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## **What does it mean to write a paper in APA style?**

Writing a paper according to APA style simply means you are standardizing the way you write the paper so that others who read it know exactly what every little reference and comma means. The APA style comes from the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The manual has been around for many years. It was started, not surprisingly, as a way to standardize research papers written in the field of psychology. But the style has also been adapted for use in other fields as well.

### **Learning the APA style**

When you first start writing using the APA style, it can be a little overwhelming because just about every aspect of your writing must conform to very specific guidelines. The way you indent; the way you use headings and titles; the way you reference sources; all these things are specified in the APA style. You do not, however, have to memorize every little rule. You can always look up how to do things you do not remember. To begin, you need to know the basics. So here are the main things you need to know to get started with a paper.

### **Basic Structure and Appearance**

If your paper is reporting your empirical (scientific) research, you must include the following parts in your paper:

- a title page
- an abstract
- an introduction
- a methods section
- a results section
- a discussion including a summary
- a reference list
- any necessary appendixes.

If you are writing a review paper for a class, for example if you are summarizing the research on a topic, you do not need all of these sections. You most likely will need to include

- a title page
- an abstract
- the main discussion and summary
- references
- any necessary appendixes.

Your instructor will usually specify the sections you need.

You should use standard-sized (8 ½ X 11 in.), heavy white bond paper. You should double-space the entire paper (except for long quotes) with margins of at least 1 inch on all four sides (if you are writing a thesis or dissertation, you may be required to leave a larger left margin for binding). A standard serif typeface, such as 12-pt Times Roman or 12-pt Courier is recommended.

**This is 12-point Times Roman**

**This is 12-point Courier**

By the way, if your instructor has specified exact margins, do not try to achieve the required length of a paper by adjusting the margins or fonts. Most instructors are not fooled by larger fonts or larger margins and this will perhaps get counted against you. Stick to the formatting rules.

### **Page Numbering**

Number all your pages, except for artwork or figures, beginning with the title page. Place the number in the upper right-hand corner at least 1 inch from the top of the page.

### **Manuscript Page Headers**

Since pages sometimes get mixed up with others, each page of your paper should have a manuscript page header. This is the first two or three words of your title placed in the upper right-hand corner above or five spaces to the left of your page number. See the title page example below.

### **The Title Page**

Your title page is the top sheet of your paper. It consists of your

- page header and page number
- a running head
- title
- the author(s) name
- the name of your institution or agency.

Your page head and page number appear first, followed by the running head. A running head is an abbreviated title used for published articles. You may or may not be required to provide a running head. It looks like this:

**Running head: EFFECTS OF TELEVISION ON CHILDREN**

The title is double-spaced using upper and lower case letters and placed on the top half of the paper. It is followed by the author's name and your institution or agency. It should look like this:

**Effects of Television on Children's Development**

**Benjamin L. Jones**

**University of Maine**

See a complete title page [here](#).

## Abstract

An abstract is a comprehensive summary of your paper. If your paper is to be published, researchers will likely read the abstract to determine if they want to read the entire paper. It should summarize all the main points and conclusions of your paper. Include in the abstract:

- the topic
- your hypothesis, if you have one, or basic thesis or topic
- the sources you used such as a review of the literature or interviews
- the conclusion of your paper.

The abstract follows the title page. It has the title, “Abstract” centered just above, followed by the one-paragraph abstract, double-spaced with no indentions. It should look like this:

### Abstract

The effects of television viewing on children were explored through a review of current literature. It is commonly believed that television viewing affects children’s social relations, cognitive development, and even physical development. The literature supports most of these notions although there is some contradictory evidence. It was concluded that there is much evidence for television viewing effects on social development which has led to the efforts of some to curb violence and other negative social behaviors on television.

## Referencing Sources in the Main Discussion and Summary

Your main discussion and summary is the main part of your paper. It should always be doubled-spaced and follow the other rules of formatting as described above.

One of the most important things you need to know about writing scholarly work is to reference all your sources. This means that as you go through your paper and make claims about things, you need to let the reader know the source of this information. What is most important to understand from this is that you cannot make statements without a source. Unless your paper is supposed to be your opinion about something, you must find a legitimate source to cite as the source for all your information. For example, let’s say you are writing about the effects of television and movies on children. You cannot say something like, “Exposure to a lot of violent programming makes children more likely to be violent with their friends,” without a source. First of all, do you know if this has been verified by research on this subject? This may just be a popular myth, and here you are continuing the myth. So you must first do your research to find out the consensus belief about this in the scientific literature; then you must cite the source or sources.

**Citing a source** is relatively easy, but you must do it a very specific way. At the end of a sentence where you have referenced some information, in parentheses you put the author’s last name followed by a comma and then the date of publication. Like this:

Boys who play violent video games are more likely than other boys to get into fights at school (Johnson, 1989).

This means the basis for making this statement is the research reported in the article you have referenced. The reader can then find the specific article you are referencing in your references list.

What if there is **more than one author**? You simply list them in the order in which they were listed in the article, usually alphabetically. Like this:

(Johnson, Labowski, Manning, and Moore, 1999)

If there are **more than two authors**, after you have listed them once, from then on you can use “et al.” Like this:

(Johnson et al., 1999)

You can also **reference the source in your actual text** rather than at the end. Like this:

Johnson (1989) found that boys who play violent video games are more likely than other boys to get into fights at school.

Note that the last name is referred to in the text and only the date is in parentheses. This way of referencing is particularly useful when you are discussing the work of a few researchers and comparing or contrasting their work.

## References

Here is where your reader will find a list of all the sources you referenced in your paper. The guidelines for references are very specific in order to assure that sources cited can be easily identified, verified or located by others. Be sure everything you cite in your paper is in your reference list and that everything in your reference list is actually cited in your paper.

References begin on a new page with the word, “References” centered at the top. References are double-spaced using hanging indents. This means the first line is set against the left margin and the subsequent lines are indented (see example below).

The basic structure of a reference goes like this:

- Author’s name
- Date of publication
- Title information
- Publication information

It looks like this:

Johnson, J. (1989). *The world of children*. New York: Macmillan.

**Basic references** follow these rules:

- The author’s last name goes first followed by initials and separated by a comma
- The year of publication is next in parentheses followed by a period
- The title is in italics followed by a period and only the first word is capitalized
- Last is the publisher’s city, followed by a colon, and the name of the publisher.

Many references are scholarly **journal articles**. The rules are a little different:

- The author’s last name goes first followed by initials and separated by a comma
- The year of publication is next in parentheses followed by a period

- The title is followed by a period and only the first word is capitalized
- The publication name is in italics followed by a comma
- The volume number (if there is one) is next
- Last are the pages of the article or chapter

Johnson, J. (1989). Antecedents of violence in elementary school boys. *Journal of Psychological Works*, 33, 133-142.

Publications of **periodicals or newspapers** include the month or date in the date position. Like this:

Jones, R. (2004, June). Why your children should watch less television. *People Monthly*, pp. 42-44.

Because this is not a journal, “pp” is used to designate page numbers. If this were a daily or weekly publication such as a newspaper, we would also include the date of publication like this:

Jones, R. (2004, June, 17). Why your children should watch less television. *The Brownsville Times*, p. C1.

### Other kinds of authors

If there are between two and six authors, list all the authors. If there are more than six, list just the first six followed by “et al.” Like this:

#### Six authors:

Johnson, J., Klein, B., Moore, K., Pogularty, L., Roberts, A. and Williams, C. (1989). Antecedents of violence in elementary school boys. *Journal of Psychological Works*, 33, 133-142.

#### More than six authors:

Johnson, J., Klein, B., Moore, K., Pogularty, L., Roberts, A. Williams, C., et al. (1989). Antecedents of violence in elementary school boys. *Journal of Psychological Works*, 33, 133-142.

If a work is **authored by an institution**, the reference should look like this:

The Children’s Institute. (2003). *Is Television Harming our Children?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Some publications are a **collection of work** edited by someone else. These should be referenced according to the book editor’s name, like this:

Pollock, D. (Ed.). (1999). *The psychology of children: Views from different fields of study.* Athens: The University of Georgia Press.

If you have **more than one work by the same author**, the one published the earliest should be listed first:

Johnson, J. (1988). *Mass Media and Society*. New York: Maximillian.

Johnson, J. (2004). *Psychological Effects of Mass Media*. San Francisco: Harrison.

See the reference list of any journal article for more examples. You may also need to consult the APA’s Publication Manual if you come across a perplexing situation.

## **Appendixes**

An appendix is supplemental information that you do not include in the text of your paper because doing so would be disruptive to the reading process. They can include things like a large table, a questionnaire, or a computer program. If you have just one appendix, label it Appendix. If you have more than one, label each one starting with a capital letter, like this:

Appendix A

Appendix B

Each appendix must also have a title. In the text of your paper refer to the appendixes by their label (such as Appendix A) instead of the title.