Example of an APA Style Paper

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Abstract

APA format is the official style used by the American Psychological Association (APA) and is commonly used to cite sources in the fields of Natural and Social Sciences, Business, and Nursing. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition, dated 2010, provides the best reference for formatting and citing in APA Style. The mechanics of basic writing and citing sources are the same in all academic writing; however, formatting papers in styles such as APA, MLA (Modern Language Association), Chicago, ASA (American Sociological Association), Turabian, among others, are different. Thus, this example paper focuses on the basic guidelines for formatting papers and citing sources in APA Style.

*Keywords*: APA, formatting, citing, References
Example of an APA Style Paper

American Psychological Association (APA) is the style of formatting that is commonly used in courses in the fields of Nursing, Education, Natural and Social Sciences, such as Psychology, Linguistics, Sociology, and Economics (Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue, 2012). Students in these fields are generally required to format papers and cite sources using this style. The manual that outlines guidelines for formatting and citing sources is the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition, revised in 2010.

**General APA Formatting Guidelines**

**Margins**

According to Aaron (2011), APA Style dictates the margins are one inch on all sides (top, bottom, left, right) (p. 509). Thus, on all pages, the text in the body begins one inch down from the top of each page. The alignment of the left and right margins should be flush left, which means the right margin is not blocked (set as “justified”). Therefore, the contents of the paper should be staggered at the right margin rather than aligned at the right.

**Font Size and Type**

The font size for APA Style papers is usually 12-pt. font, and the type is generally Times New Roman (Aaron, 2011, p. 509). However, other similar font is acceptable typefaces, depending upon professor’s specifications. In addition, the font size and type must be the same in the Running head on all pages.

**Line Spacing**

Double-space throughout the paper, including the title page, abstract, body of the document, references, and appendixes; but footnotes, tables, and figure captions may be single-
spaced (Aaron, 2011, p. 509). Microsoft Word 2007 and 2010 includes an additional horizontal spacing between paragraphs that are not in accordance to APA style; thus, the default settings in spacing must changed to present true double-spacing in an APA Style paper.

**Spacing after Punctuation**

APA Style dictates spacing once after all punctuation except the end punctuation (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 87). Two spaces are following punctuation marks at the ends of sentences.

**Paragraph Indentation**

According to Aaron (2011), the indentation of each paragraph is 5-7 spaces (p. 509); however, this spacing can be best accomplished through the use of the TAB key rather than pressing the SPACEBAR of the keyboard.

**Pagination**

The pages are numbered one inch from the right upper edge of the paper on the first line in the header portion of every page (except Figures), beginning with the title page (Aaron, 2011, p. 509).

**Tone and Style**

Depending on the type of assignment, as a general rule, use the active voice rather than the passive voice (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 66). For example, use “Researchers theorized...” rather than “It was theorized that ... .” Moreover, avoid the use of second-person pronouns you and your, and write in a formal tone and style.

**Major Paper Sections and Order of Pages**

The order of major paper sections and order of pages in an APA Style document are the following: Title Page, Abstract, Body, and References (Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue, 2012).
Other additional paper sections are included after the References page and consist of the following order: Appendixes, Footnotes, Tables, Figure Captions, and Figures (Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue, 2012). These additional sections are usually included for an extensive research paper.

Running Head

A page header, called the Running head, is inserted at the top of every page. To create a page header, insert page numbers flush right against the right margin in the header section of each page. Then type the “TITLE OF YOUR PAPER” in all capital letters, flush against the left margin. Using most word processors, the manuscript page header and page number can be inserted into a header, which then automatically appears on all pages (Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue, 2012).

Purpose

The running head is a shortened version of the paper’s full title, and it is used to help readers identify the titles for published articles (even if the paper is not intended for publication, the paper should still have a running head).

Format

The running head cannot exceed 50 characters, including spaces and punctuation (Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue, 2012). The running head’s title is typed in all uppercase (capital letters) after typing, “Running head:” in lowercase letters, followed by a colon. Note the word “head” is not capitalized. (The words “Running head” and the colon are included in the header only on the Title Page. Thereafter, these words and the colon are removed, and the subsequent pages of the document consist of only the title and page number in the header.) Again, the running head is typed flush left, and page numbers should be flush right.
Page header on title page. The running head on the title page should look like this:

Running head: TITLE OF YOUR PAPER

Page header on subsequent pages. The running head on all pages that follow the title page should look like this:

TITLE OF YOUR PAPER

Title Page

APA Style requires the use of the Title Page, which is numbered as page 1. (Refer to the example title page on page 1 of this example APA Style paper.) The key elements of this page are the running head, title of the paper, author’s name, and institutional affiliation (Aaron, 2011, p. 510). All text on the title page is double-spaced, and the size and type are 12-pt font, Times New Roman or other similar acceptable typefaces.

The three lines in the body of the title page consist of the title of the paper, the author’s name, and the institutional affiliation. These three lines must be vertically centered from upper one-third of the page upwards (Aaron, 2011, p. 510).

Title

The purpose of the title is to summarize the paper’s main idea. APA recommends that the title be no more than 12 words in length (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 23). It should not contain abbreviations or words that serve no purpose. The title should only take up one line, but if it is long, a second line may be needed.

Center the title in the upper half of the page. Type the paper title in upper and lowercase letters. Capitalize all key words, such as nouns. The title should not be bold-faced, underlined or in italicized font.

Author’s Name
The author is the individual who wrote the paper. On the line following the title, center and type the author's name in uppercase and lowercase letters. Annotate by first name, middle initial(s), and last name. Do not use titles (Dr.) or degrees (Ph.D.) (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 23).

**Institutional Affiliation**

The institutional affiliation indicates the location where the author wrote the paper and/or conducted the research. On the line following the author's name, center and type the institutional affiliation in uppercase and lowercase letters. Avoid abbreviating any portion of the name of the institution (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 166).

**Other information**

Any additional information, such as the name and number of the course, professor’s name(s), and date, are noted only if the professor requires it. Place this information at the bottom of the place or where required by the professor. Center the contents in the same fashion as the title, etc. Write the date as name of the month, date, and year (Aaron, 2011, p. 510).

**Abstract**

Not all assignments require the Abstract for an APA Style paper. Depending on the nature of the assignment, the paper may not need the Abstract. If one is not needed, begin writing the body of the paper on page 2. However, if an Abstract is needed, it is included before the body of the paper. (Refer to the example Abstract on page 2 of this example APA Style paper.)

The abstract is a one-paragraph, self-contained summary of the most important elements of the paper. It allows readers to quickly review the main points and purpose of the paper. It also provides a brief and comprehensive summary of the study. It is very important because this portion of the paper may be all that many people will read if the work is a comprehensive study.
Therefore, the Abstract needs to be well written and should include a brief description of the problem being investigated, the methods used, the results, and their implications (American Psychological Association, 2010).

**Pagination**

The abstract begins on a new page and is numbered with the running head 2; however, the words, “Running head” and the colon need to be removed from the header.

**Format**

The word “Abstract” is typed in regular font and centered on the first line below the manuscript page header. It should *not* be bold-faced, underlined or in italicized font. The entire page is double-spaced and is typed in 12-point Times New Roman. The abstract is written in block format, which means this paragraph is not indented (Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue, 2012). It begins on the line following the Abstract heading.

The abstract should “be between 150 and 250 words” (Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue, 2012). All numbers in the abstract (except those beginning a sentence) should be typed as digits rather than words (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 103). Abbreviations and acronyms used in the paper should be defined in the abstract (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 105).

**How to Write an Abstract**

According to Kendra Cherry (2012), first, write the paper. While the abstract will be at the beginning of the paper, it should be the last section that is written. Once the final draft has been completed, use it as a guide for writing the abstract. Keep it short. An abstract should be no longer than 120 words and should be written as only one paragraph. In order to succinctly describe the entire paper, the most important elements need to be determined.
Structure the abstract in the same order as the paper. Begin with a brief summary of the introduction, and then continue on with a summary of the major sections of the paper (Cherry, 2012). It should be accurate (do not include information here that is not in the body of the manuscript), self-contained (spell out abbreviations), concise (“between 150 and 250 words” [Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue, 2012]), and specific (begin this section with the most important information and limit it to the four or five most important concepts, findings, or implications of the study [Cherry, 2012]).

Other key points for writing the Abstract are the following: Avoid citing references in the abstract. Paraphrase rather than quote. Use active rather than passive voice (but avoid the use of personal pronouns). For example, write, “Researchers instructed participants to . . . ,” rather than, “Participants were given instructions to . . . .” Use past tense for procedures and present tense for results (Cherry, 2012).

Keywords can be listed from the paper in the Abstract. To do this, center the text and type Keywords: (italicized) and then list the keywords. Listing keywords will help researchers find the paper’s work in databases (Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue, 2012).

**Body of the Paper**

The body of the paper begins on a new page (page 3), and follows the Title Page (page 1) and Abstract (page 2), if one is required. Like the Title Page and Abstract, the body of the paper is double-spaced, typed in Times New Roman, 12-pt font, and maintains the one-inch margins at the top, left, right, and bottom. The running head maintains its page numbering and title placement that was established on the Abstract page. (Refer to the example body of an APA Style paper that begins on page 3 of this example APA Style paper.) Unlike the Abstract, which
does not require the use of indentation of its paragraph, the paragraphs in the body of the paper should be indented by the use of the TAB key, or 5-7 spaces (Aaron, 2011, p. 509).

The body of the paper begins with typing the title. The title is typed in uppercase and lowercase letters and is centered on the first line below the running head. Although the running head shows the title of the paper, the title still must be typed to begin the body of the paper, especially if the title in the running head is a shortened version of the original. Moreover, the title is not underlined, boldfaced, or written in italics.

The introduction of the paper (which is not labeled with a heading, “Introduction”) begins on the line following the paper title. This paragraph provides background information about the paper’s topic, its purpose, a main idea (the thesis statement), and an overview of the major points of discussion that will be addressed in the body of the paper. This introduction sets the stage for the information that follows. Furthermore, for papers that provide complex, detailed information, the body of the paper can be broken down into subsections that are separated by headings. However, these subsections do not begin on new pages. Instead, they maintain double-spacing and continue discussion in a smooth, transitional pattern.

**Headings:**

Headings are used to organize the document through separating and classifying paper sections according to their relative importance. There are 5 heading levels in APA. Regardless of the number of levels, always use the headings in order, beginning with level 1. According to the American Psychological Association (2010), the format of each level is illustrated below:

- **Level 1:** Centered, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Headings
- **Level 2:** Left-aligned, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading
- **Level 3:** Indented, boldface, lowercase heading, ending with a period
Level 4: *Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase heading, ending with a period.*

Level 5: *Indented, italicized, lowercase heading, ending with a period.* (p. 62).

(This example APA Style paper uses level 1 and level 2 headings to organize main points of formatting in APA Style.)

**Citing**

Ideas, tables, graphics, researched information, and all other data that are not the writer’s must be cited wherever included in the paper. Failing to cite constitutes plagiarism, regardless of whether this was the writer’s intent. Thus, all sources must be cited in accordance to APA Style.

Consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th edition, dated 2010, for citing sources within the body of the paper. Generally, sources are cited at the point where the information is quoted, paraphrased, or summarized. *The Little, Brown Handbook* states, “In your text, a parenthetical citation ear the borrowed material directs readers to a list of all the works you refer to” (Aaron, 2011, p. 491). If the author(s) and year of publication of a source are known, the author’s last name(s) year are cited. For example, the name of the author is not named in the previous sentence of the direct quote; thus, the author’s last name, year of publication, and page number of the book are cited within the parenthesis, separated by commas. The end punctuation follows the citation. On the other hand, if the author’s name is used “in the text, do you repeat it in the reference” (Aaron, 2011, p. 492), as in the following example: Jane Aaron explains, “In your text, a parenthetical citation ear the borrowed material directs readers to a list of all the works you refer to” (p. 491). The citation is thus shown without the author’s name.

For a work with two authors, if the names are used in the text, separate their last names with the word “and,” as shown in this example: “Pepinsky and DeStefano (1997) demonstrated
that a teacher’s language often reveals hidden biases” (Aaron, 2011, p. 492). However, if the authors’ names were not used in the text, the “names are connected by an ampersand, &” (p. 492).

For a work that has no named author, the name of the title is used. Aaron (2011) explains, “…use the first two or three words of the title in place of an author’s name, excluding an initial The, A, or An” (p. 431). An example of citing an unnamed source in the body of the paper is shown as thus: “One article, (“Right to Die,” 1996) noted that a death-row inmate may crave notoriety” (Aaron, 2011, p. 493). Note that the title of the article is written within quotation marks. In APA Style, titles of books, journals, and other similar works are written in italics (p. 493).

Reference Page

Every source cited in the body of the paper should have a referenced entry, and every source listed on the References page should be cited in the body of the paper. This list “includes full publication information on every source cited in the paper” (Aaron, 2011, p. 494). After the conclusion paragraph, a reference list of all of those sources needs to be established. This list is called the References page. (Refer to the example References list on page 14 of this example APA Style paper.)

Start the reference list (also known as the Bibliography, but called References in APA Style) on a new page following the body of the paper. Center the heading, “References.” Do not bold, underline or italicize the heading. Like the rest of the entire paper, double-space all entries on this page. In addition, there should be no additional horizontal space between each listed source. Each source begins at the left margin; however, the second and subsequent lines of the citation need to be indented.
Aaron (2011) instructs, alphabetize the sources “by the author’s last name. If there is no author, alphabetize by the first main word of the title” (p. 494). The author is listed as last name, initial of first name, rather than by full name. For sources that have more than one author, “use an ampersand (&) before the last author’s name” (p. 494).

Although titles of sources are capitalized and written in italics or within quotation marks in the body of the paper (depending on the type of source), titles on the References page are written differently. For “titles of books and articles, capitalize only the first word of the title, the first word of the subtitle, and proper nouns; all other words begin with small letters” (Aaron, 2011, p. 495). Aaron (2011) adds, “In titles of journals, capitalize all significant words” (p. 495).

Regarding the use of italics and quotation marks for titles on the Reference page, titles of articles are not annotated with either, but titles of books and journals are italicized (p. 495).

The overall citation of a source on the References page depends on the type of source; i.e., book, journal, electronic sources, etc. Thus, each type of source is listed in different formats. Consult with the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition, dated 2010, for the correct template for listing types of sources.

APA format is the official style used by the American Psychological Association (APA) and is commonly used to cite sources in psychology, education, and social sciences. The mechanics of basic writing and citing sources are the same in all academic writing. However, students who major in these fields should learn how to format papers and cite sources in APA style paper. If they follow the basic guidelines that are outlined in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition or other reliable sources such as the Little, Brown Handbook by Jane Aaron, they will successfully write their papers and cite others’ sources in APA Style.
References


Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue & Purdue University. (2012). The Purdue OWL family of sites. *The Writing Lab and OWL at Purdue and Purdue University.*