Tips for Writing APA Style Research Papers
Guidelines for Structure, Formatting, References, and the Writing Process

Structure of the Paper

Research papers written in APA style typically have the following structure:

1. **Title Page** – name of paper, who wrote it
2. **Abstract** – one paragraph summary of paper
3. **Introduction** – what is the topic; why study it?
4. **Methods** – how was the research conducted?
5. **Results** – what was found in the research?
6. **Discussion** – what do the findings mean?
7. **References** – list of sources cited in the paper
8. **Figures and Tables** – presentation of data

Optional: Appendix including supplementary info

Formatting the Paper

General formatting rules for papers written in APA style are as follows:

- Papers should have 1-in. margins on all sides.
- All text should be double spaced.
- Times New Roman, 12 point font is preferred.
- All lines should be flush left and all paragraphs should be indented except for some headings and exceptions per APA's Publication Manual.
- Pages should be numbered at the top right.
- A Running Head should be at the top left.

See our website for section-specific formatting.

Finding References

You should primarily use *peer-reviewed* articles.

- Articles that are published in scholarly journals.
- Avoid articles in magazines, websites, and blogs.

Use databases to search for *peer-reviewed* articles.

- Access databases such as PsycINFO via the UCSD library system (you may need to VPN)
- Perform searches using a variety of keywords. You might also use Boolean operators (*and, or*), as well as quotation marks in your searches.
- If the database allows, specify "peer-reviewed articles" + "full text available" when searching.

Using References

Critically read each reference and take notes.

- Examine articles more than one time, section by section, and evaluate the claims and evidence.
- Record notes on major points, page numbers, etc.

To avoid plagiarism, provide in-text citations and list all sources in the References section.

- Use APA guidelines for in-text citations. Format is typically (Author, year), or when mentioning the author directly, Author (year).
- Complete details of each reference (e.g., title, journal) should be in the References section.

Writing the Paper

Tips for the scientific writing process:

- **Writing:** it can help to organize your ideas first, to "get words on a page" early and then revise, or to complete one section at a time.
- **Revising:** techniques to help the revision process including reading the paper out loud, asking someone else to read it, and returning to the draft after a break.
- Watch for **accuracy, clarity, organization, wording choice and consistency, concision, formatting, and grammar and spelling.**

Literature Reviews

Many research papers incorporate a *literature review* (overview of prior research on the topic). Steps for writing a literature review can include:

1. **Identify and clearly define the topic.**
2. **Conduct a literature search** on the topic.
3. **Read the research** carefully and take notes.
4. **Organize your notes**; create an outline.
5. **Write the review**; edit and revise as needed.
6. **Incorporate the review** into the research paper.

Literature reviews help readers better understand the topic of your research paper by providing background and context.

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