

Public Policy Practicum

Developing an Effective “Team Voice” in Practicum Reports¹

The following exercises require you to analyze published Public Policy practicum reports as models for polishing your work. You can access the published reports at <https://publicpolicy.stanford.edu/publications>.

I. Come to a Consensus on Quality

In order to create good writing, it is essential to identify what good writing is. As a team, select one report and spend 10 minutes reading through the introduction. Have each person separately write down the answer to the following questions related to style and then compare your responses.

- Describe the tone of the document. How have the authors created the tone through word choice? What is effective to you about the tone and style? What would you change?
- Describe the voice of the document. Is it written in first or second person? Active or passive voice? What is effective about the voice in targeting the audience? What would you change?
- Describe the sentence composition. Do the authors employ a variety of sentence structures? A great way to determine if sentence composition is working is to read the document out loud. Do you feel fatigued after reading a paragraph? Or, does the prose seem lively, engaging, and informative?

II. Practice Crafting Voice Together

Take a moment to consider the following paragraph, thinking about the best way to revise the style in order to best capture the meaning. Have each person on the team revise the paragraph and then compare your changes. From there, try to come to a consensus on the best way to revise the paragraph.

“Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell a story.”

¹ This handout was adapted by Mary Stroud from a handout created by Alyssa O’Brien for PUBLPOL 200 in Winter 2015