APA (American Psychological Association) 6th Edition

Writing Style:
A Guide for Students
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APA (American Psychological Association) Writing Style:

A Sample Guide for Students

What follows is a short guide to writing in APA style. The purpose of this handout is to provide a summary and overview of APA style for the beginner. This short handout cannot possibly be as comprehensive as the full APA manual. However, it is hoped that this will provide a good overview for the beginner, and a summary of the most important aspects of writing APA style. This guide is by no means complete, and is not a replacement for the full APA manual. That said, there are also a number of online reference guides available, and some links and references will be provided later in this paper.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE: These instructions are guidelines for writing a research paper. They are NOT absolute laws! YOUR instructor has the right to set different requirements for classroom assignments, and to give specific instructions geared toward the needs of his or her class. When in doubt, ask your instructor about his or her specific requirements.

Basic Formatting Instructions

There are a few basic formatting issues that are important for all research papers. The following is a list of a few required elements of all APA style research papers:

- **Paper Size:** Your paper should be turned in on standard 8½” by 11” paper.
- **Font Size:** Use 12-point font for your paper.
- **Typeface:** Use standard typefaces, such as Times New Roman, Arial, or Courier.
- **Margins:** Use one-inch margins on all sides.
- **Spacing:** Use double-spacing throughout the entire document. Uniformly double-space all sections, from introduction, through the references page. Note that you should not include extra spaces between sections, or between references—just use uniform double-spacing across the entire paper.
- **Running head/Page number:** A running head goes in the upper left corner of all pages of the paper. The running head of the paper is a short form of the title in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. A page number should be located on the upper right corner of every page, starting with the title page.
  - **Note on Running head:** Early editions of the 6th edition APA manual were in error regarding the format of the running head. Only the title page contains the actual words “Running head” preceding a short form of the title in ALL CAPS. The remaining pages contain the capitalized words after “Running head” and a page number but not the words “Running head” themselves.
- **Paragraphs/Indentation:** The paragraphs should be aligned with the left margin. Use the Tab key (set at ½ inch) to indent paragraphs.
Sections of the Research Paper

The sections of the research paper go in the following order: title page, abstract, body of the paper, and references. Appendices, tables, and figures may follow in a more formal research paper.

Title Page

The title page is the first page of your paper. The purpose of the title page is to identify your paper and its title, and to identify yourself as the author. The title page also includes your “institutional affiliation” (what school you are from). The parts of a title page are as follows:

- **The running head**: The running head is a short form (50 characters maximum, including spaces) of the title, used for publication purposes. It is typed, in CAPITAL LETTERS, and located as a header on the upper left of every page. The words “Running head” themselves only appear on the title page.

- **The page number**: All of the pages of your paper are numbered, including the title page. Page numbers should be placed on the upper right corner of every page.

- **The title**: Think of an appropriate title of the paper—keep it simple and descriptive. The title should be centered (horizontally) on the page, and should be placed in the upper half of the title page. The APA recommends that a title contain no more than 12 words. Capitalize every significant word of your title on the title page (not words like, a, an, the, of, etc…).

- **Your name**: This goes right under the title (centered and double spaced).

- **Your institutional affiliation**: Place the institution that you attend under your name (such as “Prairie State College”).

Note on Other Information: APA 6th edition offers instructions for placing an author note on the title page. This generally includes information such as disclaimers, acknowledgements, and contact information for authors. This is generally not required for student research papers. Other information is not standard for APA style, but instructors at the college level often request that you space down 3-4 times under your name, and include the name/section of your class, (such as “Psychology 101, Section 01, Introduction to Psychology”), as well as the name of the professor (“Professor J. Smith”) and the date that the paper was submitted. This may help the professor keep track of his/her papers. However, when in doubt, ask your instructor for the required information.
A note on the header/page number: Most word processors (such as Microsoft Word) allow the option of setting a different header/footer for the first page than other pages of text. In MS Word, the option exists to make the first page of your paper different from the following pages. This allows you to put the words "Running head" on the first page, but not on the remaining pages of the paper.
The Abstract

An abstract is a short, one-paragraph summary of the major points of the research paper, such as the purpose, and major findings. The abstract is formatted in a block of text (no indentation), and contains between 150-250 words, depending on the requirements of an instructor or publisher.

Almost all scientific journal articles require an abstract. Always consult your instructor for his/her instructions regarding the abstract. Some instructors do not require the abstract for an undergraduate literature review.

That said, the abstract is actually considered a very important part of many research articles. The purpose of the abstract is to allow your reader to determine whether he/she needs to read your entire article. Therefore, the goal is to include a great deal of important information and key words into your abstract in clear and succinct language. Detailed instructions for how to write an abstract can be found in the APA 6th edition guide, as well as online.
The Body of the Paper

*Literature reviews* are descriptions of existing research. Writing a literature review involves reading the existing body of work, summarizing the available research, and integrating the information you have read into a coherent description of the research on your chosen topic. This is the most common type of APA style assignment performed at the lower undergraduate levels.

*Things to do in a literature review:*

- In the introduction to the literature review, define and articulate the plan and purpose for writing your literature review.
- In the body of your literature review, review the research on your topic, and summarize the current research for your reader.
- Consider these questions: What information appears throughout the research? What information appears to be missing? Discuss common threads in all of the current research, and also look for any contradictory research or missing gaps in the area that you are studying.
- Suggest further research that could be conducted on the topic that you chose, and or suggestions for how to reconcile any inconsistencies in the research that you read.

*Empirical studies* are sometimes called by other names, especially when you are searching through article databases. Some common terms often used to describe empirical research are: “*scholarly publication*,” “*empirical journal article*,” and “*peer-reviewed journal article*.” When in doubt about the type of article you are reading, ask your instructor. Empirical research articles are descriptions of actual research performed by the author. An empirical research article includes a literature review of material relevant to the topic studied, a description of experimental methodology utilized by the researcher, and a write-up of the statistical analysis performed on the data obtained from the experimentation. This is a more advanced process, usually conducted by undergraduate students in specialized classes, or by graduate students for thesis/dissertation work.

- In an empirical research article authors probably conducted their own research. If you are writing a literature review, you will be reporting the results of research conducted by others. However, it is very important to understand what you can expect to find in the various sub-sections of an empirical research paper.
- The *Introduction* contains the entire literature review. The entire paper that is being described in this handout would fit in the introduction of an empirical research paper. This is the section of
the paper that describes the background work done by other scientists that forms the basis for your research project.

- The Method section is used to describe the equipment and techniques used in the study being presented. This section is often divided into three subsections as well. These are as follows:
  - **Participants**: A description of the characteristics of the participants in the study (number of participants, mean age, and a breakdown of the demographic characteristics of the participants)
  - **Materials**: A description of the tools/materials used in the experiment. What equipment was used? How was the equipment set up? How was the equipment calibrated?
  - **Procedures**: A description of the procedures used by the experimenter. What were the participants required to do? How long did they spend in the experimental session? Step-by-step, this section describes how the experiment was performed, so that any other experimenter who would like to see if the results replicate can repeat the process.

- The Results section summarizes the statistical analysis of the data obtained from your project. This is an advanced process, and usually is learned in specialized experimental design and statistical analysis classes.

- The Discussion section is used to interpret the data analysis “in words.” While the Results section presents data obtained from the statistical analysis, the Discussion section interprets this data, and highlights the findings that are relevant to the topic discussed. This is a good section to read, even if your statistical knowledge is limited.
  - The discussion also often discusses the strengths and limitations of the study. What worked and what didn’t work? Why? What could be done in future studies to improve research on this topic?
  - The discussion usually contains implications for future research on the topic. The authors explain what they have done, and what they think still needs to be studied relevant to the topic. This is a science, so the more people that study the same topic, and validate your research findings, the better.
Reference Page

The reference page is often the final page of the research paper (especially in a literature review). Some advice about the reference page:

1. **Center the page title** “References” **in the top center of the page.**
2. **Double-space Uniformly:** Do not include extra spaces between references.
3. **Hanging Indentations:** The first line of each reference is flush with the left margin, and that second and subsequent lines are indented.
4. **Alphabetize:** Alphabetize references by the last name of the first author (or first word, if there is no author—see examples on the next pages) of each article. If there are multiple authors for a source don’t change the order of authors given within each article (keep the order of authors that is given on the article/book), but definitely alphabetize the whole list.
5. **Use italics:** When appropriate for the reference, some elements of a reference may require the use of italics. Older versions of APA (and MLA style) often used **underlines** in reference citations. APA 6th edition uses **italics** for references.
   For example, when citing a journal article, the **name of the journal and the volume number** go in italics (the volume number is technically part of the journal title). When you cite a book, the **title of the book** goes in italics. For a newspaper, **the name of the newspaper** goes in italics. More detailed examples will be provided later in this guide.
6. **Names:** Use the last name, and the first and middle initials (if available) for each author. Do not spell out an author’s entire first and middle name on the reference page.
Examples of References in APA Format

Notes on sources:

- Generally speaking, there are some differences between sources retrieved from a text source, and those retrieved from online sources. Both types are listed here. Please follow the example that most closely matches the source type you are citing.

- The following examples concern source citations located on your reference page. For examples of how to cite these sources in the text of your paper, please see the next section.

Journals

Journal articles generally follow this format:

Author(s) last name(s), and initials. (Year). Title of article, with only the first word capitalized. Title of Journal in Italics, volume number, pages in text.

Journal Article, one author:


Journal Article, 2-7 authors:


Journal Article, more than 7 authors:


Notes:

- With multiple authors, use an ampersand (&) between the names of the next-to-last and the last author, instead of the word “and.”

- Do not capitalize every word in the title of the article on the reference page. Only capitalize the first word of the title. If the title has a colon (:) in it, such as “Rats and disease: An important study,” then capitalize the word after the colon too.

- Italicize the name of the journal, and the volume number of the journal. The volume number is actually considered part of the title of the journal. Also, you DO capitalize every significant word in the name of a research publication.
• Use only the first and middle (if available) initials of the author(s), not the whole first and middle name.

**Journal Articles, retrieved online:**

• If you are citing a journal article retrieved from an online database, there are a number of ways to indicate the source.

• If the online journal article has a DOI (digital object identifier) number, include this in the reference.

• If the online journal has no DOI, but was retrieved from a webpage, you can include the URL for the specific webpage.

**Online Journal Article, with DOI number:**


**Online Journal Article, no DOI number, retrieved from webpage:**


**Citing abstracts:**

Generally speaking, you should read the full text of any article you are citing. Instructors may require you to provide full text copies of your sources upon request. However, with the prevalence of online article search databases, many students have access to the abstracts of articles, but not the full text. If you are only citing the abstract of an article (without reading the full text), you should indicate this in the reference for the paper, as follows:

**Abstract cited as an original source, online:**

Newspapers and Magazines

Newspaper article, with author:

Newspaper article no author:

Newspaper article, retrieved online:

Magazine article, with author:

Magazine article, retrieved online:

Notes:
- Put the names of newspapers and magazines in italics.
- For newspapers, page numbers should be preceded with p. or pp.
- If an article appears on multiple, non-continuous pages, you should give all page numbers and then separate the page numbers with a comma.

Books, Encyclopedias and Reports

Books generally follow this format:
Author. (Date). *Title in italics*. Location Published: Publisher.

(Please note that, for books, you italicize the title of the book.)

Book, one author:

Book, multiple authors:
Electronic version of printed book:

Electronic-only book:

Chapter in an edited book:
Sometimes you will find a book containing a number of chapters written by different authors. Usually, there is an editor (or editors) for the overall book, but when you are citing the book for a research paper, you should each chapter individually because they were written by different authors.


Citing a book authored by an organization:
At times, you will find a significant reference work (such as the APA manual or the DSM-V) that lists no authors or editors. In that case, you can cite these sources using the organization as the author. In the reference, the word “author” will indicate that the author of the book is also the publisher. Please note that unlike the other references in this section, the next two references are actually real reference sources in the field of psychology:

Book, authored by organization—APA Manual:

Book, authored by organization—DSM-V:

An article in an encyclopedia:
Cite articles from an encyclopedia separately by the author of each individual article.

An article in an online encyclopedia:

Government reports:

Online Sources and Other Media

Webpage, with an author:

Webpage, no author:
This is the title of my webpage. (2009). Retrieved from http://www.anotherfakelink.com

Webpage, no author or date:
This is yet another title of a webpage. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://morefakelinks.com/webpage

Blog post:
If no author is available for a blog post, you can use the author’s screen name in place of the author name.

Note: If no author is available for a blog post, you can use the author’s screen name in place of the author name.

Online forum or discussion group posting:

Motion Picture:

Video Recording:
Television Program:

Online Video:

Other Reference Types
This handout doesn’t cover every possible type of citation that you could think of. Again—if you’re in need of more detail, I would advise purchasing the APA Manual itself. That said, here are a few more types of citations that you might find useful for your class.

Class PowerPoint Presentations:

Note: When citing slides from a class lecture, this information is best classified as a form of unpublished presentation or paper. Provide the instructor, class, date of presentation, and college name.

Class handouts:

Note: Course handouts are also classified as a form of unpublished paper or presentation. Cite the information as follows.

Course lectures or interviews:
In APA style, information like non-recorded personal interviews, conversations, or lectures falls under the heading of “personal communication.” According to the APA, personal communications should only be cited in the text of the paper, and are not included in the references because the information is “unrecoverable.” In the next section on in-text citations, I will provide more examples of how to cite this information. In the body of the paper, you might state:

“In a class lecture on February 25, 2009, to a PSYCH 101 class, Professor Williams said…”

However, this information is cited in text, and not on the reference page.
Sample APA Reference Page

References


Citing Sources in the Text of the Paper

When you describe someone else's work or ideas, you must take the time to cite them in the text of your paper. The sources that appear on your reference page should also appear as in-text sources in the body of your paper as well. In this way, you give credit to the authors and researchers that provided you with the information from your paper.

Even if you are paraphrasing information in your own words, you still need to cite sources in the text of your paper. Even though you may not be directly quoting information in your paper, you still need to give credit for any ideas or information to the proper sources.

When you know the author(s) and publication date for your information:

Generally speaking, if you have access to the authors of a work and the publication date for the work, this is the information you cite in the body of your paper. Your reader can use this information to obtain the complete source from your reference page.

There are a couple of different ways to cite information in the text of your paper. If you make the author(s) of a source part of the sentence you are writing, you can cite the sources like this:

- According to research by Smith (1992), preparing source citations can be challenging for students who are unfamiliar with college-level expectations.

If you decide not to make the authors part of the sentence itself, you should put the citation at the end of the list in parentheses (known as a parenthetical citation).

- Research on writing has concluded that many students struggle with formatting their papers (Jones & Anderson, 2004).
Multiple sources in parenthetical citations:

If you have multiple sources that contribute to your cited information, you can cite them parenthetically after the sentence, and you should separate the different sources with semicolons. If you have multiple sources cited parenthetically, put them in alphabetical order by the last name of the first author of each source.

- A review of the recent research on writing concludes that students are often reluctant to read the material provided to them by their instructors (Jones & Anderson, 2004; Smith, 1992; Thompson, 2001).

Multiple authors:

When a source has one or two authors, all authors are cited every time the source is cited in the text of the paper.

When a source has three, four, or five authors, all authors should be included in the citation the first time the source is cited. If the same source is cited again in the paper, the first author’s last name followed by “et al.” should be used.

- First time: Anderson, Walker, Jackson, and Williams (2003) concluded that teachers are often upset by the unwillingness of students to read the materials provided for them.
- Second and subsequent times: In later research, it was found that teachers have a high rate of anxiety during exam grading season (Anderson, et al., 2003).

When a source has six or more authors, you should cite by the last name of the first author followed by “et al.” every time the source is cited, including the first time.

Authored by organization:

If the source is authored by a government agency or organization, use the organization and the date in the in-text citation. The following examples would illustrate how to cite the DSM-V in text.

- According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013)...
- Parenthetically at the end of a sentence: (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Personal communication:

If you plan to cite a personal communication, such as an interview, conversation, letter, or e-mail, you should cite the initials of the source, the last name, and the most accurate date for the source as possible. Personal communication is not considered to be “recoverable” information, and is not included in the references page of the paper.

- R. S. Anderson (personal communication, January 3, 2009) proposes that students be required to take mandatory courses in college success during the first semester of attendance.
Citing online sources (includes sources without author or date):

If possible, you should use the author/date structure to cite material retrieved from the web. However, if you are citing a webpage that does not contain an author, you can use the first few words of the page title instead of the author. If there is no date cited for the information, you can use “n.d.” (“no date”) in place of the date.

- One web-based journal proposes changes in editorial standards used by online journals (Rodriguez, 2008).
- One online poll cites the most common classroom source of confusion involves unclear expectations or standards on the part of the instructor (“Students and Learning,” 2007).
- According to research conducted by the college’s academic success center, students often fail to take advantage of free tutoring sessions (“Free Tutoring,” n.d.)

**Secondary Sources**

Under certain circumstances, you may find it necessary to cite a source that is referred to in another source. It is generally advised to read the research in the original if possible, but if it is necessary to cite a secondary source, the procedure follows:

Imagine that you wish to cite research conducted by Jones and Smith in 1996 (which you did not read in the original) that is mentioned in an article written by Anderson and Douglas in 2002 (which you did fully read).

- *In the text of the paper:* Research conducted by Jones and Smith (1996) (as cited in Anderson & Douglas, 2002) reveals that college is the source of much anxiety for first-generation university students.

On the reference page, however, you only cite the secondary source that you actually read—not the original research. So, your reference page would include the full information for Anderson and Douglas (2002). Since you did not actually read the original article by Jones and Smith, you do not cite it on your reference page.
Quotations

Short quotations:
Short quotations (fewer than 40 words) should be enclosed in quotation marks, and should be part of the overall sentence structure. For quotations, include the page number of your source (if available).

- Research performed by Robertson (1999) found that “cats performed very well on a test of cognitive skill” (p. 34).
- Researchers at the University of Southeastern Ontario discovered that “cats performed very poorly on a test of cognitive skill” (Robertson, 1999, p. 34).

Long quotations:
Long quotations (over 40 words) are placed in a block of text that is indented 5 spaces from the left margin. Place the citation after the closing punctuation. For example:

Place direct quotations longer than 40 words in a free-standing block of typewritten lines, and omit quotation marks. Start the quotation on a new line, indented five spaces from the left margin. Type the entire quotation on the new margin, and indent the first line of any subsequent paragraph within the quotation five spaces from the new margin. Maintain double-spacing throughout. The parenthetical citation should come after closing punctuation mark. (Neyhart & Karper, 2002)

Some teachers discourage overuse of direct quotes (however, in some disciplines, extensive use of direct quotations is quite necessary—speak to your instructor directly if you have questions about using quotes in your research). Over-using direct quotes can be a substitute for understanding the material. A paper full of direct properly cited quotations might not be plagiarized, but it also fails to demonstrate understanding of the material. For this reason, we often advise that you learn to paraphrase.

Paraphrasing
Paraphrasing involves restating material from another source in your own words. You still must cite the original source when you paraphrase another author’s idea. You may be citing the sources in your own words, but you are still borrowing the ideas.

If you plan to paraphrase, I advise taking the following steps:

1. Read the original work several times, making sure you fully understand the concepts that the author is describing.
2. Put the original work away. Re-write the paraphrase in your own words. The goal is to clarify, simplify, and translate an author’s work into something that is more accessible to a general reader.

3. Re-read the original source and make sure that you are still expressing the same ideas, but in your own words.

4. Remember—you still must cite a source for your information in the text of your paper, even if you are phrasing the information in your own words. You may not be directly quoting the text of another author, but you are still borrowing his/her ideas and work.

Final Comments: Writing Issues

1. Use proper sentence structure, grammar, and punctuation. This is a matter of concern, even in classes like Sociology and Psychology! Spelling and grammar are very important. If you want your instructor to see your ideas shine through in your paper, don’t make obvious grammar or punctuation errors. Every time an instructor has to go back and correct an obvious spelling mistake, it draws his/her attention away from the subject of the paper itself. In addition, your attention to detail reflects your work ethic, and shows your instructor that you are willing to expend the effort that it takes to write a good paper.

2. Proofread your paper. Have someone else read your paper too! If a peer picks up your paper, reads it, and says, “This sentence makes no sense,” then it is likely that your instructor will think the same thing. Leave yourself time to write multiple drafts of your paper.

3. Write more than one draft! Give yourself enough time to craft your ideas, and give yourself time to ask questions before you write your final draft of your paper.

4. The final issue is the problem of plagiarism. When it comes to citing sources from other people, the best thing to do is to put away their article, and do your best to write down their ideas in your own words. In addition, even if you describe the work of others in your own words, you must give them credit (cite them) in your paper. As long as you give credit to another author for his/her ideas, and you don’t use his/her words as your own, you will be fine. Plagiarism is a big issue in all academic institutions. At best, plagiarism often results in failure of an assignment. In many cases, plagiarism can result in the automatic failure of a course, and in some cases, expulsion from a university. This is a serious issue that I urge you to seek further information about, should you have questions. Finally, remember: when in doubt—ask your instructor!
Useful Sources and Other Helpful Links

What follows is a list of useful resources that I used to construct this handout. These references can also be found on a sample page at the end of this handout.


*This is the reference for the APA Manual itself. The APA manual can be found in the library, or purchased online or at a local bookstore.*

Helpful online sources for APA style writing:

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/
(This is Purdue University’s online writing lab—it has an incredible number of links to all sorts of topics involving writing, from basic writing tips, to specific writing style documentation. I strongly advise that you take a look at their resources. For those of you writing a paper in MLA style, there is also a link to this information on Purdue’s OWL page.)

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/
(This is the specific link to Purdue’s online APA guide)

www.apastyle.org
(This is the official American Psychological Association page for APA writing style.)

http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/
(This is Diana Hacker’s page on research and documentation for a variety of writing styles.)

Links at Prairie State College:

http://library.prairiestate.edu
(This is just the general link for Prairie State’s library. You can follow this page to a variety of research databases to gather information for your classes.)

General Psychology and Social Science Links:

http://www.psywww.com/index.html
(PsychWeb: This leads you to dozens of links to any topic you could think of relating to psychology. This is a great starting place for psychology majors, as well as other interested parties, to find all sorts of information about the field, including career information.)

http://www.apa.org
(This is the homepage of the American Psychological Association—this is the homepage of one of the largest psychology-related organizations in the world. This is a good place to do some browsing if you want a good idea of the depth and breadth of the field.)

http://www.asanet.org/
(This is the homepage of the American Sociological Association. The ASA is another major social science organization, and this site will give you a good introduction to the field of sociology.)