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Sample APA Paper for Students Interested in Learning APA Style

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Abstract

The abstract should be a single paragraph in block format (without paragraph indentation) and should not exceed 120 words. See section 1.07 of the APA manual (American Psychological Association [APA], 2001) for additional information. The abstract is simply a summary of the paper. One trick in writing the abstract is to write one summary sentence for each major part of the paper. Then you will have a nice, four-sentence abstract.



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Before getting started you will notice some things about this paper. First, everything is double-spaced. Second, margins are 1-inch wide on all sides. Third, there are several headings used throughout to separate different parts of the paper. Fourth, and this is perhaps a surprise, there is exactly one space after each punctuation mark, including periods. Try to pay attention to all of these details as you look through this paper.

Now that those details are out of the way, you should know that this first part of the paper is called the "Introduction" section, yet it does not have a heading that actually says "Introduction." Instead, the title of the paper is typed at the top of the first page (be sure to center the title). In this section you would often start with a topic paragraph that introduces the problem under study. Section 1.08 of the APA manual (APA, 2001) will help give you some ideas.

The bulk of the Introduction section is background literature on the topic being researched. Here a literature review is often very helpful to provide a theoretical or empirical basis for the research. Remember to cite often. Articles and books are cited the same way in the text, yet they appear different on the References page. For example, an article by Cronbach and Meehl (1955) and a book by Bandura (1986) are written with the authors' names and the year of the publication

in parentheses. However, if you look on the References page they look a little different. Remember that APA style does not use footnotes or anything like that for citations.

Two other things about citations are important. When a citation is written inside parentheses (e.g., Cronbach & Meehl, 1959), an ampersand is used between authors' names instead of the word "and." Second, when citing an author's work using quotations, be sure to include a page number. For example, Rogers (1961) once wrote that two important elements of a helping relationship are "genuineness and transparency" (p. 37). Notice that the page number is included here. Unless a direct quote is taken from a source, the page number is not included.

The last section of the Introduction states the purpose of the research. The purpose can usually be summarized in a few sentences. Hypotheses are also included here at the end of this section. State your hypotheses as predictions (e.g., "I predicted that..."), and try to avoid using passive tense (e.g., "It was predicted that..."). You will notice that hypotheses are written in past tense because you are describing a study you have finished.

Method



The Method section is the second of four main parts of an empirical paper (see Section 1.09 of the APA [1994] manual). (Be aware that some papers are reviews of the literature and

therefore would not have a separate Method section.) There are typically three major subsections in the Method although there can be more. These subsections are separated by subheadings. Subheadings are described in sections 3.31 of the APA manual (APA, 2001).



Participants

This brief section describes the people who participated in your study. (They should be called "participants," not "subjects," by the way.) Mention the number of participants, the percentage of females and males, the mean age (where "mean" is abbreviated *M*), ethnicity or cultural background, and what year in school participants were (if you are studying students). Any other demographic information would be appropriate here.

Measures

This section describes the tests or instruments used to collect data. It would be appropriate to describe any scales that you used. For example, if you used the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale in your research, you may say that the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSD; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) comprises 33 true-false items that measure social desirability. You would also provide the reader with information regarding the MCSD's reliability and validity. Do this for each and every measure used in the study.

In the event that the purpose of your paper is to develop a new measure, you may wish to describe reliability and validity in the Results section (see below). However, you would only do this for a scale-development project.

Procedure

This section describes in great detail the data-collection procedures. Describe how participants were recruited, whether they participated alone or in groups, how they were compensated for their participation, etc. It is hard to make this section too detailed. You should describe the procedure in a way that another researcher could conduct the same study (i.e., replicate it) just by reading the procedure.

Results

The Results section may be the most difficult to write, at least until you get a little practice. This is the section where the results of the data analyses are presented. Section 1.10 in the APA manual (APA, 2001) will help a little bit. Feel free to use tables (see Table 1) to help describe your results. Table 2 provides another example of a table, this one describing correlations.

You may find it helpful to remind the reader of the hypotheses before presenting each result. It is also a good idea to tell the reader what type of data analysis was done (e.g., correlation, ANOVA) before it is presented. State what alpha

level you adopted; an alpha level of .05 is the standard. Also, whenever reporting the results of a hypothesis test the degrees of freedom need to be reported; see section 3.57 of the APA (1994) manual for guidance. Although you should be sure not to try to interpret or explain your results here, it is appropriate to state whether or not your hypotheses were supported (just don't try to explain why; that's what the Discussion is for).

Discussion

This is the fourth and final section of the paper. This is the part where you interpret and explain your results. Try to explain why you found what you did in your results. Is it what you predicted? If not, why? You may have to think about your results in a theoretically meaningful way. Also, how do your findings fit in with previous theory and literature? Are your results consistent or inconsistent with what has been found in the past? If they are inconsistent, how can you explain this? The explanation and interpretation of results will probably be the biggest part of the Discussion.

There are two additional parts of the discussion. First, include limitations of the study. Describe the ways in which the internal or external validity of the study may have been compromised. Was the sample biased? Were the measures problematic? Think about what you would do different next time if you conducted a similar study.

Second, describe the implications of your findings to theory and practice. Answer the question, "How does my study add to psychological theory?" Also, think about practical applications of your findings. Perhaps give some directions for future research. When you've done that, you have written a paper in APA style!

References

- American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Cronbach, L. J., & Meehl, P. E. (1955). Construct validity in psychological tests. *Psychological Bulletin*, 52 , 281-302.
- Crowne, C. P., & Marlowe, D. (1960). A new scale of social desirability independent of psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 24(1), 349-354.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.



Table 1

Sample Table Describing Fake Data

	Variable A		Variable B	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Men (<i>n</i> = 100)	32.61	8.95	17.08	5.25
Women (<i>n</i> = 80)	33.02	9.17	16.91	5.13

Note. These data were totally made up. They are just presented to give you an idea about how to present information in a table.

Table 2

Convergent and Discriminant Validity of Depression Scale

Variable	Correlation
<i>Convergent Validity</i>	
Self-Esteem	.44*
Hopelessness	.51*
<i>Discriminant Validity</i>	
Social Desirability	.11
Anxiety	.22

Note. * $p < .05$.