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Writing in APA is more than simply learning the formula for citations or following a certain page layout. APA also includes the stylistics of your writing, from point of view to word choice.

### POINT OF VIEW AND VOICE

When writing in APA Style, you can use the first person point of view when discussing your research steps ("I studied ...") and when referring to yourself and your co-authors ("We examined the literature ..."). Use first person to discuss research steps rather than anthropomorphising the work. For example, a study cannot "control" or "interpret"; you and your co-authors, however, can.

In general, you should foreground the research and not the researchers ("The results indicate ..."). Avoid using the editorial "we"; if you use "we" in your writing, be sure that "we" refers to you and your fellow researchers.

It is a common misconception that foregrounding the research requires using the passive voice ("Experiments have been conducted ..."). This is inaccurate. Rather, you would use pronouns in place of "experiments" ("We conducted experiments ...").

APA Style encourages using the active voice ("We interpreted the results ..."). The active voice is particularly important in experimental reports, where the subject performing the action should be clearly identified (e.g. "We interviewed ..." vs. "The participants responded ...").

Consult the OWL handout for more on the distinction between **passive and active voice**.

## VERB TENSE

Switching verb tenses can cause confusion for your readers, so you should be consistent in the tense you use. When discussing literature reviews and experimental procedures that have already happened, use past tense ("Our study *showed*") or present perfect tense ("studies *have proven*"). Also use past tense when discussing results ("students' concentration *increased*"), but use present tense when discussing what your results mean and what conclusions you can draw from them ("Our study *illustrates*").

## CLARITY AND CONCISENESS

Clarity and conciseness in writing are important when conveying research in APA Style. You don't want to misrepresent the details of a study or confuse your readers with wordiness or unnecessarily complex sentences.

For clarity, be specific rather than vague in descriptions and explanations. Unpack details accurately to provide adequate information to your readers so they can follow the development of your study.

**Example:** "It was predicted that marital conflict would predict behavior problems in school-aged children."

To clarify this vague hypothesis, use parallel structure to outline specific ideas:

"The first hypothesis stated that marital conflict would predict behavior problems in school-aged children. The second hypothesis stated that the effect would be stronger for girls than for boys. The third hypothesis stated that older girls would be more affected by marital conflict than younger girls."

To be more concise, particularly in introductory material or abstracts, you should

eliminate unnecessary words and condense information when you can (see the OWL handout on **Conciseness** in academic writing for suggestions).

**Example:** The above list of hypotheses might be rephrased concisely as:  
"The authors wanted to investigate whether marital conflict would predict behavior problems in children and they wanted to know if the effect was greater for girls than for boys, particularly when they examined two different age groups of girls."

Balancing the need for clarity, which can require unpacking information, and the need for conciseness, which requires condensing information, is a challenge. Study published articles and reports in your field for examples of how to achieve this balance.

## WORD CHOICE

You should even be careful in selecting certain words or terms. Within the social sciences, commonly used words take on different meanings and can have a significant effect on how your readers interpret your reported findings or claims. To increase clarity, avoid bias, and control how your readers will receive your information, you should make certain substitutions:

- Use terms like "participants" or "respondents" (rather than "subjects") to indicate how individuals were involved in your research
- Use terms like "children" or "community members" to provide more detail about who was participating in the study
- Use phrases like "The evidence *suggests* ..." or "Our study *indicates* ..." rather than referring to "proof" or "proves" because no single study can prove a theory or hypothesis

As with the other stylistic suggestions here, you should study the discourse of your

field to see what terminology is most often used.

## AVOIDING POETIC LANGUAGE

Writing papers in APA Style is unlike writing in more creative or literary styles that draw on poetic expressions and figurative language. Such linguistic devices can detract from conveying your information clearly and may come across to readers as forced when it is inappropriately used to explain an issue or your findings.

Therefore, you should:

- Minimize the amount of figurative language used in an APA paper, such as metaphors and analogies unless they are helpful in conveying a complex idea,
- Avoid rhyming schemes, alliteration, or other poetic devices typically found in verse
- Use simple, descriptive adjectives and plain language that does not risk confusing your meaning.