General Guidelines for Writing an APA-Style Paper

The basic sections of the paper are:

1. Title Page
2. Abstract
3. Introduction
4. Method
5. Results (or Results and Discussion)
6. Discussion
[For studies with multiple experiments, repeat 4-6 as needed, then tie it all together with a General Discussion.]
7. References
8. Figures and Tables, etc.

The order in which you would typically write the sections is not the order in which they appear in the paper. Instead, you would typically write the Method section(s) first, then the Results section(s), then the Intro, then the Discussion(s)/General Discussion, then the Abstract, then the rest of the sections. Remember, all pages are double-spaced with 1” margins all around.

Abstract
This section should not be more than a page in length — in fact, it should not exceed 120 words. You should think of it as a very brief synopsis of the other sections of the paper. In other words, you should write about 2 sentences of introduction, 2 sentences of method, 2 sentences of results (where you state specifically what you found), and 2 sentences of discussion (where you interpret what you found).

I would argue that this is the hardest section to write and arguably the most important. After all, this is what gets printed in PsycINFO and Psych Abstracts. If people read your abstract and can’t figure out what you did or what you found, they are unlikely to read your paper. It’s worth any extra effort to make this section as clear as possible.

Introduction
In this section you establish the importance of the research you are reporting. One typically reviews the relevant literature to show the reader what other researchers in the area have found. This review serves two functions. First, it shows that the area is sufficiently interesting that several researchers have worked in the area. Second, it shows the controversies/ambiguities that remain — even after all the research.

So you would typically begin by reviewing the relevant literature. Next you would indicate what areas of ambiguity remain. For instance, maybe no one has looked at the effect with children (or rats, or schizophrenics, etc., and you can see why someone should) or Smith reports one interpretation and Jones reports a second interpretation. Finally, toward the end of the Intro you would tell the reader (in general terms) how your research will serve to clarify any controversies/ambiguities. This “purpose paragraph” is quite important. It’s the vehicle whereby you will tell the reader the way in which your research will contribute to the discipline. What do we know? What don’t we know? How will your research tell us something new?

The Introduction would typically be fairly long. In the case of most journal articles, I think one would expect 5-10 pages. My expectations for your reports are a bit different. For your laboratory reports, I would expect that your Introductions would be 3-5 pages. For your final projects, I expect that you would be closer to 10 pages, in part because I would like to see you review the many articles that you’ve used to develop your experiment and also because I’m unlikely to have a lot of background knowledge in the specific area within which you are proposing your research.

Method
For the Method section, you are trying to represent all the ingredients essential to the experiment so that an interested researcher would be able to replicate the experiment. I think that a good hint for determining if your Method is clear might be to have a roommate read the section and then tell you what happens in the experiment. If he or she can’t give you a specific outline of your experiment, then you need to work more on your Method section (or on your roommate).
You need to become clear on what constitutes an essential ingredient. If you used a Sony camcorder (Model THDGF) and it’s essential for replication that the exact same camcorder be used, then be sure to report all the crucial details. However, if any old video recorder would work equally well, then you can simply say that stimuli were recorded with a camcorder.

The Method section often includes subsections (Participants, Materials, Materials and Apparatus, Design, Procedure). You should use any subsection(s) that would make your methodology clearer.

**Results**

Your crucial results are reported in this section. Follow the format shown in the APA style manual or the appendix of your text. The results are reported with little or no interpretation if you are using separate Results and Discussion sections.

Be sure to note how to include figures or tables, which are often found in this section. They are actually appended to the end of your paper, and where you want them to be inserted into your paper is indicated by where you make reference to the figure or table within the text. Thus, if you are going to use a figure or table, you must mention it in the text of your results section. Figures and tables are not intended to be self-explanatory, but are intended to supplement the text. You would not use a figure or a table to report only a small number of means (i.e., less than 4), but simply write them into your text. You would also not be likely to include an ANOVA source table as a figure.

**Discussion**

In this section you interpret your results in light of the questions raised in the Introduction. (Do you see why you would write the Intro and Discussion at the end?) Provide the reader with an integrative overview of the results of your experiment. Do not simply reiterate the results. Focus on interpretation: Tell the reader what you think it all means. Direct the reader to the importance of the results, especially in the context of prior research (“...our findings are inconsistent with a theory of ___ as proposed by Jones...”).

Finally, you might suggest to the reader what specific questions remain unanswered even with your truly important and impressive contribution. Everyone expects that more research is necessary, so simply mouthing that platitude isn’t going to get anyone excited — be specific about what you think needs to be done next and why.

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Citations to resources would be as follows:

- Smith (1989) — single author within body of text
- (Smith, 1989) — single author reference within parentheses
- Smith and Jones (1989) — two authors within body of text, use this form throughout text
- (Smith & Jones, 1989) — two authors within parentheses, use this form throughout text
- Smith, Jones, and Hall (1989) — three authors within body of text, first reference
- Smith et al. (1989) — three authors within body of text, subsequent references
- (Smith, Jones, & Hall, 1989) — three authors within parentheses, first reference
- (Smith et al., 1989) — three authors within parentheses, subsequent references
- Use form for three authors for up to 6 authors, for more than 6 go straight to et al. form

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For a good overview of the process of writing an APA-style paper, you should read Bem’s piece “Writing the Empirical Journal Article,” which can be downloaded from the course web pages.

For help as you write your papers, you should look on the web page for the course, where I’ve provided useful links, including a one-page set of links to serve your needs as you write APA-style paper (and other papers as well).
CHECKLIST FOR APA STYLE

General Formatting
☑ Set all margins to 1 inch.
☑ Left justify all text except the title of the paper and the words identifying the start of the major sections.
☑ Double-space everything. All the text, regardless of section, is double-spaced.
☑ Indent each paragraph except for the abstract.
☑ Do not put extra lines between paragraphs.
☑ Insert a single space after each word and punctuation mark including commas, semicolons, and periods.
☑ Running head and page numbers begin on title page and run throughout the entire text. The only pages that do not have the running head and page numbers are the figures.
☑ Print all text in the same font and size (10 pt. or 12 pt.). Use an easy to read font (e.g., Courier or Times New Roman).
☑ Order of Sections for Research Report
  Title Page (Page 1)
  Abstract (Page 2)
  Introduction (Page 3)
  Method
    Participants
    Materials
    Procedure
  Results
  Discussion
  References (Start on new page)
  Appendix (Optional—Start on new page if included)
  Author Note (Optional—Start on new page if included)
  Footnotes (Optional—Start on new page if included)
  Tables (Start each table on a new page)
  Figure Captions (List all figure captions starting on a new page)
  Figure (Each page has a separate figure)

Capitalization
☑ Capitalize the first letter of each sentence.
☑ Capitalize the first letter of a word following a colon.
☑ Capitalize proper nouns and trade names of tests, drugs, and other commercial products.
☑ Capitalize nouns followed by numbers or letters.

Italics
☑ Italicize titles of books and periodicals.
☑ Italicize technical names used to identify species and varieties.
☑ Italicize letters used to represent statistics.
☑ Italicize words or phrases (a) to add emphasis, (b) to introduce a new or technical term, (c) as an example, or (d) as anchors of a scale.
☑ Do not use italics for foreign abbreviations (e.g., vice versa, et al., a priori), Greek letters, chemical terms, or mathematical functions (e.g., Σ, ×, √).

Abbreviations
☑ Spell out the entire phrase the first time it occurs followed by the abbreviation.

One of the more robust phenomena in psychology is the partial reinforcement extinction effect (PREE).

☑ Use the following only within parentheses.
  (cf.) compare (e.g.) for example
  (etc.) and so forth (i.e.) that is
  (viz.) namely (vs.) versus

☑ Do not use periods within degree titles (MS, PhD) or organization titles (AAAS, APA, APS).
☑ To form plurals of abbreviations, add “s” without an apostrophe.

Numbers
☑ Use numbers to express values equal to or greater than 10. Spell out numbers less than 10.
☑ Use numbers when the value precedes a unit of measurement (e.g., 3 days, 15 cm).
☑ Use numbers when the value is a part of a noun (e.g., Day 2, Experiment 1).
☑ Use words when the value begins the sentence.
☑ Use numbers when the sentence contains several related numbers and at least one is equal to or greater than 10.
☑ To make a number plural, add “s” or “es” as necessary; do not use an apostrophe (e.g., 10s and 20s).
☑ Spell out common fractions and common expressions (e.g., one-quarter, one-half, two-thirds, Fourth of July).
☑ Use numbers to represent statistical results, irregular fractions, mathematical functions, or the results of mathematical equations.
☑ If a number cannot exceed 1.0, do not use a leading 0 before the decimal point (e.g., r = .73 not r = 0.73).
☑ Use combinations of numerals and written numbers for large sums (e.g., more than 3 million people).
☑ Use the percent symbol (%) only with a number, not with words (e.g., 5%, five percent).

Miscellaneous
☑ Avoid the construction “and/or” (e.g., “positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, or both”).
☑ Avoid the construction “s/he” and “he/she.”
Examples of Citations Within the Text of a Manuscript

Single author/single citation
- List the author’s last name followed by the date of publication.
  - Smith (1998) examined the effects of delayed reinforcement.
  - At least one experiment examining the effects of delayed reinforcement (Smith, 1998) demonstrated . . .
- You may also include the date as a part of the sentence.
  - Watson published his APA presidential address in 1913 and started a debate regarding . . .

Single author/multiple citations
- List the author’s last name followed by the dates of the individual citations.
  - Recent research on this topic (Smith, 1996, 1998, 1999) . . .

Two or more authors/single citation
- If there are two authors, list both names followed by the date of publication. Use an ampersand (&) when the citation is within the parentheses.
  - Allumbaugh and Hoyt (1999) examined the effectiveness of . . .
  - In a recent review of grief therapies (Allumbaugh & Hoyt, 1999) . . .
- If there are three to five names, list all the names in the first citation. On subsequent citations, list the last name of the first author followed with et al. and the date.
  - First citation:
  - Recent research examining service relationships (Gutek, Bhappu, Liao-Trouth, & Cherry, 1999) . . .
  - Subsequent citations:
  - Many researchers believe that the Gutek et al. (1999) study indicated . . .
  - Several tests of this construct exist (Gutek et al., 1999).
- If there are six or more names, list only the first name followed by et al. and the date for all citations.

Multiple citations
- If you include several citations from different authors in the same parentheses, list the citations alphabetically by the authors’ names. Separate the citations with a semicolon.

Translated work
- If the original work was translated into English, list the author’s name, the date of the original publication, and the date of the translated publication.
  - Freud (1913/1952) developed the theory of screen memory.

Corporate author
- List the name of the organization followed by the date of publication.
  - Sleep disorders are a common symptom of depression (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Newspaper or magazine article with no author
- List a short version of the title followed by the date of publication.
  - The popular press often sensationalizes psychological research (IQ tests measure nothing, 1999).

General notes regarding citations in text
- Do not include an author’s first name unless there are two authors with the same last name.
  - Jones (1999) concluded that unconscious transference does not occur. Several authors, most notably David Ross (2000) and Robert Ross (2002), found substantive errors in Jones’ methodology and data analysis techniques.
### Commonly Used Statistics and the Format for Presenting Them in the Text of the Results Section

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptive Statistics</th>
<th>Presentation in Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>$M = 25.67$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>$Mdn = 34.56$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>mode = 45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>$SD = 1.23$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error</td>
<td>$SE = 12.01$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Error of Measurement</td>
<td>$SEM = 0.98$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inferential Statistics</th>
<th>Presentation in Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANOVA</td>
<td>$F(2, 25) = 3.82, p = .036$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>$\chi^2(4, N = 55) = 12.02, p = .017$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
<td>$U(12, 15) = 5.67, p &lt; .05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson’s $r$</td>
<td>$r(98) = .872, p &lt; .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spearman’s $r$</td>
<td>$r_s(74) = -.948, p &lt; .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student’s $t$-ratio</td>
<td>$t(123) = 2.31, p = .023$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**General notes regarding statistics in text**

- The numbers within the parentheses represent the degrees of freedom for the statistic.
- Print the exact probability of the observed statistical test unless it is exceptionally small (e.g., $p < .001$) or you cannot determine the exact probability level.
- Italicize the letters representing the statistics and probability.
- In general, use only two to three numbers to the right of the decimal (e.g., 12.36 rather than 12.357431).

### Examples for Formatting the Reference Section of an APA-style Research Report

**Journal Articles**

**Single author:**


**Multiple authors:**


**Notes:**

- Capitalize the first letter of the first word in the title of the article and of the first word following a colon.
- Capitalize the first letter of each major word in the name of the journal.
- Italicize the title of the journal, the volume number, and commas.
- Do not include the issue number unless the journal starts each issue with page 1.
- Use a nonbreaking hyphen for the page number to prevent the computer from splitting the numbers across two lines.
- If there are six or more authors, use the first author’s name and “et al.” in the text (e.g., “Hatano et al. (1993) examined . . .”).
Books

Single author:


Multiple authors:


Notes:

- Capitalize the first letter of the first word in the title of the article and the first word following a colon.
- Italicize the title of the book.
- If the location of the publisher is not well known (e.g., Newbury Park) list the state.

Reprint of a classic text:


Translation of a book:


Notes:

- For the text citation, indicate the original and new publication dates (e.g., Locke (1690/1964), Freud (1930/1961)).

Book chapter:


Corporate author:


Magazines and Newspapers

Magazine:


Newspaper article:


Newspaper article, no author:


Other Sources

Computer program:


Internet website:


CD recording:

Using Word to write APA-style papers

Header:

Under the View menu, open Header and Footer. You’ll see a little tool bar such as the one in the screen shot below (with AutoText on the left). Because you want the header information on the right hand side, you would use the right-justify icon (see the darkened alignment icon at the top). Then you would type in two-three words from your title, then a couple of spaces, then click on the page number icon (#) at the left of the Header/Footer tool bar. Doing so will place the words from your title and ascending page numbers on the pages of your paper.

Hanging indentations in Reference section:

To produce the proper indentation for references, you need to create a hanging indent. To do so, place your cursor on the little rectangular blue base of the indentation (top of window) and drag it in to the point at which you want the indentation to occur (typically .5 inch). Then, drag just the top little blue triangle back to the left, so that it’s at the left margin. Doing so creates the proper hanging indentations, as seen below:

References
