



STYLE AND GRAMMAR GUIDELINES ▾

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# Headings

Headings identify the content within sections of a paper.

Make your headings descriptive and concise. Headings that are well formatted and clearly worded aid both visual and nonvisual readers of all abilities.

## Levels of heading

There are five levels of heading in APA Style. Level 1 is the highest or main level of heading, Level 2 is a subheading of Level 1, Level 3 is a subheading of Level 2, and so on through Levels 4 and 5.

The number of headings to use in a paper depends on the length and complexity of the work.

- If only one level of heading is needed, use Level 1.
- If two levels of heading are needed, use Levels 1 and 2.
- If three levels of heading are needed, use Levels 1, 2, and 3 (and so on).

Use only the number of headings necessary to differentiate distinct sections in your paper; short student papers may not require any headings. Furthermore, avoid these common errors related to headings:

- Avoid having only one subsection heading within a section, just like in an outline.
- Do not label headings with numbers or letters.
- Double-space headings; do not switch to single spacing within headings.
- Do not add blank lines above or below headings, even if a heading falls at the end of a page.

## Format of headings

The following table demonstrates how to format headings in APA Style.

Level	Format
1	<b>Centered, Bold, Title Case Heading</b>  Text begins as a new paragraph.
2	<b>Flush Left, Bold, Title Case Heading</b>  Text begins as a new paragraph.
3	<b>Flush Left, Bold Italic, Title Case Heading</b>  Text begins as a new paragraph.
4	<b>Indented, Bold, Title Case Heading, Ending With a Period.</b> Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.

### Learn more

Headings are covered in the seventh edition APA Style manuals in the [Publication Manual \(/products/publication-manual-7th-edition\)](#) Sections 2.26 and 2.27 and the [Concise Guide \(/products/concise-guide\)](#) Sections 1.25 and 1.26



This guidance has been revised from the 6th edition.

### Related handouts

- [Heading Levels Template: Student Paper \(PDF, 257KB\) \(/instructional-aids/heading-template-student-paper.pdf\)](#)
- [Heading Levels Template: Professional Paper \(PDF, 213KB\) \(/instructional-aids/heading-template-professional-paper.pdf\)](#)

5	<i>Indented, Bold Italic, Title Case Heading, Ending With a Period.</i> Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.
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Note. In title case, most words are capitalized ([/style-grammar-guidelines/capitalization/title-case](#)).

## Headings in the introduction

Because the first paragraphs of a paper are understood to be introductory, the heading “Introduction” is not needed. Do not begin a paper with an “Introduction” heading; the paper title at the top of the first page of text acts as a de facto Level 1 heading.

It is possible (but not required) to use headings within the introduction. For subsections within the introduction, use Level 2 headings for the first level of subsection, Level 3 for subsections of any Level 2 headings, and so on. After the introduction (regardless of whether it includes headings), use a Level 1 heading for the next main section of the paper (e.g., Method).

## Creating accessible headings

Writers who use APA Style may use the automatic headings function of their word-processing program to create headings. This not only simplifies the task of formatting headings but also ensures that headings are coded appropriately in any electronic version of the paper, which aids readers who use navigation tools and assistive technologies such as screen readers.

Here are some tips on how to create headings in some common word-processing programs:

- If you use Academic Writer (<https://academicwriter.apa.org/>) to write your APA Style papers, the headings menu in the Writing Center will format headings for you in 7th edition APA Style.
- If you use Microsoft Word to write your APA Style papers, use the Styles menu to format headings.
  - a. Follow [these headings directions from Microsoft](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/customize-or-create-new-styles-d38d6e47-f6fc-48eb-a607-1eb120dec563) (<https://support.office.com/en-us/article/customize-or-create-new-styles-d38d6e47-f6fc-48eb-a607-1eb120dec563>) to customize the heading formats for your future use.
  - b. To apply Level 4 and 5 headings (which are inline headings, meaning the heading appears on the same line as paragraph text), first type the heading and a few words of the text that follows. Then highlight the text that you want to be your heading and select the appropriate heading level from the Styles menu. Only the highlighted text will be formatted as the Level 4 or 5 heading.

## From the APA Style blog



### APA Style student papers webinar

A new APA Style webinar, “A Step-by-Step Guide for APA Style Student Papers,” taking place on September 10, 2020, will provide detailed guidance on creating, formatting, and organizing APA Style student papers.

([/blog/webinar-student-papers](#))



### Is your paper “heading” for trouble?

Current APA Style guidelines advise writers to use title case, boldface, and double-space for all headings.  
([/blog/7th-edition-headings](#))



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750 First St. NE, Washington, DC 20002-4242  
Telephone: (800) 374-2721; (202) 336-5500  
TDD/TYY: (202) 336-6123

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