



American Planning Association
Transportation Planning Division

Making Great Communities Happen

HELPFUL HINTS FROM THE REVIEWERS

APA Transportation Planning Division

Student Paper Competition

The following are suggestions provided by reviewers of the APA student paper competition. Students are encouraged to consider them as general guidelines when preparing their papers for the competition. The suggestions could be used by sponsors for guiding students in preparation of paper submittal.

Thesis

The paper's thesis is the point against which your paper will be evaluated. A good thesis is clearly stated, has relevance to the transportation industry, and should be applicable beyond its particular location.

Organization

The paper's thesis should be stated near the beginning of the paper. A general, brief introduction to the situation being discussed should be provided. The reviewers know the industry but not necessarily your particular area. The paper should be well organized. Extraneous points that are irrelevant to your thesis should be left out.

Research

The paper should be well researched. Original research is better than a literature review. A simple historic review is not desirable. Multiple sources should be checked rather than relying on one source. Any research/sources noted in the paper should be included in the Reference section.

The author should be aware of any biases held by sources. Some individual authors and think tanks have a particular view and the paper author should be cognizant of these perceptions.

Factual statements are preferred to sweeping generalizations. For example, "hardly anyone pays for parking" is not as good as "one study found that 95% of employees had free parking". All factual statements should be sourced. Make sure you are accurately reporting the facts and using them correctly. The reviewers often check references. If using annual statistics, make sure you are using the latest version.

Conclusions/Application

Papers should have a clear conclusion about what was learned. The reviewers are looking for insight on the topic and its future use. The conclusion should note how the findings can be applied in a similar setting. If there is a "hot" issue related to the thesis, the paper should show how the research applies. For example, a paper on emergency responsiveness should show how the findings apply to Katrina relief; omitting this application would be a shortcoming.

Formatting

The competition does have certain requirements related to font size, margins, line spacing, and page limits. These requirements must be followed to receive an award. A header/footer should be included that gives the paper's title and the page number.

Graphics are desirable when helpful to make a point. General pictures are not desired. All graphics should be referenced in the paper. Maps are always appreciated.

For goodness sake, proofread your paper and use a spell checker. Poor formatting, incomplete sentences, and misspelling will all detract from what you're trying to say, and make the reviewers question the quality of your research. Papers submitted for competition should be free from any comments, edits, or grades.