

How to Use Five Levels of Heading in an APA Style Paper

by Chelsea Lee

Headings give structure to your writing. They not only tell the reader what content to expect but also speak to its relative position within a hierarchy. The *APA Publication Manual* (section 3.03, pp. 62–63; see also the [sample papers](#)) gives guidelines for up to five levels of heading in a paper, although most papers will need only two, three, or four.

The example below shows font and indentation formatting for when all five levels are used, including what to do when headings follow one another with no text in between. We have previously explained in detail [how to format each level of heading](#).

Anxiety Made Visible: Multiple Reports of Anxiety and Rejection Sensitivity

Our study investigated anxiety and rejection sensitivity. In particular, we examined how participant self-ratings of state and trait anxiety and rejection sensitivity would differ from the ratings of others, namely, the close friends of participants.

Literature Overview

Anxiety and rejection sensitivity are two important facets of psychological functioning that have received much attention in the literature. For example, Ronen and Baldwin (2010) demonstrated....

Method

Participants

Participants were 80 university students (35 men, 45 women) whose mean age was 20.25 years ($SD = 1.68$). Approximately 70% of participants were European American, 15% were African American, 9% were Hispanic American, and 6% were Asian American. They received course credit for their participation.

Procedure

Recruitment. We placed flyers about the study on bulletin boards around campus, and the study was included on the list of open studies on the Psychology Department website. To reduce bias in the sample, we described the study as a “personality study” rather than specifically mentioning our target traits of anxiety and rejection sensitivity.

Session 1: Psychiatric diagnoses. During the initial interview session, doctoral level psychology students assessed participants for psychiatric diagnoses. Eighteen percent of the sample met the criteria for generalized anxiety disorder according to the Structured Clinical Interview for *DSM–IV* Axis I Disorders (First, Gibbon, Spitzer, & Williams, 1996).

Session 2: Assessments. All participants attended a follow-up session to complete assessments. Participants were instructed to bring a friend with them who would complete the other-report measures.

Self-report measures. We first administered several self-report measures, as follows.

State and trait anxiety. Participants took the State–Trait Anxiety Inventory for Adults (STAI–A; Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg, & Jacobs, 1983), a 40-item self-report measure to assess anxiety.

Rejection sensitivity. Participants took the Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire (RSQ; Downey & Feldman, 1996), an 18-item self-report measure that assesses rejection sensitivity.

Other-report measures. We also included other-report measures to obtain independent sources of information about participants’ levels of anxiety and rejection sensitivity.

State and trait anxiety. We adapted the STAI–A so that questions referred to the target participant rather than the self.

Rejection sensitivity. We adapted the RSQ so that questions referred to the target participant rather than the self.

Results

State and Trait Anxiety

State anxiety.

Self-report data. For state anxiety, participant self-report data indicated that participants were significantly less likely....

Other-report data. For state anxiety, other-report data indicated that friends of participants were significantly more likely....

Trait anxiety.

Self-report data. For trait anxiety, participant self-report data indicated that participants were significantly less likely....

Other-report data. For trait anxiety, other-report data indicated that friends of participants were significantly more likely....

Rejection Sensitivity

The results for rejection sensitivity paralleled those for anxiety, demonstrating that....

Discussion

Strengths and Limitations

Some of the strengths of our research were....

Directions for Future Research

In the future, we hope that researchers will consider multiple sources of information when making assessments of anxiety. We also recommend....

Important notes on formatting your headings:

- The title of the paper is not in bold. Only the headings at Levels 1–4 use bold. See [this post](#) for a clarification on when to use boldface.
- Every paper begins with an introduction. However, in APA Style, the heading “Introduction” is not used, because what comes at the beginning of the paper is assumed to be the introduction.
- The first heading comes at Level 1. In this paper, the first heading is “Literature Overview,” so it goes at Level 1. Your writing style and subject matter will determine what your first heading will be.
- Subsequent headings of equal importance to the first heading also go at Level 1 (here, Method, Results, and Discussion).
- For subsections, we recommend that if you are going to have them at all, you should aim for at least two (e.g., the Literature Overview section has no subsections, whereas the Method section has two Level 2 subsections, and one of those Level 2 sections is further divided into three sections, etc.). Again, the number of subsections you will need will depend on your topic and writing style.

Level 3, 4, and 5 headings are indented, followed by a period, and run in with the text that follows. If there is no intervening text between a Level 3, 4, or 5 heading and another lower level heading following it, keep the period after the first heading and start the next heading on a new line (e.g., see “State anxiety” and “Trait anxiety” at Level 3 in the Results section, which are immediately followed by lower level headings and text). Begin each heading on a new line; do not run headings together on the same line.

Are there other aspects of headings you want to know more about? Let us know in the comments.

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