**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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For more information on writing research papers in APA style, please visit: [http://www.psychology.ucsd.edu/undergraduate-program/academic-writing-resources/](http://www.psychology.ucsd.edu/undergraduate-program/academic-writing-resources/)

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