



APA Citation Practice

Undergraduate Research Methods in Psychology

Quinton Quagliano, M.S., C.S.P

Department of Psychology

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1 Purpose

The primary source of empirical and theoretical research are articles published in academic journals. This is fairly consistent across almost all STEM and non-STEM fields - and these articles are treated as the record of knowledge in a certain research area.

In contrast to writing in English class, where we may often cite passages from a novel, poem, or other prose; in science - we instead cite these journal articles for our arguments. These journal articles are used to help us establish context for our own hypotheses and state previous evidence for the theory, ideas, and tools that we use. Any written work that does not make citations implies that the ideas are original to the present paper.

Just like with writing any other paper, it is of paramount importance that we do not plagiarize - that is, we need to avoid stealing others' ideas or writing and representing it as our own. However, we may build upon their ideas, so long as we give proper attribution. In fact, it is a key feature of research that we establish precedence for our current hypotheses. So how should we go about giving credit to the authors of the articles that we need to cite?

Many students are likely already familiar with the [Modern Language Association \(MLA\)](#) style for citing and referencing sources. In this class, we will instead use the style defined the [Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association \(APA\), Seventh Edition, published in 2020](#) - this is often abbreviated as APA 7th style. This set of guidelines is regularly used for psychological research, as well as other social sciences, such as economics and sociology.

While adhering strictly to the APA guideline can be tedious, it is a critical part of giving credit to other authors and avoiding any accidental plagiarism. I will be watching closely to ensure that you develop a strong command in using in-text citations and references during the semester. I expect that your final research proposal will flawlessly attribute all necessary authors, as anything less may border on plagiarism.

This ungraded assignment will help you build the foundation skills in navigating citing with APA 7th, and prepare you for later homework and work on the research proposal. It will also be a good source of reference information that you can use alongside other resources.

2 Guide for an APA 7 Citation

If you are already very familiar with APA, you may wish to skip down to the [Assignment section](#)

A proper APA 7 citation contains two essential parts:

1. An in-text citation clearly attached to some paraphrased statement or idea. This in-text citation will contain just enough information about the author(s) and year of publication in order to connect it to the references section.
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2. A corresponding reference in the “References” section or bibliography of the paper. This reference will contain much more verbose detail about the source and give a reader adequate information to find the original work.

Both parts should follow a fairly strict format, so that it is absolutely clear the origin of each idea. Any time a statement appears without citation it is either: a) an original idea proposed by the current author, b) “common knowledge”, or c) an act of plagiarism.

2.1 General Guidelines

- Historically, I find that students benefit from more citations, not less. While over-citation is a real problem, I would generally encourage you to use more citations, rather than only using the minimum necessary amount.
- In APA 7, direct citations, i.e., direct quotes embraced in quotation marks, are discouraged. We should instead paraphrase, or transform ideas into our own words.
- The order in which authors names appear is important - do not change it. Being listed earlier as an author exhibits a higher degree of work put into the paper. Thus, the first name that appears is the individual that did the plurality of the work.
- There are different style guidelines for the in-text citation dependent on whether there are one, two, or more than two authors on a paper, pay close attention to which one applies in any given situation.
- “Et al.” is a Latin abbreviation for “et alia”, meaning “and others”. It is used to imply that there are more authors to a paper than what is explicitly listed in the in-text citation. However, we only use this for in-text citations
- the actual references will include all authors.

2.2 In-text Citation

The following examples are fabricated and used purely for demonstration.

An in-text citation, as the name would imply, is inserted directly within the writing of a paper, usually linked to a nearby sentence. The exact appearance is dependent on 1) the desired flow of the sentence and 2) how many authors there are on an article. Good writing is often a combination of many of these forms to create a natural flow to the language of the paper. You may have to revise to get a better sounding sentence and cohesion!

2.2.1 For a Single-author Paper

For papers with only one author, we can use the following:

- “[Only Author Last Name] ([Year of Publication]) ...”

Each bracketed piece of information is replaced based on the source being cited, and “...” is a following sentence. For example, it may look like this in practice:

- “Skinner (2024) said ...”

We may also turn this around and insert the citation at the end of a sentence, such as:

- “... behaviorism, as shown by Skinner (2024)”

Finally, we can use the parenthetical version if we don’t want the authors name to flow in the writing itself. In this, we embrace the entire citation in parentheses and separate the author and year of publication with a comma like:

- “... as part of this theory (Skinner, 2024)”

2.2.2 For a Dual-author Paper

With two authors, we will follow this template:

- “[First Author Last Name] & [Second Author Last Name] ([Year of Publication]) ...”

Like with single-author papers, this may appear at the start or end of a sentence like:

- “Skinner & Freud (2024) posited ...”
- “... with psychoanalysis, demonstrated by Skinner & Freud (2024)”

Once again, we may use the parenthetical version:

- “... before this hypothesis was accepted (Skinner & Freud, 2024)”

2.2.3 For a Multi-author Paper (More Than Two)

With more than two authors, we employ the use of et al. to abbreviate the other authors names, as to not crowd the page:

- “[First Author Last Name] et al. ([Year of Publication]) ...”

We can use all the same forms as above:

- “Skinner et al. (2024) showed ...”
- “... contrasted with cognitivism, like with Skinner et al. (2024)”
- “... throughout the Zeitgeist of this era (Skinner et al., 2024)”

2.2.4 For Two Papers with Same Authors, Author Order, and Year of Publication

In rare cases, you might find that you need to cite two papers that have the same authors, author order, and year of publication. However, if we use the normal rules above, it would mean that the in-text citations for these two papers would look the exact same!

In this case, we determine which full reference would come first, based on the alphabetical order of the paper titles and then mark that in-text citation and reference year with an “a”, so that it would look like “Skinner (2024a)” and we mark the second one with “b” like “Skinner (2024b)”. Make sure you also mark these same letters in the ‘References’ section as well!

2.2.5 A Complete In-text Example

“Skinner & Freud (2024), provided an early comparative analysis of behaviorism, cognitivism, and psychoanalysis, which highlighted the substantial differences between these paradigms. This was further expanded upon in works by Skinner et al. (2025) and Freud & Skinner (2024).”

In short paragraph above, you may think that all 3 in-text citations represent the same source - but this isn't the case! Using the formats above, we can deduce that there are actually 3 papers being referenced here:

1. “Skinner & Freud (2024)” - a 2024 dual-author paper with Skinner performing more work
2. “Skinner et al. (2025)” - a 2025 multi-author paper in which Skinner performing the most work of all of the authors
3. “Freud & Skinner (2024)” - a 2024 dual-author paper with Freud performing more work

Thus, each of these papers would be represented by a separate entry in the paper references. As you can see, keeping all of these straight can be pretty intense!

2.3 References / Bibliography

For each and every in-text citation, there should be a corresponding reference in the bibliography. In most cases, the bibliography comes at the end of the paper in a section titled “References”. In this section, you include the full details necessary to find any cited sources. It is very important that you check that you only have references to actual in-text citations you have made and vice-versa. The bibliography will also be alphabetically ordered by the first authors last name.

Generally, each reference includes: authors, year of publication, title of paper, journal name, volume number, issue number, page numbers. The citation should also include a digital object identifier (DOI) link, if available. Some journals may not report volume, issue, and page numbers, especially if they are fully online - but you should double-check before assuming this is the case.

Unfortunately, there can be minor variations in this that are rather tricky to check - please review [this APA reference page for more nuanced information].

Most of the time, your references will look close to this:

[Author List] ([Publication Year]). [Title of Article - Sentence case]. [Title of Publication/Journal - Italicized, Title case], [Volume Number - Italicized]([Issue Number]), [Page Range]. [DOI Link]

These should also be double-spaced, like the rest of your paper, and also have a hanging indent, which means that each line *after* the first is indented.

2.4 Title-case vs Sentence-case Usage

Students often get confused about where to use title-case or sentence-case in relation to references. Please look at these two webpages for more information on when and how to use these:

- [Title case in APA 7 style](#)
- [Sentence case in APA 7 style](#)

Generally, you should use **sentence case** when you are writing out the full article name reference in the 'References' section of a paper, and use **title case** when writing the journal name for the reference.

2.5 Note on Citation Software

There are numerous, useful tools for citation and reference management and creation. In fact, most scientists are never going to write out each reference by hand! On portals like Google Scholar and PSYCInfo, you can get an APA 7 style reference from the article pages as well.

I myself have been an avid user of [Zotero](#) for years, and it has made writing much easier for me. You may be familiar with others such as [Citation Machine](#) or [EasyBib](#). I have no problem with you using these and other related software (I'd actually encourage that you explore these options), but I implore you **double-check your references!** These programs are good, but do make mistakes. It is your responsibility to check their output.

2.6 APA Style Grading

APA style is tough - and I know this! Part of this course is building your confidence with this style and making sure you can execute on it.

On earlier assignments, I will grade more lenient as you start building your competence. However, by the final research proposal submission, you should have a strong command of this style. Please use the homework and early assignments to deliberately focus on learning from your mistakes.

3 Assignment

This is an ungraded assignment, but I do still expect you to practice these skills now, as they will be essential for later.

There will be a discussion board on Blackboard to post to as part of this assignment - instructions will vary by which section your in. Please check the weekly learning module and read the instructions so that you can respond!