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A Student's Guide to American Psychological Association (APA)

Publication Style

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Abstract

American Psychological Association publication style, or APA format is a standardized style for preparing manuscripts. This document is meant to acquaint students with this format. The first portion of this paper provides background and general information on the style. The next portion will also acquaint the student with the appropriate writing style for writing in the social sciences. The last portion is devoted to some of the more mechanical aspects of manuscript preparation. Overall, though, the purpose of this paper is to provide some basic examples which students can utilize as a guide when preparing papers in APA format.

A Student's Guide to American Psychological Association (APA)

Publication Style

APA format is a standardized style for preparing manuscripts similar to that set forth by the Modern Languages Association (MLA). This document is meant to provide the student with some basic information and some basic examples to aid in preparing papers in the APA publication style.

Background

The American Psychological Association currently oversees the publication of 18 professional journals, such as the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, and the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* which are the breeding and proving grounds for new and innovative ideas, theories and research. The editors of these journals review approximately 6,500 manuscripts which are submitted each year for publication in these 18 journals. Requiring the authors of these manuscripts to adhere to the APA style makes the task of reviewing and editing these manuscripts less burdensome and lends to faster and more cost-effective publication of the information (American Psychological Association [APA], 1983, p. 10).

In the long-term scheme of things, requiring students, especially psychology majors, to prepare papers in APA format provides them with the opportunity to begin utilizing and practicing the skills of manuscript preparation that may be required of them later in their careers as psychologists. These skills may not only be required in their careers, but, in the shorter scheme of things, may also be required in further undergraduate or graduate programs of study in psychology (Tomczak, 1990, p.47).

Students from other majors enrolled in psychology classes may then wonder why they are required to prepare their papers in APA format since they are not pursuing careers in

psychology. Many discipline areas other than psychology also require that papers and manuscripts be prepared in APA style at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels. It has been more than once that several colleagues of mine who were pursuing advanced degrees in business administration, education, physical education, criminal justice and social work sought my advice and/or my copy of the *Publication Manual* to help them in preparing papers for their class work. Many of their professors required these papers to be prepared using APA specifications.

Writing Style

The expression writing style, refers to how things are said and the tone which a particular author conveys in expressing his or her ideas. Often, students do not realize that the proper tone is important in presenting information effectively.

Writing in the sciences, psychology in particular, serves a different function than writing in other disciplines. It is meant to provide clear, straight-forward communication of information (APA, 1983, p. 32). This function, in fact, has lead many students who are successful writers in other classes to often report that they have a difficult time adjusting to the research writing style necessary to convey ideas in the sciences (Bond & Magistrale, 1987, p.108). This is because writing in the sciences requires "economy of expression"-the writer needs only say what needs to be said and no more (APA, 1983, p.33). Ideas should be presented as concisely and succinctly as possible (Bond & Magistrale, 1987, p. 108). Many students falsely believe that good writing in psychology requires using big, flowery words, complex sentences and poetic devices. Using these techniques may be appropriate in other types of writing where liberal use of words facilitates description, but they are distractions in psychological writing. The rule of thumb is to be complete but brief. Only say what needs to be said using short, simple words and sentences

(APA, 1983, pp.32-33). The student should strive to write at a level that is neither too poetic nor too informal (Tomeczak, 1991, p.45).

Mechanics

General Information

On the most basic level, APA format is a standardized way of typing or presenting a paper. This section is devoted to discussing the essential requirements for actual preparation of the manuscript.

One general rule for manuscript preparation that many editors of journals feel is most important is to double-space *everything* (APA, 1983, p. 11). Every line in the paper, with some exceptions, including those on the title page and the reference page should be double-spaced. The exceptions are the title page, the abstract page, and the final page of text before the references. Take note of the distance between the short title/page number and the first line of every page; also note the distance between the end of each section of this paper and the section headers as well as the distance between each paragraph.

Another general rule is that all margins--top, bottom, left and right--should be 1 inch. Only the short title and page number should appear within this border. Double-spacing and leaving 1 inch margins leaves room for copy editors, or in this case, your instructor, to write comments and corrections (APA, 1983, p. 137; APA, 1994, p. 240).

Computer users should be aware that the dot matrix print used by many computer printers is unacceptable by APA standards. Your instructors may make exceptions though, so ask. In contrast, the new software and laser printers offer the user a wide variety of typefaces to choose from. Although some of these fonts may look very nice, students should stick with standard fonts like courier, American Typewriter (in pica or elite typewriter sizes), or Times Roman 12 Point

size, which was used to for this particular exercise (APA, 1994, pp. 237-238). Once again check with your instructor; he or she may allow different fonts. However, some students use larger or smaller fonts in hopes of falsely meeting the instructor's length requirements for the paper.

Please avoid doing this.

Students should also be aware that standard rules for typing apply. For example, one space should be left after commas, semi-colons, periods or other end marks and colons (APA, 2001, pp. 290-291). Also note that periods should only appear *after* parentheses, as in the previous sentence.

Finally, the need for traditional footnotes at the bottom of the page, or endnotes which identify the originator of some work or idea in the traditional MLA requirements has been eliminated by the APA. Footnotes are used in APA format but their function is rather different then in the traditional MLA style (see APA, 1983, pp. 105-107). The APA (1983) has noted that this type of information can be cited directly in the manuscript itself in a variety of ways (p. 107). Thus far, I have been citing information obtained from the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, published in 1983, revised in 1994 and again recently revised in 2001, in various ways. Since there are no specific authors of the *Manual*, I simply cite the APA as the corporate author, the year the work was published, and if the information is from a specific page in the original work, the page number it appears on.

If what you are citing is a general conclusion or finding from the original work, you need only include the author's last name and the year of publication. Although you are not necessarily required to provide page numbers as I have done in several of the in-line citations in this sample paper, the authors of the *Publication Manual* state, "...authors are encouraged to do so, especially when it would help an interested reader locate the relevant passage in a long or

complex text.” (APA, 1994, p. 97). As long as all of this information is present somewhere in the paragraph, either parenthetically or worded into the sentences themselves, the citation is complete. The previous and following paragraphs include some “bogus” citations designed to illustrate how to cite works written by one or more authors and also to demonstrate how to list works from a variety of sources in the reference section. Students should review these citations and check them against the reference list to observe how to do them properly. For example, you should use an ampersand (&) instead of the word “and” between authors’ names if they are listed in parentheses; if there are three or more authors list all of their names once and then use the first author’s last name and “et al.” (meaning, “and others”) in subsequent citations; if there are six or more authors, use only the first author’s last name and “et al.” (see APA, 1983, pp. 107-111).

The student should also keep in mind that ideas borrowed from other authors should be paraphrased to avoid plagiarism. Quotes should be used sparingly since this may give readers the impression that the author is not capable of writing for his or herself. Short quotations (40 words or less) can be incorporated in to the text using quotation marks; longer quotations should be typed in block form (i.e., no tabs) with the entire block being indented five spaces. No quotation marks are required (APA, 1983, pp. 68-69).

Title Page

A short title and page number should appear at the top of every page within the 1 inch margin (see above). It should be flush with the right margin and the page number should be 5 spaces from the short title (APA, 1994, p. 241). This title does not have to be very descriptive; its function is to allow the reader of the paper to easily identify which paper the pages belong to in case they accidentally become separated (APA, 1983, p. 138).

A running head should appear on the very first line of the title page, flush with the left

p. 144). The remainder of the page should be blank.

Body

The actual body of the paper should begin on page 3. The title of the paper should appear, centered, on the first line of the page. The text should start one double-spaced line below the title.

If your paper is divided into sections, section headings should appear centered on a separate line, but not underlined. Subsections headings, as the one listed above, are typed flush with the left margin in italics.

APA format was designed primarily for researchers who submit manuscripts which describe experiments to journals for publication. If your instructor requires you to submit a report on a psychological study that you have conducted your paper should be divided into the specific sections.

The first section is the introduction, which contains a description of the research problem, a brief literature review of past studies performed on related research questions, the rationale for conducting the study and a succinct statement of your experimental hypothesis. This section is not labeled and starts right on page 3 under the title (APA, 1983, pp.24-25).

The second section is the Method section which is labeled as described above. The method section should provided a detailed description of how the research was conducted. There are three subsections, which are labeled as described above, in the method section: participants (a discussion of the subjects who participated in the study), apparatus (any materials which were used like questionnaires, tachistascopes, EEGs), and procedure (what was actually done; APA, 1983, pp.25-26). This section should basically be written like a recipe so that other researchers could duplicate your study exactly.

The results section is the third section and is labeled. This section should provide a summary of the results found and a brief discussion of the statistical tests used to analyze the data (APA, 1983, p.27).

The final section is the discussion section and it is also labeled. The aim of this particular section is to relate the actual results of the study to the initial research problem and hypotheses. In particular, the author should state whether or not the results support the initial hypotheses as they relate to the theories and research discussed in the introduction. The author should also suggest possible improvements on the research (APA, 1983, pp.27-28).

References

The list of references, or the bibliography should appear on a separate page. The word, "References," should appear centered, one double-spaced line from the page number; do not underline it. Keep in mind that you should list all works that were cited in the paper itself and *only* works that were cited in the paper. Do not pad your references!

The first thing that should be immediately obvious is that first line of each reference is flush left and subsequent lines of the same reference are indented five spaces—this is referred to as a *hanging indent* format. Also note that the last name of each author is listed first; then only the first and middle *initial* (if given) are used. Do not use the word "and" when listing authors' names--use an ampersand (&).

The eighth reference listed is a reference to an article in a journal. The date of publication is listed in parentheses after the authors' names. The title of the article is next. Note that only the first letter of the first word, first letter of a formal name or the first letter of the first word after a colon is capitalized. The journal title is then listed and it is in italics. Conventional rules for capitalization are used for this title. Also in italics is the volume number; issue numbers are

Appendix

The following presents examples of how to properly cite some of the more common resources used to complete undergraduate papers. If you are using a source that doesn't fall into one of these categories, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Edition*. See pages 232-280. This book can be found in most libraries (the call number is **BF76.7 .P83 2001** in the reference and the circulating collections).

INFORMATION FROM PERSONAL INTERVIEWS, E-MAIL COMMUNICATIONS:

In the text:

One psychology professor, in particular, argues that APA format is totally awesome (T. P. Tomczak, personal communication, July 13, 2001).

This does not have to be cited in the references!

WORKS FROM CORPORATE AUTHORS

In the text:

The incidence of the disorder is much higher in women than in men (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1987, p. 347).

In subsequent citations, just use APA.

In the references:

American Psychiatric Association. (1987). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (3rd. ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

WORKS WITH NO AUTHOR

In the text:

According to some theorists, bulimics have nine irrational beliefs ("Turning Around Bulimia," 1989).

Only the first few words of the title are necessary.
Remember--article titles in quotes, book titles underlined!

In the references:

Turning around bulimia with therapy. (1989, September).

Psychology Today, p. 14.

Note that this is from a popular magazine--look at how the date is listed. This is a monthly magazine, but in cases of a weekly magazine you'd also want to list the date after the month, for example: (1989, September 5).

SOMETHING FROM A SECONDARY SOURCE YOU HAVEN'T LOOKED AT

In the text:

Generally attachment patterns are set, but they can be altered by later experience (Ainsworth, 1982, as cited in Papalia & Olds, 1990, p. 262).

In the references: just make sure that you have the secondary source listed!

IF YOU ONLY USED AN ABSTRACT, BUT DID NOT DIG UP THE ACTUAL ARTICLE

In the text cite it as you would any journal article.

In the references:

Fagot, B.I. & Hagan, R. (1991). Observations of parent reactions to sex-stereotyped behaviors: Age and sex effects. *Child Development*, 62, 617-628. (From *Psychological Abstracts*, 1992, 79, Abstract No. 1062).

INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM A WORLD-WIDE WEB PAGE

In the text, cite the authors' last names and the year as usual.

In the references:

Chou, L., McClintock, R., Moretti, F., & Nix, D. H. (1993).

Technology and education: New wine in new bottles. Retrieved
August 24, 2000 from

<http://www.ilt.columbia.edu/publications/papers/newwine1.htm>

Type (n.d.) in place of the date is no date is listed. If no author is listed, follow the rules listed above under "WORKS WITH NO AUTHOR."

AN ON-LINE, FULL-TEXT VERSION OF A JOURNAL ARTICLE:

In-line cite the authors' last names and the year of publication as usual.

In the references:

VandenBos, G., Knapp, S., & Doe, J. (2001). Role of reference
elements in the selection of resources by psychology
undergraduates [Electronic version]. *Journal of
Bibliographic Research*, 5, 117-123.

You can also find examples of how to cite various electronic sources available through GCC's library on the GCC library web page.

A CHAPTER OR ARTICLE IN AN EDITED BOOK

In the text, cite the chapter or article author(s) last names, year of the book's publication and the relevant page number.

On the reference page:

Draguns, J.G. (1980). Psychological disorders of clinical
severity. In H.C. Triandis & J. Draguns (Eds.), *Handbook of
cross-cultural psychology* (vol. 6). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.