Capstone
Outline for Complete Project

This document presents a generic outline you might use, and identifies what sections are to be included in your first draft and second draft. Your headings might have different titles that better match the content of your project (or they may use the same headings), but these headings represent the sections of your paper and the content that should be included.

It may also be helpful to you to look back at the rubric for the course and review the criteria used to assess your writing. In that rubric, the faculty has developed descriptions of writing at different levels.

The first draft typically includes sections I through IV.
The second draft includes sections I through VIII.

Generic Outline:

I. Executive Summary ½ -1 ½ pages
This will be the last thing you write. It is not due with the first half of your paper. It will be a 1-2 page summary of what you found focusing on describing the purpose of the study, your results, and your recommendations.

II. Introduction 2-3 pages
What is the issue and why is this issue a problem? Briefly introduce the problem and/or the purpose of the paper giving a perspective from the client and/or the research literature. An introduction is always intended to introduce the reader to the problem and to indicate why the problem is important. Sometimes people use a combination of statistics and good quotes from experts or well-known people to introduce the problem or topic.

This section needn’t have a heading; in fact, many style books discourage using a heading for the Introduction. Just begin.

A good introduction will close with a brief statement of the purpose and layout of the paper.

III. Review of Literature and Statement of Purpose 7-9 pages
This section is to provide the background information and rationale for your project. It includes a combination of information you have gained from the client and/or organization and information you have gained from reviewing the scholarly literature. It concludes with an expanded (more expanded than the introduction), clear statement of your purpose and the questions you hope to answer.

Consider developing three sub-sections for this part:
(a) The organization and its problem: background on the organization and the context for its problem and discussion of the problem (no references here other than possibly internal agency reports); (1-2 pages)
(b) Scholarly literature: a summary of what you have learned from the review of literature that can help you and/or the agency in addressing the problem. The literature review may include theories, essays, think-tank documents, or research studies, and must include articles from
referred, or peer-reviewed, journals. The literature review should start broad and gradually narrow to provide more detail on what researchers or experts have found about the particular problem you’re addressing.

This section is the most lengthy of the three parts described here (5-6 pages). Clients often remark that the literature review provides them with valuable information. Most importantly, you should use it to inform the steps you take in your project (See suggestion #4 in “odds and ends” on writing a review of literature.)

(c) Your purpose and the research question(s) you hope to answer. Identify 1-4 questions you hope the project will answer for the client.

IV. Methodology 1-3 pages
What data/information do you need? Identify the specific information you need and where will you find it (source of data).
How are you going to get it? What are you going to do? Describe your data collection methods. Discuss if you are doing a survey, interviews, using secondary data or collecting primary data, conducting a content analysis, etc. This section should identify your unit of analysis, your sample or population, and the means by which you will collect information. In some cases, you may have multiple methods to describe. Be clear in how the data you collect will give you the means to answer your research question(s).
Also, indicate how you implement your methodology (who will you call, pilot survey, process to ensure response rate, etc.). For example, for interviews, discuss the types of people you will interview and numbers of each type, how you will interview them (by phone, in person, by e-mail. Note: in person is best. Use phone when people are out of the metro area. E-mail is used as a last resort if they won’t talk by phone.) For surveys, indicate the group you intend to survey, how you will access them (e-mail, distribute the survey to them, a phone survey) and what you hope to learn from the survey. If you’re using items from an existing survey, describe those.
Once you get the data, how will you process it?
Discuss how you intend to process the data, such as with descriptive statistics or inferential statistics, content analysis, regression, etc.
Be sure to reference empirical articles to see how they describe their methods.
Are there any methodological limitations? Be sure to reference methodological literature so as to address issues of validity, reliability, etc. No method is perfect, so note any steps taken to attenuate those issues or acknowledge concerns arising from limited time/resources in pursuing mitigation strategies.

V. Results 4-6 pages
Once your study is complete, you will present your results in this section. This section may include tables to present quantitative data or to summarize trends found in interviews. This section should describe the results and provide a little interpretation, but most of the big interpretations are held until the next section where you put it all together.
Organize this section with headings from the questions your study is designed to answer (the questions you presented at the end of II). Then, under each question, present the results that are pertinent to that question. Consider how tables or illustrations can be used to summarize quantitative or qualitative results.
Note: The results section should “stick to the facts,” i.e., reporting what you found. You may comment briefly on issues such as when two data sources or methods (items or answers to interview questions) confirm each other and may conclude with what the data tell you about the
answers to this question. But, this is not the part where you draw grand conclusions or offer opinion. That material is for the next section.
VI. Discussion and Conclusion 2-3 pages
Summarize what you found. Then, interpret it. Discuss how the results answer the research questions. What do the results mean and what are the broad implications of your study for the organization? What is working? What is not? What should the organization change? Many clients would like students to list specific and developed recommendations.

This is also a section where you should discuss the limitations of your study. How certain are you of your results? What should the client, or other researchers, do in the future to confirm your results? Should the client continue doing more research, and if so, what kind? Limitations can include not getting enough data or interviews from the right kind of people, not asking the right questions, unexpected mistakes or delays. Discuss these issues forthrightly without dwelling on them and suggest how future research can avoid the problem.

VII. Reference List
Follow APA style (or check syllabus for allowable alternatives).
Your references should include at least five scholarly articles (peer reviewed) relevant to your subject.

VIII. Appendices
A. Include materials that support text, but are not central to it. These materials may be included in several appendices. These can include copies of surveys or interview questions, lists of people interviewed if appropriate, summaries of data that are too detailed to include in the paper, or any other documents that support your paper or provide further insight.
B. SPA competencies: Identify three SPA competencies that helped you in completing this project and discuss how they did (content from the course that assisted you). At least one course must be a core course. One to two paragraphs on each competency is sufficient.
Odds and ends
1. Be sure to number the pages.
2. Your total paper should not exceed 25 pages. The first “half” will be about 8-10 pages.
3. Use your headings to form an outline. Check the Auraria library web site for the links to key components of the APA style manual. Their writing suggestions can be very useful. But, the key style issues are: (a) organizing headings; (b) citing references in the text; (c) citing references in the reference list at the end. When you are writing your results section and conclusions, the manual will have guidelines for how to develop tables to present information or data.
4. Your literature review should not summarize one article at a time. Instead, you want to think about all the articles that you read and the relevance of each to your topic. Some articles may go together and you may, thus, discuss them together. Example: Most research studies on merit pay in the public sector have not found that it improves performance (Smith, 1998; Torey, 2003; Vanderwal, 2000). For example, Jane Smith studied performance pay for executive employees in the federal government. She found that difficulties in rating employees’ performance and relatively low monetary rewards for outstanding performance were problems that may have contributed to the absence of performance gains. Torey, however, did find an effect in his study of postal workers. In this study, postal workers were given rewards for very concrete performance, such as the time taken to complete routes, etc.
   In other cases, when you find an article that is quite similar or relevant to your study, you may want to spend a paragraph or more discussing what they found, the people or organizations they studied, and the methods they used, in addition to commenting on the relevance of the study for your purpose.
5. Try to avoid “he” or “she” by using plurals or nouns, e.g., employees, clients.
6. “Data” is plural for the word “datum.” So, if you use the word “data”, the verb should be plural. For example, “data are.”
7. “Organization” and “agency” are singular. References to them should be singular, such as “the organization is aware that its mission….”
8. Do not over use the word “utilize.” The word “utilize” should be used when you’re referring to an innovative use. Don’t use it just to sound more sophisticated.
9. Know how to cite quotations correctly in the text. (See citation styles in manuals.)
10. Don’t confuse “your” and “you’re,” “principal” and “principle,” or “its” and “it’s.”
11. Think about each section and what you’re trying to say. At a more micro-level, think about each paragraph. Write a strong topic sentence for each and every paragraph, and support the topic with the subsequent sentences. Do all the sentences fit in the paragraph? Do they make the case for the key point to be made in that paragraph? Do you make paragraph breaks at appropriate places? Are there transitions from one section to another? One paragraph to another?
12. Minimize the use of jargon. Be clear and concise. Short sentences help. Think Hemingway!
13. If you’ve had problems with writing in the past or want extra support, make use of the UCD Writing Lab (see link on Capstone website). They will answer writing questions, and review drafts and give you feedback. They will meet with you in person, talk by phone, or communicate through e-mail.