

## Annotated Capstone Sub-Genres

### The Executive Summary

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#### Overview

An Executive Summary is a synthesized document that allows busy government or non-profit leaders and other stakeholders to quickly read and understand the main ideas of a study or report. As Professor Thomas Main reminds us in his “Elements of a Capstone Thesis,” the Executive Summary “presents in condensed form the argument of your entire thesis. It is not an introduction to your thesis.” Most sources say it should be no longer than 10% of the accompanying paper. A 1- to 2-page Executive Summary is common.

Although the terms “Abstract” and “Executive Summary” often get used interchangeable, they are actually slightly different. An Abstract, which is often found in scholarly contexts or used for indexing purposes, can consist of only a paragraph or two. It allows a researcher to decide if a paper is worth reading in full. An Executive Summary, on the other hand, is more familiar to business and government audiences, capable of standing on its own, and emphasizes recommendations.

To write an Executive Summary, the first step is to re-read your Capstone, with a pen or highlighter in hand, so that you can underline or highlight the key ideas and arguments you are making. Another way to pre-write towards the Executive Summary is to summarize the most important points of each section of the Capstone, like the Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, etc. Once you have isolated these ideas, you can combine them into a narrative. Strategic bullet points are OK—again, your audience for this mini-paper values brevity and succinctness. Charts, graphs, and other visual representations of data, however, should not appear in the Executive Summary.

Thus, the Executive Summary is one of the last sections you will need to write and can also be a useful step in testing the cohesion of your Capstone. Below is the Executive Summary from a Marx graduate’s Capstone, annotated with key moves made by the writer.

#### Annotated Model Capstone Executive Summary

From “We Don’t Need Ribbon-Cuttings to Have Great Parks: A Review of the NYC Community Parks Initiative Targeted Improvement Program”

This paper examines the success of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation’s Community Parks Initiative (CPI). The current New York City administration, which is focused on issue of inequality, implemented the CPI program to combat the unequal distribution of park resources in NYC.

Park quality is considered an environmental justice issue. It has been well documented that parks provide a range of physical and social benefits to people. Therefore, it is essential for cities to ensure that all communities, regardless of economic status and income level, have access to high-quality parks.

Succinct opening statement about the Capstone’s purpose followed by brief background on the topic.

Brief summary of issues from literature on the topic, illustrating the stakes of the matter.

Unfortunately, declining NYU Parks Department expense budgets over the past several decades have left some parks struggling. Many community Parks lack needed funding and have fallen into a state of disrepair (unlike parks in wealthier neighborhoods that often have access to private-public partnerships and conservancies to make up the difference in public funds.)

The Community Parks initiative was implemented to help improve struggling parks: capital funding, community building, and fast-track targeted improvements. Capital projects and community building often take several years to bear fruit, but the targeted improvements were designed to have an immediate impact on struggling parks. In this paper, I reviewed whether the fast-track targeted improvement plan made a difference at 55 run-down neighborhood parks.

I evaluated the success of the CPI targeted improvement program by looking at differences in park quality between 2014 (before the program was implemented) and 2015 (after implementation). To measure program success, I analyzed 311 service requests and Parks Inspection Program data. I also conducted site visits to several of the CPI parks.

Overall, my findings indicate that the program was very successful in year one. The CPI targeted improvement plan should serve as a model for future investment in under-resourced parks since it provides high-impact, immediate enhancements at low cost.

Summary of the problem.

Summary of policy or solution to be evaluated.

Brief summary of methodology.

Summary of findings and recommendation with brief justification. [The writer could include another sentence or two here detailing how the program met the measures for success.]

### Useful templates and phrases for the Executive Summary

“After looking at these numbers, I wanted to see/After examining the data, I wanted to know/The data presented the following questions....”

“This paper explores/studies/analyzes....”

“My analysis finds/proves/suggests....”

### Further resources

“Academic Phrasebank,” University of Manchester, <http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/>, (see especially “Introducing Work,” “Defining Terms,” and “Signaling Transition”).