



Introduction to the APA Style

This brief handout describes a few of the most basic elements of writing a paper according to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA), but it is by no means comprehensive. This handout is intended to help students who have never used the APA style get started in learning what the APA style is and how to use it. Comprehensive coverage of the APA style can be found in the *Publication Manual*, though there are also a number of valuable sources online, many of them linked from the ANU Library's APA Style Help Guide: <http://library.an.edu/ufairfax/apastyle>.

What is APA Style?

The term "APA Style" refers to a style of writing and formatting that was created by the American Psychological Association in 1929. The official title for the APA style manual is the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The manual is currently in its 6th edition.

The purpose of a style guide (like the APA style guide) is to provide uniformity in the style and layout of writing, particularly academic writing. The rules laid out in the APA style manual are designed to make scholarly writing more clear and consistent, which will help readers understand the author's ideas.

Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.). (2010). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

This handout provides a basic introduction to the following key elements of the APA style guide:

- Crediting sources (creating citations)
- Formatting your document
- Organizing your document

Crediting Sources

What is a Citation?

A citation is a quote or a reference to a book, article, passage, or other text or author. It contains the basic information that is needed to find a specific document, including the document's author, title, and publication information.

Citations are used to give credit to authors for original ideas and arguments. That means that whenever you make a reference to another document or use an argument from another author in your paper, you need to cite that document and give credit to the author for their ideas. The APA style requires two types of citations for each document that you include in your paper: an in-text citation, and a references page citation.



Citing Within the Text

Whenever you are citing information from an outside source in your writing (for example, information from a book or article that you used in your research), the APA style requires that an in-text citation be provided immediately after the source is referenced. These in-text citations require an author's last name and the date of publication for the document, for example, (Smith, 2010).

Remember:

- In-text citations are much shorter than the full citation that will appear in your references page.
- They are not a substitution for the full citations.
- In-text citations help keep your paper organized, and they also help your readers find out more information about your research.

You can find more information on how to create in-text citations on the library's [APA Style Guide](#).

Reference Page Citations

According to the APA style, each paper that you write must include a reference page. Every single outside source that you refer to in your paper must have a full citation included on that reference page. The citations on this page should include the author's full name, title of the work, date of publication, and all relevant publication information.

Including a reference page with full citations serves several purposes:

- A reference page makes it easier for your readers to locate the sources that you used in your research and writing.
- A reference page lends credibility to your writing.
- Providing proper citations also indicates to your reader that you are not plagiarizing the works of others.

The reference page will be the last page in your paper, and it must be formatted in a specific way. You can find more information on how to build your references page on the Sample References Page Handout, or on the Library's APA Style Guide.

Formatting Documents

The APA style also provides specific rules regarding the format and layout of papers.

A general list of basic formatting requirements is provided below:

- Your paper should be typed, double-spaced on standard-sized paper (8.5" x 11").
- The margins on your paper must be 1" on all sides.
- Use 12pt size font; Times New Roman is recommended.
- Include a page header at the top of every page.



- The page header cannot exceed 50 characters (this includes punctuation and spacing!).
- The page header should always be capitalized, and it should represent some form of the title of your paper.
- The header on the first page of your paper should read, "Running head: TITLE OF YOUR PAPER."
- All subsequent headers should simply read, "TITLE OF YOUR PAPER."

Document Organization

The APA style guide states that every paper should contain four main sections:

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Main Body
- References

Title Page

The title page of the document is the first page in your paper, and it needs to contain the following items, in order:

- Title of the Paper
- Author's Name (that's you!)
- Institutional Affiliation (i.e., University of Fairfax)

Abstract

The abstract is a brief summary of your paper. An abstract appears at the beginning of the work, and it outlines the work's key points and arguments. The abstract should adhere to the following guidelines:

- Start the abstract on a new page, immediately after the title page.
- Label this page "Abstract" (text should be centered on the first line of the page).
- Starting on the next line, write a concise summary of your research.
- The abstract should be between 150 and 250 words.
- Include a page header.
- The abstract should be double-spaced.

Note: do not indent the first line of the abstract.

Main Body

The next section of your paper should be the main body of your paper. Your writing should adhere to the following rules:

- All pages must be double-spaced.



- All pages must include page header.
- Follow standard rules for indentation, capitalization, punctuation, etc.

References Page

The references page is the last section of your paper. This is where you will provide a full list of citations for all of the outside resources that you used in your paper. The references page should adhere to the following guidelines:

- Start the references page on a new page, after the conclusion of your writing.
- Label this page “References” (text should be centered on the first line of the page).
- For each entry in your reference list, all lines after the first line should be indented ½ inch from the left margin.
- Reference list entries should be alphabetized by the authors’ last name.
- The references page should be double-spaced.

Additional Resources:

- Purdue OWL: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/1/>
- University of Fairfax APA Style Guide: <http://library.an.edu/ufairfax/apastyle>
- University of Fairfax Writing Center: <http://library.an.edu/c.php?g=449233&p=3847274>
- APA Style: <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/index.aspx>