



CAPSTONE PROJECT HANDBOOK

M.Ed. in Special Education – Applied Behavior Analysis

College of Education



UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

Table of Contents

Overview of the Capstone Project.....	3
Capstone Objectives.....	3
Participant Selection.....	4
Feasibility and Scope	4
Design Considerations	5
Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Projects	5
Capstone Timeline & Process.....	7
Proposal Development.....	7
Proposal Review & Approval.....	7
Project Implementation	7
Final Report Development	7
Final Report Review	8
Capstone Presentation.....	8
Proposal Requirements	9
Final Report Requirements.....	10
Presentation Requirements	11
Capstone Reader Responsibilities	12
Primary Reader Responsibilities.....	12
Secondary Reader Responsibilities	12
Reader Expectations.....	12
Reader Disagreements.....	13
Proposal Review Outcomes	14
Approved.....	14
Approved with Minor Revisions.....	14
Major Revisions Required	14
Not Approved.....	14
Final Report Review Outcomes	15
Pass.....	15
Pass with Revisions.....	15
Revise and Resubmit	15
Fail.....	15
Failure and Remediation.....	17
Frequently Asked Questions	18

Can my project focus directly on changing a student's behavior?	18
What if my intervention does not produce meaningful improvement?	18
What if I cannot collect interobserver agreement (IOA), procedural fidelity, or social validity data?	18
How should I select a social validity measure?	18
What if my project changes during implementation?	18
What happens if my participant leaves or becomes unavailable?	18
Can I modify my project after proposal approval?	19
Proposal and Final Report Rubrics	20
Exceeds Expectations	20
Meets Expectations	20
Developing	20
Does Not Yet Meet Expectations	20
Proposal Rubric	21
Final Report Rubric.....	23

OVERVIEW OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

The Capstone Project is the culminating experience for students in the Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Special Education – Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) program at the University of Washington. The purpose of the capstone is to provide students with an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills developed throughout the program by designing, implementing, evaluating, and communicating an applied behavior-analytic project within an authentic fieldwork setting.

Capstone projects focus on training, coaching, supporting, and improving the performance of adult implementers (e.g., teachers, paraeducators, caregivers, behavior technicians, therapists, and other practitioners). Through systematic implementation, measurement, and evaluation, students contribute to practice improvement within their fieldwork settings while demonstrating competencies in applied behavior analysis.

Capstone projects are designed as applied training and quality improvement activities conducted within fieldwork settings. Although projects are informed by the professional literature and use single-case methodology to evaluate outcomes, they are not intended to function as master's theses. The emphasis is on applying behavior-analytic principles to address meaningful implementation challenges and improve service delivery in real-world settings.

Students are expected to identify a relevant performance need, develop and implement a training or coaching intervention, collect and analyze data, interpret project outcomes, and communicate findings through written and oral dissemination. Capstone projects should prioritize feasibility over complexity and be designed to be completed within the timeline and resources available during the academic year.

The primary participant in the capstone project should be an adult implementer, and the primary focus of the capstone should be the implementation and evaluation of a training, coaching, or performance-support intervention with an adult participant.

Capstone projects are evaluated based on the quality of project design, implementation, measurement, analysis, interpretation, reflection, and professional communication. Students are not evaluated based on whether the intervention produced meaningful behavior change. Projects that produce limited, mixed, or null effects may still demonstrate strong professional practice and successfully meet capstone requirements.

Most capstone projects are best conceptualized as applied training and quality-improvement activities rather than research studies intended to generate generalizable knowledge. As a result, most projects do not require Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. Students should consult with program faculty regarding any project that may require IRB review or other external approvals.

Capstone Objectives

By the completion of the Capstone Project, students will be able to:

- Design and implement an applied behavior analytic project within a fieldwork setting.

- Develop and evaluate a training, coaching, or performance-support intervention for an adult implementer.
- Apply single-case design methodology to evaluate project outcomes.
- Collect, graph, analyze, and interpret project data.
- Use data-based decision making throughout project implementation.
- Evaluate project outcomes and identify factors that may have influenced implementation and results.
- Reflect on project outcomes, limitations, and implications for practice.
- Communicate project activities and outcomes through professional written and oral dissemination.

Participant Selection

The primary participant in the capstone project should be an adult implementer, such as a teacher, paraeducator, caregiver, behavior technician, therapist, or other practitioner responsible for implementing services, instruction, or behavioral supports.

Capstone projects are designed to evaluate training, coaching, and performance-support interventions delivered to adult implementers. As a result, the primary focus of the project should be improving the knowledge, skills, performance, or implementation fidelity of the adult participant. Students or clients should not serve as the primary participant in the capstone project.

Examples of appropriate primary participants include:

- Teachers implementing classroom behavior supports.
- Paraeducators implementing instructional or behavioral interventions.
- Caregivers implementing home-based supports.
- Behavior technicians implementing clinical procedures.
- Therapists or practitioners learning new intervention or data collection procedures.

Students are encouraged to discuss potential participants with their capstone readers early in the proposal development process.

Feasibility and Scope

Capstone projects should prioritize feasibility over complexity. A well-executed project with a narrow, clearly defined focus is preferred over an ambitious project that cannot be implemented, measured, and evaluated successfully within the available timeframe.

Students are encouraged to select a manageable number of participants, target skills, and outcome measures. Projects that involve multiple participants, numerous target behaviors, extensive assessment procedures, or complex intervention packages may need to be simplified prior to approval.

Projects should be designed with consideration for:

- Participant availability
- Access to data collection opportunities

- Feasibility of collecting procedural fidelity, social validity, and interobserver agreement data
- Time available for implementation during the academic year
- Organizational and setting-specific constraints

Students should anticipate that projects may require modification as implementation progresses. Applied projects rarely proceed exactly as planned. When barriers arise, students are expected to make reasonable adjustments, document those changes, and discuss their implications when interpreting project outcomes.

Design Considerations

Students should select a single-case design that is appropriate for the project goals, setting, and timeline.

Commonly used designs include:

- Two-tier multiple baseline or multiple probe designs across participants, behaviors, or settings
- Withdrawal/reversal designs (e.g., A-B-A or B-A-B) when appropriate and ethically feasible

More complex designs may be considered but should be discussed with capstone readers to ensure feasibility and appropriateness for the proposed project.

Students are encouraged to prioritize designs that can be implemented successfully within the constraints of the fieldwork setting and academic year.

The goal of the capstone project is not to implement the most complex intervention possible. Rather, the goal is to demonstrate competency in project design, implementation, measurement, analysis, interpretation, and professional communication within an authentic fieldwork setting.

Examples of Appropriate and Inappropriate Projects

The examples below are intended to help students determine whether a proposed capstone project aligns with program expectations.

Examples of Appropriate Capstone Projects

Capstone projects should focus on training, coaching, supporting, or improving the performance of an adult implementer.

Examples include:

- Training paraeducators to implement behavior-specific praise
- Coaching caregivers to implement a visual schedule
- Training behavior technicians to conduct preference assessments
- Supporting teachers in implementation of classroom behavior supports
- Training staff to implement behavioral data collection procedures

- Coaching paraprofessionals to implement prompting procedures with fidelity
- Training practitioners to implement functional communication training procedures
- Coaching staff to improve procedural fidelity during intervention implementation

These examples are not exhaustive but illustrate the expectation that capstone projects focus on improving adult implementation and performance.

Examples of Inappropriate Capstone Projects

The following examples generally do not align with capstone expectations:

- A project focused on reducing a student's challenging behavior
- A project focused on increasing a student's academic performance
- A project in which a student or client serves as the primary participant
- A project with a scope that cannot reasonably be completed within one academic year
- A project focused on evaluating a direct intervention with a student or client rather than evaluating a training or coaching intervention delivered to an adult implementer

Students who are unsure whether a proposed project aligns with capstone expectations should consult with their capstone readers prior to proposal submission.

CAPSTONE TIMELINE & PROCESS

The capstone project is completed across the academic year and includes proposal development, project implementation, evaluation, and dissemination. Students work closely with their instructor and capstone readers throughout the process.

Proposal Development

Students develop a capstone proposal in consultation with their instructor and capstone readers. Proposal development includes:

- Identification of a meaningful training, coaching, or performance-support need within the fieldwork setting
- Selection of an appropriate adult participant
- Review of relevant literature
- Development of training/coaching procedures
- Selection of a single-case design
- Development of measurement and evaluation procedures

Proposal Review & Approval

Students submit proposals according to course deadlines.

Projects may not be implemented until required proposal approvals have been obtained.

Proposal review is intended to ensure that:

- The project aligns with program expectations
- The project is feasible to complete within the academic year
- Appropriate measurement and evaluation procedures are in place
- Ethical and organizational considerations have been addressed

Project Implementation

Following proposal approval, students implement the project within their fieldwork setting.

Students are expected to:

- Collect and graph project data
- Monitor project implementation
- Make reasonable adjustments when barriers arise
- Document modifications made during implementation

Applied projects rarely proceed exactly as planned. Students should communicate with their instructor and capstone readers when significant project changes occur.

Final Report Development

Students prepare a final report describing the completed project.

The final report should build upon the approved proposal and reflect what was actually implemented during the project. Students should revise proposal sections as needed to incorporate reader feedback, describe implementation, report project outcomes, and discuss implications for practice.

Final Report Review

Final reports are reviewed by two capstone readers.

Students may be asked to make revisions before final approval is granted. Review outcomes and revision procedures are described later in this handbook.

Capstone Presentation

Students are expected to present their completed capstone projects to faculty, peers, and invited guests during the annual capstone presentation event.

The presentation provides an opportunity for students to professionally disseminate project outcomes and reflect on their work with the broader ABA program community.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Students should use the Capstone Proposal Template provided by the program when preparing their proposal.

The purpose of the proposal is to describe a feasible capstone project that aligns with program expectations and is appropriate for implementation within the student's fieldwork setting.

Capstone proposals should include the following components:

- Project Overview
- Literature Review & Project Rationale
- Purpose Statement
- Method
 - Participants
 - Setting
 - Materials
 - Target Skill(s) and Dependent Variable(s)
 - Project Procedures
 - Single-Case Design & Evaluation Plan
 - Measurement & Data Collection
 - Planned Data Analysis
 - Feasibility Statement
- References
- Appendix

Proposals should be developed in consultation with the student's instructor and capstone readers.

Proposal expectations include:

- A minimum of five scholarly sources relevant to the proposed project
- An adult implementer serving as the primary participant
- A training, coaching, or performance-support intervention
- An appropriate single-case design
- Clearly defined measurement procedures
- A project scope that is feasible to complete within the academic year

Students should refer to the Capstone Proposal Template for detailed instructions regarding each section.

FINAL REPORT REQUIREMENTS

Students should use the Capstone Final Report Template provided by the program when preparing their final report.

The final report should build upon the approved proposal and reflect the project that was actually implemented. Students should revise proposal sections as needed to incorporate reader feedback, describe implementation, report project outcomes, and discuss implications for practice.

Final reports should include the following components:

- Project Overview
- Literature Review & Project Rationale
- Purpose Statement
- Method
 - Participants
 - Setting
 - Materials
 - Target Skill(s) and Dependent Variable(s)
 - Project Procedures
 - Single-Case Design
 - Measurement & Data Collection
- Results
- Discussion
- References
- Appendix

Final reports should clearly describe:

- What was implemented
- How data were collected
- Project outcomes
- Barriers and limitations encountered during implementation
- Implications for future practice

Students are expected to report project outcomes honestly and accurately. Capstone projects are evaluated based on the quality of project design, implementation, measurement, analysis, interpretation, and professional communication. Students are not evaluated based on whether the intervention produced meaningful behavior change.

Students should refer to the Capstone Final Report Template for detailed instructions regarding each section.

PRESENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to present their completed capstone projects during the annual capstone presentation event.

The purpose of the presentation is to provide students with an opportunity to professionally disseminate project outcomes and share their work with faculty, peers, and invited guests.

Presentation expectations may vary from year to year and will be communicated by program faculty. Students should be prepared to present the purpose, procedures, outcomes, and implications of their completed project.

Presentations are evaluated on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. The presentation requirement is intended to support professional communication and dissemination of project outcomes rather than serve as a formal project defense.

CAPSTONE READERS

Each capstone project is reviewed by two capstone readers. The primary reader is the instructor of the student's EDSPE 601 section and serves as the student's primary point of contact throughout proposal development, project implementation, and final report preparation. The secondary reader provides an independent review of the proposal and final report and offers feedback regarding project quality, methodological integrity, and completion of required capstone components.

Primary Reader

The role of the primary reader is to:

- Provide guidance during proposal development
- Review and evaluate proposal submissions
- Support students during project implementation
- Review and evaluate final report submissions
- Provide feedback regarding required revisions
- Determine whether minor revisions have been satisfactorily completed

Secondary Reader

The role of the secondary reader is to:

- Review and evaluate proposal submissions
- Review and evaluate final report submissions
- Provide feedback regarding project strengths and areas for improvement
- Identify concerns related to project quality, methodology, implementation, or reporting

Capstone readers evaluate projects based on handbook requirements, approved project plans, and program expectations. Readers do not impose requirements beyond those communicated through program materials, templates, rubrics, and coursework.

Readers understand that capstone projects are applied training, coaching, and quality-improvement activities completed within authentic fieldwork settings. Applied projects frequently involve implementation barriers, setting constraints, participant variability, and other challenges that may influence project outcomes.

Capstone projects are evaluated based on the quality of project design, implementation, measurement, analysis, interpretation, reflection, and professional communication. Projects are not evaluated based on whether the intervention produced meaningful behavior change.

Reader Disagreements

If readers disagree regarding proposal approval, final report outcomes, or required revisions, readers confer to reach a consensus decision. The program director may be consulted to support resolution of disagreements and/or to ensure consistency with program expectations.

PROPOSAL REVIEW OUTCOMES

Following proposal review, one of the following outcomes will be assigned.

Approved

The proposal meets program expectations and may proceed to implementation. Minor editorial feedback may be provided but does not require formal resubmission.

Approved with Minor Revisions

The proposal meets program expectations but requires targeted revisions before implementation may begin. Required revisions are limited in scope and do not substantially alter the project purpose, procedures, measurement plan, or design. Minor revisions may be reviewed and approved by the primary reader.

Major Revisions Required

The proposal does not yet meet program expectations and requires substantial revision before approval can be granted. Examples may include:

- Insufficient alignment with capstone expectations
- Inappropriate participant selection
- A project scope that is not feasible within the academic year
- Inadequate measurement procedures
- An inappropriate or unclear single-case design
- Missing proposal components

Projects receiving this outcome must be revised and resubmitted for review.

Not Approved

The proposed project does not align with program expectations and requires substantial redevelopment before it can be considered for implementation. Students receiving this outcome should work with their instructor and capstone readers to identify an alternative project approach.

FINAL REPORT REVIEW OUTCOMES

Following final report review, one of the following outcomes will be assigned.

Pass

The capstone project meets program expectations and demonstrates competency in project design, implementation, measurement, analysis, interpretation, and professional communication. Minor editorial corrections may be requested but do not require formal resubmission.

Pass with Revisions

The capstone project meets program expectations but requires targeted revisions prior to final approval. Required revisions are limited in scope and do not substantially alter the project, implementation, analysis, or conclusions. Examples may include:

- Clarification of procedures
- Expansion of discussion or limitations
- Improvements to graphs or data presentation
- Additional explanation of project outcomes
- Minor organizational, formatting, or writing revisions

Pass with Revisions outcomes may be reviewed and approved by the primary reader.

Revise and Resubmit

The capstone project does not yet meet program expectations because substantial components are incomplete, unclear, inadequately reported, or missing. Examples may include:

- Missing graphs or project data
- Missing or incomplete results
- Missing discussion of project outcomes
- Insufficient description of project procedures
- Conclusions that are not supported by the reported data
- Missing required report components

Projects receiving this outcome must be revised and resubmitted for additional review.

Fail

The capstone project does not demonstrate minimum competency and cannot be approved without substantial remediation. Examples may include:

- Failure to implement the approved project
- Failure to collect project data
- Significant deviation from approved capstone expectations
- Major concerns related to academic integrity or professional conduct

- Inability to demonstrate competency following opportunities for revision

FAILURE AND REMEDIATION

Students who do not successfully complete the capstone project may be required to enroll in an independent study credit the subsequent quarter, as determined by program faculty. During the remediation period, students will work with the program director to address identified deficiencies and complete any required revisions prior to degree conferral.

The specific remediation plan will depend on the nature of the deficiencies identified during the review process. Remediation may include:

- Revision of written report components
- Additional analysis or interpretation of existing data
- Collection of supplemental data when feasible
- Revision of project materials or documentation
- Additional activities deemed necessary by program faculty

In rare circumstances, students may be required to substantially redesign or repeat portions of the project if minimum capstone requirements have not been met. Students should consult with their capstone instructor, advisor, and program director regarding remediation requirements and timelines.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can my project focus directly on changing a student's behavior?

No. The primary participant in the capstone project should be an adult implementer and the primary focus of the project should be evaluating a training, coaching, or performance-support intervention delivered to an adult participant.

What if my intervention does not produce meaningful improvement?

Capstone projects are not evaluated based on whether the intervention produced meaningful behavior change. Students are evaluated based on the quality of project design, implementation, measurement, analysis, interpretation, reflection, and professional communication. Projects that produce limited, mixed, or null effects may still demonstrate strong professional practice and successfully meet capstone requirements.

What if I cannot collect interobserver agreement (IOA), procedural fidelity, or social validity data?

Students should develop plans for collecting procedural fidelity, social validity, and interobserver agreement data. If barriers arise that prevent collection of planned data, students should describe those barriers, explain how they affected project implementation, and discuss resulting limitations when interpreting project outcomes.

How should I select a social validity measure?

Students should select a social validity measure that is appropriate for the participant, setting, and project goals. Methods may include questionnaires, interviews, rating scales, open-ended feedback, or other approaches. Students should provide a rationale for the selected method and discuss any limitations encountered during implementation.

What if my project changes during implementation?

Applied projects rarely proceed exactly as planned. Students should communicate with their instructor and capstone readers when significant changes occur. Project modifications should be documented and discussed in the final report, including any implications for interpretation of project outcomes.

What happens if my participant leaves or becomes unavailable?

Students should communicate with their instructor and capstone readers as soon as possible. Depending on the timing and circumstances, students may be able to modify the

project, identify an alternative participant, or revise project goals. Program faculty will work with students to identify an appropriate path forward.

Can I modify my project after proposal approval?

Yes. Modifications are often necessary when conducting projects in authentic fieldwork settings. Students should communicate significant changes to their instructor and capstone readers. Changes should be documented and discussed in the final report.

PROPOSAL AND FINAL REPORT RUBRICS

Capstone review outcomes are determined holistically by the capstone readers and are not based on any single rubric category. Readers consider the overall quality, completeness, feasibility, implementation, and professional communication of the project when determining review outcomes.

Rubric ratings are intended to support evaluation of capstone proposals and final reports. The following rating scale is used for proposal and final report evaluation:

Exceeds Expectations

Demonstrates exceptional quality, thoroughness, and professionalism beyond program expectations.

Meets Expectations

Demonstrates competency and fulfills program expectations.

Developing

Demonstrates partial competency. May require revisions or additional development.

Does Not Yet Meet Expectations

Does not demonstrate minimum expectations and requires revision before approval can be granted.

PROPOSAL RUBRIC

Category	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Developing	Does Not Yet Meet Expectations
Project Rationale & Literature Review	Provides a thorough and well-integrated rationale for the project. Literature clearly supports both the target skill and training / coaching procedures. Connections to the proposed project are exceptionally clear.	Includes a minimum of 5 relevant scholarly sources. Establishes a rationale for the target skill and training / coaching procedures. Clearly connects the literature to the proposed project.	Literature review is incomplete, underdeveloped, or only partially connected to the proposed project. Additional clarification or development is needed.	Literature review is missing major components, lacks sufficient sources, or does not establish a clear rationale for the proposed project.
Project Purpose & Scope	Purpose is exceptionally clear and demonstrates strong alignment with capstone expectations. Project scope is highly feasible and appropriately focused.	Clearly identifies the purpose of the project. Aligns with capstone expectations. Demonstrates a feasible and appropriately scoped project.	Purpose, scope, or alignment with capstone expectations requires clarification or revision. Project may be overly broad or insufficiently developed.	Purpose is unclear, project scope is not feasible, or project does not align with capstone expectations.
Participant s, Setting & Procedures	Participant selection, setting, materials, and procedures are exceptionally clear and well-developed. Procedures are feasible and appropriate for the setting.	Clearly describes participants, setting, materials, and procedures. Training / coaching activities are appropriate and feasible for implementation.	Important details are missing, unclear, or insufficiently developed. Additional information is needed to understand project implementation.	Major project components are missing or unclear. Procedures are not adequately described or are not feasible for implementation.
Measurement & Evaluation Plan	Measurement procedures are clearly defined and demonstrate strong alignment with project goals. Plans for evaluating outcomes are thorough and feasible.	Includes operational definitions, measurement procedures, and plans for evaluating project outcomes. Includes plans for collecting procedural fidelity, social validity, and interobserver agreement data.	Measurement procedures or evaluation plans require clarification, additional detail, or revision.	Measurement procedures are missing, unclear, or insufficient to evaluate project outcomes.
Single-Case Design & Data Analysis Plan	Selected design is highly appropriate for the project and clearly justified. Data analysis plan demonstrates strong understanding of project evaluation.	Selects an appropriate single-case design. Provides a feasible implementation plan. Describes how project outcomes will be evaluated and interpreted.	Design selection or data analysis plan requires clarification or revision. Additional justification may be needed.	Design is inappropriate, unclear, or insufficiently described. Data analysis plan is missing or inadequate.

Professional Writing & Organization	Proposal is exceptionally well organized, professionally written, and easy to follow. APA formatting is consistently appropriate.	Proposal is organized, readable, and professionally presented. Writing supports understanding of the project. APA formatting is generally appropriate. Required proposal components are included.	Organization, writing, formatting, or completeness require revision but do not substantially interfere with understanding.	Writing, organization, formatting, or missing components substantially interfere with understanding of the proposal.
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FINAL REPORT RUBRIC

Category	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Developing	Does Not Yet Meet Expectations
Project Rationale & Literature Review	Provides a thorough and well-integrated rationale for the completed project. Literature clearly supports both the target skill and training / coaching procedures. Connections between the literature and project implementation are exceptionally clear.	Provides a clear rationale for the completed project. Summarizes relevant literature related to the target skill and/or training / coaching procedures. Clearly connects the literature review to the project purpose and implementation.	Literature review or project rationale is incomplete, underdeveloped, or only partially connected to the completed project. Additional clarification or revision is needed.	Literature review is missing major components, lacks sufficient support, or does not establish a clear rationale for the project.
Method & Project Procedures	Provides exceptionally clear and detailed descriptions of participants, setting, materials, procedures, measurement systems, and implementation. Project modifications are thoroughly documented and explained.	Describes participants, setting, materials, and procedures. Includes operational definitions and measurement procedures. Clearly describes training / coaching procedures and project implementation. Reports modifications made during implementation when applicable.	Important details regarding implementation, measurement, or procedures are missing or require clarification. Additional information is needed to understand how the project was conducted.	Major components of the method are missing, unclear, or inadequately described.
Results & Data Presentation	Data are presented clearly, accurately, and professionally. Graphs and supporting data displays facilitate interpretation of project outcomes. Results are reported thoroughly and objectively.	Presents project data clearly and accurately. Includes appropriate graphs and data displays. Reports project outcomes objectively. Reports procedural fidelity, social validity, and interobserver agreement outcomes when available. Explains barriers that affected data collection when relevant.	Data presentation, graphing, reporting, or interpretation of results requires clarification or revision. Important information may be incomplete or difficult to interpret.	Results are missing, inadequately reported, or presented in a manner that prevents meaningful interpretation of project outcomes.
Discussion & Interpretation	Provides thoughtful, insightful interpretation of project outcomes. Demonstrates strong understanding of implementation factors, limitations, and implications for practice. Reflection is particularly thorough and meaningful.	Interprets project outcomes appropriately. Draws conclusions supported by project data. Identifies barriers and limitations encountered during implementation. Discusses implications for future practice and reflects on project implementation and outcomes.	Discussion, interpretation, or reflection requires additional development. Conclusions may be only partially supported by the reported data.	Discussion is missing major components, contains unsupported conclusions, or does not adequately address project outcomes and implications.

Professional Writing & Organization	Report is exceptionally well organized, professionally written, and easy to follow. Tables, figures, and supporting materials are presented clearly and professionally. APA formatting is consistently appropriate.	Report is organized and professionally written. Writing supports understanding of the project. APA formatting is generally appropriate. Required report components are included. Tables, figures, and supporting materials are presented clearly and professionally.	Organization, writing, formatting, or completeness require revision but do not substantially interfere with understanding.	Writing, organization, formatting, or missing components substantially interfere with understanding of the report.
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