

The Skills Development Seminars: equipping MPA students with key transferable skills



Dr Babken Babajanian is the MPA Programme Tutor. In this post, he explains the Skills Development Seminars, a unique feature of the LSE MPA Programme. These seminars are explicitly designed to equip students with key transferable skills that will bolster workplace efficacy.

The MPA offers a set of **Skills Development Seminars** (SDS) to support students in their studies. Their objective is to help students to strengthen their **analytical, evaluative, methodological writing** and **presentation skills**. These seminars have different formats, including lectures, participatory workshops and practice sessions.

In **year one**, the seminars focus on principles of:

- academic writing
- writing policy memos
- working in groups
- delivering effective presentations.

These seminars are closely linked to the content of the core courses and help students in preparation for their assessments (e.g. writing policy memos and delivering group presentations). For example, the SDS provides guidance and an opportunity for students to practice their group presentation skills in preparation for the GV478 Political Science and Public Policy course assessment. Students also have a chance to learn key requirements for writing policy memos and apply them to critique past exam papers for EC455 Quantitative Approaches and Policy Analysis course.

In **year two**, the seminars provide academic and practical support for writing the **MPA Policy Papers and Dissertations**. Some sessions provide information and advice on the following writing techniques:

- how to develop the research topic and question
- how to design analytical framework
- how to structure and present policy analysis.

The SDS seminars for second year students start with introductory lectures that lay out the MPA requirements and these lectures are followed by participatory workshops entitled Policy Paper & Dissertation Café. During these workshops, students work in small groups to assess relevance and feasibility of different research topics and formulate questions for their policy papers and dissertations. The participatory and informal nature of these workshops complements the formal lectures and enables students to construct their own conception of meanings, or in other words, to learn on their “own terms”.

Both first and second year students find the SDS very useful for:

- learning about conventions of academic and policy writing
- understanding the MPA assessment criteria
- improving their presentation skills



- having opportunities to practice in informal small group settings and to receive feedback from teachers and peers.

The **Skills Development Seminars** training is valuable not only for offering practical study support, but also for helping students develop transferable skills that are essential for effective policy analysis and research in their future careers in public policy.

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