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# **APA Citation Practice**

Undergraduate Research Methods in 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.

## **2 Anatomy of an APA 7 Citation**

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.
  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.
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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

- 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 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 author to a paper than what is explicitly listed in the in-text citation.

## 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:

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- "... 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 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 reading 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
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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!