figure titles appear at the top of the figure; sources appear at the bottom of the figure.
  - Adjust the image resolution (DPI) for better-quality figures.
  - Make figures accessible to individuals with color blindness by avoiding red and green.
- Do not create any footnotes, endnotes, or appendices. Any such material will be incorporated into the body text.
- Style guidelines are as follows:
  - Use American spelling and punctuation.
  - Use third person voice (e.g., “This paper argues . . .”).
  - Use straightforward and objective language.
  - Use verbs rather than nouns whenever possible (e.g., “to evaluate” rather than “the evaluation of”).
  - Use verbs in the active voice with precise subjects (e.g., “the government implements” rather than “the program was implemented by the government”).
  - Use Oxford (serial) commas (e.g., “A, B, and C”).
  - When using an acronym, spell out the full term at its first mention, indicate its abbreviation in parenthesis, and use the abbreviation from then on.
  - Use direct quotations sparingly (no more than five total).
  - Do not use double spaces between sentences.

## **Elements of the Capstone Paper**

### **Title Page**

The title and your name should be in Headline Capitalization but not bold. Headline Capitalization, also known as title case, is a capitalization style where the first letter of every major word is capitalized, while minor words are lowercase. You are the only author of your capstone paper. List each of your previous degrees (but not the MPA degree you are about to earn) in chronological order. Use the degree abbreviation (with periods), but do not include your major. Do not enter anything in the signature section at the bottom right corner; this will be managed by the department.

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

If you properly use the Styles tool in Word to apply your heading styles, you can use the Table of Contents tool in Word to automatically generate the Table of Contents. Use this function to ensure accurate page numbers and easy updates as you edit your paper.

## **ABSTRACT**

An abstract (250 words or less) is a paragraph summary of the entire capstone paper. Write the abstract last after all the chapters. At the end of the abstract, enter your keywords alphabetically separated by commas, up to a maximum of 6. Keywords are left-aligned and all lowercase.

## **CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION**

Provide a brief overview of the policy problem you selected and describe how the paper unfolds. Explicitly state and italicize your research question, which should be specific, focused, and open-ended. This research question concerns one policy problem that is significant to you and has practical implications for public administration.

## **CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Examine the body of academic knowledge. Clearly demonstrate your understanding of the public administration literature on your topic by referencing peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books. First, lay out theories, concepts, and models learned from the MPA program that are integrated into the paper. Second, elaborate the literature review on the specific topic you are researching. Explain a practical and academic contribution you expect the capstone paper to make (e.g., “to fill the gap in the literature”).

## **CHAPTER III. METHODS**

The three research methods commonly used in capstone research are as follows:

- **Case study:** This method is used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It allows the student to select a narrow topic and stay focused. A case study-based paper usually examines a single subject, but it can also be a comparative study to examine relationships between two or more subjects.
- **Interviews:** This method is used to collect primary data by asking multiple people about their experiences, opinions, or perspectives on a specific topic or subject matter. An interview-based paper usually engages with experts on a particular topic. Institutional Review Board (IRB) review by NMU may be required.
- **Survey:** This method is used to collect primary data by asking questions to a predefined group of people. A survey-based paper usually leverages institutional- or administrative-survey datasets rather than running a new survey. IRB review by NMU may be required.

## **CHAPTER IV. RESULTS**

Report your findings and propose possible solutions or suggestions to address your policy problem. Develop a well-reasoned argument and engage with alternative interpretations.

## **CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION**

Explain how your findings and suggestions are important for public administration theory and practice. You must also describe the limitations of your paper.

## REFERENCES

Each reference you cite in the capstone paper must appear alphabetically in your reference list; each entry in the reference list must be cited in your body text. All lines after the first line of each entry in your reference list should be indented one-half inch from the left margin.

## CAPSTONE PAPER EVALUATION

Once the capstone paper is submitted to NMU Commons, your paper will be evaluated using the six evaluation criteria below.

### **1. Content and format: Does this paper meet the expectations for the capstone paper?**

Abide by the capstone paper guidelines, including the quality expectations, timelines, paper length, formatting, and style.

### **2. Theory, concepts, and models: Does this paper apply public administration theory, concepts, and models properly?**

The capstone paper should demonstrate the ability to apply what you have learned in the MPA program to a real-world issue. This practice-oriented research paper should also demonstrate your analytical skills, graduate-level writing skills, and comprehension of the public administration literature by applying public administration theory, concepts, and models properly to address a policy problem of your interest.

### **3. Evidence-based writing: Is this paper written compellingly?**

Make thesis statements and employ compelling evidence to prove the thesis. For the capstone paper, APA 7th edition guidelines are used to reference evidence. In addition, at least 20 references from peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books must be used for the paper.

### **4. Concise and accurate writing: Is this paper written clearly, concisely, and with grammatical correctness?**

Use active voice and strong nouns and verbs. Use short sentences for easier reading. Additionally, avoid spelling and grammar mistakes. Such mistakes can make your reader question the credibility of the paper. After completing the first draft, carefully reread your paper and make amendments to improve the content and writing.

### **5. Integrity: Does this paper abide by academic integrity?**

Students must abide by accepted standards of academic honesty, which dictate that the capstone paper shall be original. Students must comply with the standards of academic honesty, including rules against complicity, falsification, and plagiarism. Procedures and penalties pertaining to academic dishonesty are outlined in section 2.3.1 of the NMU Student Handbook at <https://nmu.edu/policies/1070>. Incorporating work generated by an AI natural language processing tool (e.g., ChatGPT) should be cautious, as it can lead to an unintentional or careless lack of acknowledging someone else's work (i.e., plagiarism).

### **6. Reflection: Does this paper incorporate lessons learned from the capstone paper reader?**

Incorporate edits and suggestions from the reader into the capstone paper.