Guidelines for Using the APA Format, 6th ed.

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Abstract

This brief paper describes the parameters for preparing a paper following the APA Style. It is structured just as a paper following the appropriate style should be; that is, if the written paper looks like this paper, it is probably in the correct format. Always refer to the *APA Manual* for accurate information, however, only using this paper as a guide.

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Writing papers is the way that you demonstrate what you have learned in a course. When you have identified what you are going to work on, you must look at it from different angles incorporating what you have learned from the other courses that you have taken in your academic career. You will probably not be able to apply everything that you have learned to your selected topic, but try to apply as much as possible. This paper, however, is designed to help you make sure that your paper is in the correct format; the format is required, and it helps make sure that your paper is easy to read and understand. This paper is only a guide and the *APA Manual* is the final word on proper format.

Everything must start somewhere and here is where you begin to work out some ideas about what you want to do for your paper. As was mentioned elsewhere, you can make changes down the road, but it is critical that you get started. This outline will help you put together your ideas into a logical and well organized way that you can expand upon as you write your paper. The actual writing style is described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2010), as well as the related web sites provided in the References section of this paper (APA, 2009; BU, 2009; Purdue, 2009). There are also two references on general writing skills (Hodges, et al., 2001 and Spatt, 2003).

Papers or manuscript articles can be categorized into roughly six categories: empirical studies (original research), literature reviews, theoretical papers (using existing research and literature to advance a theory), methodological papers (explicating new approaches to research or practice), case studies (for shedding light on working with one or more individual clients); and a category called “other,” which includes brief reports, comments on other papers, book reviews, etc. For the purposes of this academic program the category “others” will rarely be used.

The student’s workbook, *Mastering APA Style* (APA, 2009), can provide even more specifics on the details of writing your paper, and you can check your knowledge by using “self-tests.” Specifically, Chapter Three in the workbook reviews term papers. The outline below should also help. A written paper has four sections described in more detail below.

**Introductory Section**

A major reason for this section is to introduce the topic and/or theme of the paper, paying particular attention to justifying why your topic is important, and to explain the major purpose behind the paper. It is the very first part, including the first paragraph, of the body of the paper. This is where the writer positions the paper in relationship to other previous writings on the topic, accomplished by describing a search of the literature, emphasizing how what has been written previously applies specifically to the paper. Finally, this is also where research papers introduce the research hypotheses that will be tested for rejection or retention. This section is identified by the title of the paper centered above the section, but not in bold face type, as in other headers.

**Method Section**

This section presents and discusses how the study for the paper was, or will be, conducted, a section that is particularly important when reporting research, or a proposal to conduct research. This is where technical terms and variables used in the study are operationally defined, as well as any measures that are used.

**Participants**

A description of the study’s participants or subjects, sampling procedures, sample size, and statistical power is offered in this section.

**Materials**

Any special materials or equipment are described in this section, including specific psychological assessments.

**Measures and Variables**

The variables to be measured are described in this section together with how they are operationally defined in specific ways that allow them to be measured. For instance the writer might state that the variable of “anxiety” will be examined, defined primarily by physiological arousal and its sequelae, and measured by using the *Hamilton Anxiety Scale*. Issues of reliability and validity of measures must be discussed here.

**Research Design**

This section is used where an experimental design is used, but omitted if the paper is not about experimental research. Additional sections can be added for clarity, using subheadings to separate them. If statistical procedures are discussed, Rice University (2006) has a website that can provide help.

**Results Section**

This section presents and discusses what was found or discovered about the topic of the paper. This is also where outcome measures and statistical analysis are reported, if used. It is important to report baseline data here, or the outcomes may not make any sense. Unexpected results are reported in this section, recognizing that anything that is found in a study is useful, whether expected or not, or whether considered desirable or not.

**Discussion Section**

This section is a summary, interpretation, evaluation, and conclusion to your paper, including any recommendation for further study. Be sure to discuss any limitations to the paper, as well as any alternative interpretations to the findings reported in the paper.

**Issues Pertaining to Writing Style**

Clarity in sharing information is the major concern of academic or professional writing and using formal guidelines goes a long way toward accomplishing this end. The style of one’s writing also has an unavoidable impact on communicating with the reading audience. Logic, organization, smooth flow of ideas, concision, clarity, precision, equanimity, fairness, being ethical, and avoidance of bias in language all contribute to a stylistically good paper, as does good use of spelling and grammar. For more information see the *Publication Manual* (APA, 2010, pp. 65 - 86).

**Other Information for Your Capstone Paper**

Specific tips on formatting your paper according to APA Guidelines can be found in the Appendix, and of course, this all assumes that you have done a good job of proof reading to correct any errors.

As a final point, often students ask about how long a paper should be. The answer is, “however long it needs to be for the paper to do the subject justice.” Length in this case refers to the body of the paper, not to include the title page, abstract, reference list, or appendices. In the case of this paper, it is four pages long – barely adequate for a course term paper.

**References**

American Psychological Association. (2009). *APA style*. Retrieved from the APA website, <http://www.apastyle.org>.

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Purdue University Online Writing Lab. (2009). *Using American Psychological Association (APA) format (updated to 6th edition)*. Retrieved from the Purdue University Online Writing Lab Web site, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html>.

Rice University. (2008). *Rice virtual lab in statistics*. Retrieved from the Rice University Unix

Facility web site. <http://onlinestatbook.com/rvls.html>

Spatt, B. (2003). *Writing from sources* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s.

**Appendix**

The first concern with any paper are the issues surrounding ethics, such as treatment of clients, plagiarism, etc. This also includes the use of bias-free language in the paper. Next would come concerns with writing clearly and concisely, including appropriate grammar and spelling. After addressing these concerns, the following are some specifics on format.

Margins:

Margins are 1 inch all around; top, bottom, left, and right.

Justification:

Justification is to the left, not centered, or full (see buttons with lines after the buttons for Bold, Italic, and Underline).

Font/typeface:

Times New Roman – 12 point is used for the text and Ariel – 12 point is used for tables and diagrams.

Spacing between words and punctuation:

One space is entered between words, and all punctuation, except for the “internal” periods used in abbreviations ( for example, U.S.), or the colons used in the relationships expressing mathematical ratios. Two spaces are placed between the period or question mark at the end of a sentence and the beginning of the next sentence. Do not split words at the end of a sentence with a hyphen.

Line spacing:

Double space the lines, no more or less, leaving one full-size blank line between each line of type. Do not add additional spaces between paragraphs.

Paragraph indentation:

The beginning of each paragraph is indented 5 spaces. This allows the reader to differentiate between paragraphs without adding additional blank lines.

Headings:

They vary depending upon how many sub-headings are used. A good guideline, at least for the written papers for the course, are to use no more that three levels of headings as follows:

**First Level Headings are Centered and Boldface with Uppercase and Lowercase Letters**

**The Second Level Heading is Flush Left and Boldface with Upper- and Lowercase Letters**

**Third level headings are indented, boldface, lowercase, ending in a period.**

There are fourth and fifth level headings, the format of which can be found in the APA Manual (2010), but that is probably too much detail for the typical paper used in the graduate program.

Page numbers and page headers:

Page numbers and the “running head” are entered into the “header” [click ‘View’ on the toolbar in the Word document, then ‘Header and Footer’]. This opens the ‘header’. Justify the “running head” to the left margin and the “page number” to the right. Each page has a number, including the title page.

Citations and the Reference Page:

Any time that you refer to someone else’s writing or ideas in your paper, or using a quotation, you need to cite it. This is done by putting the person’s/author’s last name, date of the work in the first citation only, and the page number(s) (if appropriate) within parentheses at the end, or within, the cited text. After the first citation, if you cite the work again, you only need to use the last name and the page numbers. It is explained in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA Manual, 2010, pp. 174 – 179). If there is only one page, then you use “p.” rather than “pp.”

You always have a list of references for the works cited within your paper, usually your text book for the class papers, in what used to be called a ‘bibliography’. If you cite it in your paper, then it goes on the reference page, but you do not put something on the reference page unless it is cited in your paper, as described above.

Required pages and their order:

1. Title page with the title of the paper, the course number, the assignment number, and your name. All are centered vertically on the page, and each is centered horizontally. The “running head” and page numbers start on this page, as the first page of the document. The “running head” should be no more than 50 characters in length. This is a separate page, beginning the numbering as page 1.

2. Abstract page. This is a separate page, numbered page 2. An abstract is a brief (one or two paragraphs), comprehensive summary of the contents of the paper. It allows readers to understand the topic of the paper, and what you have to say about it, at a glance. The abstract does not have the first line indented.

3. The body of your written text. This starts on a separate page, beginning with page 3.

4. Reference page, which used to be called the bibliography, titled **References**. This is a separate page, numbered as the next page after the last page of the text content.

It always comes in this order. For more details, refer to the web sites given for APA Format:

<http://www.apastyle.org>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html>

[http://idcontent.bellevue.edu/content/bellevue/generic/academic\_preparation\_apa/index. html](http://idcontent.bellevue.edu/content/bellevue/generic/academic_preparation_apa/index.%20html)

5. Tables.

6. Figures.

7. Appendices. Each appendix starts on a separate page. They are double spaced and the initial title is the word “Appendix” followed by a capital letter, starting with “A.” If there is only one appendix, do not use an identifying letter. Double space down, and type the title of the appendix, centered, in uppercase and lower case letters. Double space and then begin paragraphs with an indentation.