Brief Guide to APA Formatting

What is APA?

APA is short for the American Psychological Association, which produced its first scientific publishing guide (*The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*) in 1929. The short guide below is drawn from the Sixth Edition APA manual and provides answers to the University Writing Center’s most common asked APA questions.

Header

The header of all pages should include a running head with the title of the paper in all capital letters, left justified, and the page number in the upper right hand corner. On the title page it should appear: “Running Head: THE TITLE OF MY PAPER” and on every other page: “THE TITLE OF MY PAPER”. The running head can be shorter than the title itself and should not exceed 50 characters, including spaces.

Margins and Spacing

The margins should be one inch all the way around on every page. Every page should be double spaced.

Title Page

This page should include (each with its own line and in this order): the title of the work, the author, and the institutional affiliation (generally the school, but some teachers may prefer the class name). This page may also include an author’s note that includes: departmental affiliation, change in affiliation, acknowledgments, special circumstances, and contact information.

Abstract

The abstract is not always required but is considered important in most scientific writing. This should be the second page of the paper, and the abstract should be the only section on that page. The abstract should be short, concise, and serve as a summary of the paper. The abstract should include things like: the problem, method, findings, and a short conclusion.

The Paper Itself

The actual paper should begin on the third page. The first page of this section should have the title, centered at the top of the page.
Introduction

Begin with the introduction; it does not require a heading. This section should include why the problem is important, how it relates to the field and previous work, the hypothesis, implications of the study. The introduction can be anywhere from a paragraph to several pages, depending on requirements, but it should be as concise as possible.

Methods and Materials

This section requires a centered and bolded heading; any subsections require a left justified bolded heading. The methods should give a detailed description of how the study was conducted. Anyone should be able to reproduce it exactly. It should include: sampling procedures, any measurements, and the overall design.

Results

As with Methods and Materials, the results section needs a centered and bolded heading. This section should summarize the data and include all relevant results and any analysis performed, it should NOT include discussion of these results. Tables and figures should be included here.

Discussion

This section requires the typical heading format. The discussion is the place for interpretation of the results and their implications. This is the section where possible biases and other weaknesses may be discussed.

Reference List

This should be placed at the end of the paper and should be the only thing on the page. The references section begins with the typical section heading. The citations should be arranged in alphabetical order by author.

Citations

In Text

One Author

If the author’s name is included in the body of the text, and it is not a direct quote, only the year of publication need be included in the citation. Include the year directly
following the author’s name. Example: Cyborg (2009) found that these emotional outbursts increased brain activity in the frontal lobe.

If both the author’s name and the year are within the text, no parenthetical citation is needed. Example: In 2012, Whalebone found this type of educational instruction was no longer relevant.

If neither the author’s name nor the year is within the text, cite the author’s last name and the year separated by a comma and located within parentheses. Example: The thumbs-up sign was then accepted as a cultural norm (Sloth, 2011).

Two Authors

If the work has two authors, cite both names each time the reference is listed. If the two authors are within the text, use the word “and.” Example: Moron and Fishead (2012) discovered whale bones at the remote beach.

If the two authors are listed in parenthesis at the end of the sentence, use an ampersand. Example: The findings were inconclusive (Moron & Fishead, 2012).

Three, Four, or Five Authors

If the work has three, four, or five authors, cite all of the authors the first time that the reference occurs in the text and only the first author’s name followed by et al. and the year in all subsequent in-text references. Example: After the authorities discovered his third murder, the criminal psychologist suspected that he was a sociopath (Smith, Wesson, Siskel, and Ebert, 2010). He was then diagnosed and committed to a psychiatric facility (Smith, et al., 2010).

Six or More Authors

If the work has six or more authors, cite only the first author followed by et al. and the year. Example: It was then that the detective agents believed the entire episode was a scam (Flora, et al., 2008).

No Author

If the work has no author, the first few words of the title should be used. Article titles, chapters, and web pages should be enclosed in double quote marks and titles of periodicals, books, brochures, and reports should be italicized. Sample sizes were found to be too small as to be relevant (“Sample Size,” 1996)
Direct Quote

If the information is a direct quote, it must be enclosed with double quote marks and the page number must be included in the citation. Example: Johnson (2008) stated that “the sample size was too small as to be relevant” (p. 19), negating the importance of the study.

If the quotation is more than forty words, omit the quotation marks and place it freestanding in the text, indented by one-half of an inch.

Reference List

All works listed in the reference list must be referenced in the text. The first line should be left-aligned and subsequent lines are indented five spaces.

Complete citations on a reference page usually include: author and/or editor information (multiple authors should be arranged in alphabetical order), the publication company information and date of publication, title of the work, and various other bits of information.

Online Newspaper Article Example


Journal article with DOI Example (DOI stands for “Digital Object Identifier” and is often located on the cover page of an article downloaded from an online library.)

Author(s). (year). Article title. Journal title, volume(issue), pages. doi:99999998

Journal article without DOI Example


Magazine Article Example

Online magazine article Example


Newspaper article


[If article is not on continuous pages, separate discontinuous pages by commas: pp. B1, B4, B6-B8]

Online newspaper article

Author(s). (year, month day). Article title. *Newspaper title*. Retrieved from http://www...

Entire book in print

Author(s). (year). *Title*. Location: publisher.

Entire book found online

Author(s). (year). *Title*. Retrieved from http://www...

Book with an editor in print

Editor(s). (Ed.). (year). *Title*. Location: publisher.

Chapter of a book or entry in reference books - Editors should be listed with their first name initial first then the last name.

Author(s). (year). Title of chapter/entry. In Editor(s) (Eds.), *title of book* (pp. pages). Location: publisher.

Entry in a reference book with no byline

Music recording

Writer. (copyright year). Song title [recorded by artist]*. On *album title*
[recording medium: CD, record, etc.] Location: Label. (date of recording)**

*if different from writer
**if different from song copyright date
Note: For in text citations use artist and track numbers: (artist, year, track #)

Motion picture

Producer(s) (Producer), & director (Director). (year). *Movie title* [Motion picture].
Country of origin: studio.

Youtube video with original creator and poster

Creator(s) (Creator(s)). Poster username (Poster). (year posted, month day). Title
[Video] retrieved from http://www...

Youtube video poster only

Poster username (Poster). Title [Video]. (year posted, month day). Retrieved from
http://www...

Note: This synopsis includes only most frequently used citation and format templates.
Many other formatting templates can be found in the sixth edition APA handbook.

Reference List

American Psychological Association (2010). *Publication manual of the American