

“Cliff Notes” to Writing an APA Style Paper

*You are **strongly encouraged** to consult the APA Style Manual 6th Edition (copies are available in the Writing Center, the Psych Department Paraprof’s office, and in Tutt Library) for help in organizing your paper.*

General Rules

- All writing assignments **must be typed**. Neatness is important and the rules for formatting are exacting.
- Paper must be white, unlined, 8 1/2" x 11"
- *Everything* double-spaced with proper margins (1.0" on all sides)
- All pages, including the title page, should be numbered in the upper right hand corner.
- Typing mistakes count the same as spelling and other such errors and may lower the grade.

Your paper should include the following sections (in this order):

Title Page

Cover sheet with the following information:

- The page number (1) in the upper right-hand corner
- “Running head:” in the upper left-hand corner
(with your ALL CAPS running head after that)
- Key Elements, located on the center of the page:

Title
Author(s)
Author Affiliation(s)

Abstract

An abstract provides a summary of the whole lab report in 100-150 words. Be sure to include: what the question was, how it was tested, and what happened. This is on a separate page and follows your title page (page labeled “2” in upper right-hand corner). It is often best to write the *after* you’ve finished writing the paper itself.

Introduction

Begin with the full title of the paper (again), centered, and then the text follows from there. In the first section of your paper you should introduce the problem and describe the research strategy. An introduction sets the stage for the research by providing a brief discussion of previously known facts and/or accepted theories related to the present report. As such, it justifies the research being conducted by showing how it is relevant to a particular scientific issue. It starts the reader thinking about the problem addressed in the paper, and then leads the reader into the specific question(s) that the experiment/study was designed to answer (i.e., the hypotheses). Think of the introduction as being shaped like an “inverted triangle”- that is, start out with big ideas, then narrow down to a justification of the specific questions being asked.

Method

This section of your paper describes *in detail* how the study was conducted. The method section typically includes three parts set off as separate paragraphs: 1) Participants - This sub-section gives the important information about the study's participants, such as age, gender, number, and other pertinent facts. 2) Materials - A detailed description of the materials is given so that the reader could duplicate the experiment if s/he wished. 3) Procedure - The essential steps in the procedure are described (i.e., what you did to conduct the study). This may include the statistical analyses used. Things to consider including: the experimental and control conditions, independent and dependent variables, etc.

Results

This section is purely factual. What did you find? Did the statistical test yield results that supported the hypotheses? Do *not* discuss the implications of these results in this section, only report them. In addition to the text of the results, it contains references to the statistics, figures (i.e., graphs), and tables (i.e., presentation of numbers) of your data. The actual Figures and Tables appear at the end of the manuscript but are referred to in the text of the results; for example, “(see Table 1).” may appear after the sentence first describing that specific table.

Discussion

The discussion section is where you interpret and evaluate the results (in light of the original hypotheses), and then relate them to the findings of other experiments. Typically this is the most important part of the lab report. In this section you should evaluate and qualify the results, as well as draw inferences from them. Did your results confirm your expectations, or did they differ from what you expected? What might account for such differences? How do your results fit with the results from previous research? What do your results suggest about additional experiments that might be done? What real-world applications may your findings have? Start narrowly, indicating whether each hypothesis was supported, then widen the focus to discuss implications for the broader topic.

References

A reference section should appear at the top of a new page at the end of your paper. In a reference section, all published materials to which you referred in your report (not everything you read in order to write the report) are listed. At the top it should be titled “References” (not “Bibliography” or “Works Cited”). Sources are then listed alphabetically by last name of the first author. The first line should be flushed left, with any run-on lines indented.

Tables and Figures

Put your tables and figures (graphs) last. Tables and figures should only be one to a page. Each table and figure should be numbered (i.e., Table 1, Table 2, Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.), and axes should be labeled completely. Each table should have a title above it. Each figure should have a caption directly below it that gives a concise explanation of the figure (and serves as the “title” for that figure). See Table and Graph Making Tips Handouts for more information

Style Issues

Always use the past tense when describing a study, theory, etc.

Use active voice (Researchers conducted a study) rather than passive voice (A study was conducted).

Do not use I, we, you, etc.

An inanimate experiment cannot perform an active function. Thus, it would be inaccurate to state, “The research found that...”

Avoid the terms *correlation* and *significant* outside of statistical discussions.

Do not use the term *prove*. Scientific hypotheses are never *proven*, but they can be “supported”

The “Find” command (Ctrl+F) is your friend; use it to find words that should not be used (above), as well as to find apostrophes (in contractions).

Numbers 10 and above should be written in numerical form. One to nine should be spelled out. (EXCEPT: when indicating a unit of measurement, a statistical result, or in a table/figure)

Do not use footnotes or endnotes.

Direct quotations from other sources are heavily frowned upon in APA style write-ups.

In-text Citations

- Basic Rules:
 - Place the author and date in parentheses at the end of the sentence
 - Ex: More academically engaged students have a more positive perception of campus life (Jones & James, 1999).
 - OR place only the date in parentheses within the sentence
 - Ex: Jones and James (1999) found that academically engaged students...
 - OR integrate the author and date into the sentence
 - Ex: In 1999, Jones and James found that academically engaged students...
- If a work has:
 - 2 authors:** cite both names every time
 - 3, 4, or 5 authors:** cite all authors the first time and then the first author followed by “et al.” subsequently
 - 6 or more authors:** cite only the first author followed by et al. for *all* citations
- If you want to cite more than one article: Order your citations alphabetically (by the FIRST author’s last names), and separate with a semi-colon.
 - Ex: (Jones & Thomas, 2001; Smith, 1999)

Reference Section

1. BOOK

FORM:

Author 1 Last name, First initial, Author 2 Last name, First initial, & Author 3 Last name, First initial. (date). *Title of book*. Place of publication: Publisher

EXAMPLE:

Arendt, H. (1977). *The life of the mind: Thinking*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

2. CHAPTER FROM A BOOK

FORM:

Author 1 Last Name, First Initial., & Author 2 Last Name, First Initial. (Year Published). Title of chapter. In Editor1 First Initial. Last Name & Editor2 First Initial. Last Name (Eds.), *Title of book* (pp. xxx-xxx). Location: Publisher.

EXAMPLE:

Smith, J., & Doe, J. (2010). Housing effects on campus climate. In J. Johnson (Ed.), *Effects on campus climate*. (pp. 100-200). Los Angeles, CA: Western Psychological Services.

3. ARTICLE IN JOURNAL,

FORM:

Author 1 Last Name, First Initial., Author 2 Last Name, First Initial., & Author 3 Last Name, First Initial. (Year Published). Title of article. *Journal Name*, *Volume Number*, Page numbers. doi:

EXAMPLES:

Jones, R., & Palmer, S. (1997). Campus satisfaction. *Psychological Bulletin*, *133*, 122-128. doi: 10.1146/annurev.ps.46.020195

Smith, A. (1987). Academics campus climate. *Psychological Bulletin*, *124*, 324-333. doi: 10.1037/1.528-35422

For any information not in this handout, please consult the APA Style Manual:

American Psychological Association. (2009). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association 6/e*. Washington, D.C.: APA.

If you feel compelled to go online, the following websites are known to have good information:

<http://www.docstyles.com/apacrib.htm>

<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/DocAPA.html>

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

*** In the case of any conflict between any of these resources, the APA Style Manual will take precedence.***