

APA Writing Style and Language

Many academic programs have preferred writing and formatting styles. APA writing style is clear, concise, and objective; this is often referred to as a scientific writing style. More information can be found in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.) and online at Owl Purdue's Online Writing Lab:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html

Typical APA Writing Assignments:

- **Research papers:** While all research papers use research of varying types to further an argument or prove a hypothesis, the assignments tend to vary in complexity and length. More in-depth research papers are divided into different sections (abstract, literature review, methodology, etc.), while research papers completed in undergraduate classes are typically not divided up in sections. Always check with your professor about his/her requirements.
- **Article reviews:** In an article review, a writer summarizes the author's research and evaluates it in terms of its comprehensiveness, biases, and empirical / secondary research.
- **Case study analysis:** This type of assignment focuses on a certain problem, often analyzed through an individual, group, or specific situation. You describe the problem and specific situation, discuss solutions, indicate where more research is needed, and make connections to specific theories or practices relevant to your field.
- **Reports:** This type of writing can have many forms—a treatment report, observation report, or diagnostic report. A report in general is factual and includes items such as a statement of the problem, client demographics and history, treatments and tools, evaluations, and recommendations.
- **Literature Reviews:** In a literature review, you define and clarify a specific issue or problem; summarize previous investigations in order to inform the reader of the state of current research; identify relations, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies in the research; and suggest the next step or steps in addressing the issue or problem.
- **Research Proposals:** This assignment includes an abstract and introduction, which includes an analysis of a problem, a literature review, and a stated hypothesis. It is everything but the actual research study itself.

Writing Tips

1. **Use clear and concise sentences and paragraphs.** Less is more, so avoid flowery language. Avoid descriptors, observations, or explanations that do not enhance the point.
2. **Use active voice.** Structure sentences so that the “doer” in the sentence is in the beginning of the sentence. In some cases (such as in the Methods section) when you want to emphasize the object receiving the action, passive voice may be acceptable.
Active Voice: The author examined the use of two strategies.
vs.
Passive Voice: Two strategies were examined by the author.
3. **Be objective.** Objective writing is appropriate for most assignments with APA style. To write objectively, include facts and avoid adding your opinion. For instance, avoid using the word

“should” because that indicates an opinion rather than a fact. Also, do not use the pronoun “I.” For example, instead of saying “I believe that this test instrument is the most useful for this study,” say “This test instrument is the most useful for this study.” It is acceptable, however, to use “I” or “We” if you are specifically referring to yourself or you and your fellow researchers. For example, “We isolated group A and observed...”

4. **Use a formal tone.** Avoid conversational language and clichés. For example, use *children* instead of *kids* and *report* instead of *write-up*. Avoid computer-speak as well: write out *you* instead of *u*; write *to* instead of *2*; write *because* instead of *bc*, etc.
5. **Be specific.** Make sure that you use words that are precise and accurately reflect your intended meaning. For example, “the scientist *feels*” suggests the emotions of the scientist, while “the scientist *thinks*” suggests the intellectual opinion. Be careful of vague pronouns as well like *this* and *that*. Ask yourself “this *what?*” or “that *what?*” Make sure the word the pronoun is referring to is clear.
6. **Avoid redundancy.** Don’t use two words together that both have the same meaning. For example, *completely unanimous* or *the reason is because*.
7. **Avoid circumlocutions.** Circumlocutions are phrases that are often made of many words, but may be replaced with a single word. For example, the phrase *due to the fact* may be replaced with *because*, *since*, or *why*.
8. **Avoid Anthromorphisms.** Do not give human characteristics to animals or inanimate objects / concepts. For example, it is incorrect to write “The *school* commended the teacher for his perseverance.” Instead, write “The *school administrators* commended the teacher for his perseverance.”
9. **Be aware of verb tense.** Use a consistent verb tense. In some cases, however, it may be appropriate to switch tenses, such as for case study reports in which the past and present may be discussed.
 - A. Use **Past** (“Jones showed”) or **Present-Perfect** (“Jones has shown”) tense when writing a literature review or the Procedure section of your paper
 - B. Use **Past** tense when *describing* the Results (“anger increased significantly...”)
 - C. Use **Present** tense to *discuss* the Results and to write the Conclusion (“the change signifies that...”)
10. **Periods**
 - A. Use periods with
 - a. Initials of names (J.P. Morgan)
 - b. Abbreviations of the United States when used as an adjective (U.S. Army)
 - c. Identity-concealing labels for study participants (F.I.M)
 - d. Latin abbreviations (p.m., e.g.)
 - e. Abbreviations on the References page (vol., ed., p.)
 - B. Do not use periods with
 - a. Abbreviations of state names (MN, NY)
 - b. Capital letter abbreviations and acronyms (APA, IQ)
 - c. The end of web addresses (http://www.strose.edu)
 - i. Metric and non-metric measurement abbreviations (cm, kg) (the abbreviation for inch [in.] is an exception)

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