



## Introduction to APA Style

Most classes in psychology will require you to write your papers in APA style, which is a writing style described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (which was just released in its fifth edition). APA style describes rules for the preparation of manuscripts for writers and students in psychology. These rules cover areas such as the content and organization of a manuscript, writing style, references, and how to prepare a manuscript for publication. APA style breaks papers up into sections, which helps you to present information clearly and also allows readers to quickly find and process the information they need.

### Who Uses APA Style?

APA style is also used in many other disciplines such as Sociology, Business, Economics, Nursing, Social Work, and Criminology. As a result, the *Publication Manual* is available at several libraries on the Purdue University campus (Consumer and Family Sciences Library; Engineering Library; Hicks Undergraduate Library; Humanities, Social Science, and Education Library; Pharmacy, Nursing, and Health Services Library; and Psychological Sciences Library) either in the reference section or on reserve. You can also purchase a copy of the manual at <http://www.apastyle.org> or at a local bookstore, although it is not necessary for most students to purchase the manual.

The basic information that you will need to write your papers can be found at this website, or you can borrow the manual from the library. However, if your question is not addressed on this website, if you are writing a complex document such as a thesis or lengthy manuscript, or if you have detailed questions, you should refer to the manual; there is a lot more information in the manual than can be provided here. You may also wish to refer to <http://www.apastyle.org> to see what has changed from the 4th edition (primarily the format for citing electronic sources)

### Why Use APA Style?

Abiding by the rules of APA style makes it easier for others to understand your writing. Your reader will be able to find what they are looking for, follow your writing more easily, and your communication will be more clearly understood. If you go on to publish your writing, the tasks of editors and publishers are simplified when everyone uses the same format. Using APA style also provides you with a model for thinking about psychological phenomena.

### How is APA Style is different from other styles of writing?

APA style is unlike other forms of writing that encourage more creativity and variation in language. APA style often involves writing according to a "formula" of sorts. Once you learn the formula, you can master APA style. Adhering strictly to formatting rules, keeping sentence structure simple, and maintaining parallel structure when reporting study details and results helps to make your writing clear.

For example:

"The first hypothesis stated that marital conflict would predict behavior problems in school-aged children. The second hypothesis stated that the effect would be stronger for girls than for boys. The third hypothesis stated that older girls would be more affected by marital conflict than younger girls." It was predicted that marital conflict would predict behavior problems in school-aged children."

For example:

"The authors also had another interesting idea to investigate. They wanted to know whether marital conflict would predict behavior problems in children and they wanted to know if the effect was greater for girls than for boys, particularly when they examined two different age groups."

These sentences could be broken up into shorter, simpler sentences. Can you think of some ways that you would break up the sentences?

When you write in APA style, you rarely use first person voice ("I studied..."). This is rarely done in published journals and when it does occur, it's only done by very senior scholars. You should use the third person or passive voice constructions when writing in APA style ("The study showed...") unless you are co-authoring a paper with at least one other person, in which case you can use "we." ("Our findings included...") In general, you should foreground the research and not the researchers.

You should also avoid use of the words "proof" or "proves." One convention of scientific writing is that no single study can prove a theory or hypothesis. Rather, experts look for a convergence of the evidence from several studies. Instead of using the words "proof" or "proves," you can say:

- The evidence suggests...
- Growing evidence provides support for...
- The study results provide support for the hypothesis that...
- Several studies indicate (or suggest, or provide support for) the idea that...

There are other variations that would be acceptable in addition to those suggested above.

## **Where do I get more help with APA style?**

It's always best to consult the *Publication Manual* first for any APA question. If you are using APA style for a class assignment, it's a good idea to consult your professor, advisor, TA, or other campus resources for help with using APA style -- they're the ones who can tell you how the style should apply in your particular case. For extraordinary questions that aren't covered clearly in the style manual or haven't been answered by your teacher or advisor, contact the Writing Lab for help at (765) 494-3723 or stop by Heavilon 226 to make an appointment. You can also email the OWL tutors at owl@owl.english.purdue.edu.

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