Writing Psychology Papers

Psychology Papers should

- Address all parts of the prompt.
- Use research and empirical evidence to support all points.
- Be concise and clear.

Formatting

- Writing in APA
  - 12 pt, Times New Roman font
  - Double-spaced with 1” margins
  - Header (cover page is different than other pages)
    - Cover page header: Running Head: TITLE OR ABBREVIATED TITLE
    - Header for rest of paper: TITLE OR ABBREVIATED TITLE
  - Page numbering starts on the cover page
  - References
    - Double-spaced
    - ½ ” hanging indent from the margin on all lines after the first in an entry
    - See “References” page for examples

Research Papers

- Abstract
- Introduction
- Literature review (past tense: “Roberts showed” or present perfect tense: “researchers have shown”)
- Methods (past tense (or future tense in the case of a proposal))
- Results (past tense)
- Discussion (present tense)
- References
- Appendices (if needed)
Dos and Don’ts

- **Do**
  - Use active voice instead of passive wherever possible.
    - passive: The experiment was conducted by Roberts.
    - active: Roberts conducted the experiment.
  - Use “I” and “we” sparingly or not at all, and only use “I” and “we” when referring to researchers, not when referring to people in general.
  - Use person-first language. For example, “people with autism” instead of “autistics.”
  - Remember that “data” are always plural.
  - Use the word “participants” instead of “subjects.”

- **Don’t**
  - Use direct quotes (they can be used, but should be used sparingly. Paraphrase whenever possible).
  - Use absolutes such as “completely”, “absolutely”, “always”, etc.
  - Use immodest expressions such as “prove”. Use words such as “suggest”, “support”, “show”, or “indicate” instead.
  - Use overly complex sentence structures. The goal is clarity.
  - Use colloquial or informal writing style, especially slang.
  - Use contractions.
  - Use biased language.
    - The male pronoun (he) does not refer to everyone.
  - Define people by what they aren’t. Rather than saying someone is “non-white”, say they are Latino, for example.
  - Assume readers will know what you mean. Define all acronyms, jargon, theories and ideas fully.

Other Useful Tips and Tricks

- Proofread.
- Edit.
- Make sure everything is cited, and cited correctly.
- Avoid common grammatical errors.
- Write the paper over time instead of in one sitting, and edit and proofread over time.
- Never be afraid to ask a professor for clarification if something is unclear.
Personal Statements

- Answer all questions
- Some ideas of what to include:
  - Why you want to pursue a degree in psychology
  - What area you want to specialize in
  - Academic experiences that have prepared you
  - Extracurricular/work experiences that have prepared you
  - If a research-based program, research experiences that have prepared you, personal research interests, faculty you would be interested in working with and how well you feel that faculty/school is matched with your research interests
  - Problems/inconsistencies in scores or grades
  - Any other information not revealed elsewhere on the application, such as workload outside of school
  - Career goals and plans for the future
  - Why you think the school/program would be a good fit for you and/or how it will help you prepare for your future
- General format
  - Motivation for studying -- opening paragraph -- anecdotal/narrative (why this field/profession?)
  - Qualities/Experiences -- told by example -- a few focused, well-developed arguments -- no listing, re-hashing of resume (why you?)
  - Future Plans -- what populations, organizational settings, research are you interested in? Not set in stone, but need some indication (what are your plans?)
  - School Choice -- why this program? Argument shows "this is me, this is you, this is why we are a perfect match" (why us?)

(Schafer)

- Tips
  - Don’t say anything that isn’t directly relevant to graduate study in psychology and/or why the admissions committee should select you.
  - Don’t list experiences or repeat your resume.
    - Tell the story (what happened)
    - Tell what you learned from the experience (what you got out of it)
    - Tell how what you learned applies to success in grad school or in your future profession (why it matters)

(Schafer)
References


