APA Format

A Quick and Easy Guide

Many students come into a college class having already written research paper in some of their previous English classes from earlier semesters of college or even in high school. Often, they've already learned the ins and outs of citing sources, but they learned those methods in the mostly English-class-specific MLA style. When they branch out into more diverse fields of study, however, they often find themselves having to write research papers and are told to format them using APA style. To the uninitiated, APA style – with its running headers, abstracts, and DOIs – can seem a bit daunting. But if you take APA format step by step, it's no more difficult than any other citation style. Like any other format, the APA style can be reduced to three key parts:

- How the paper looks
- How the sources are cited
- How the citations are acknowledged

All of the rules for those parts are described in detail in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th Ed., 2010), but this little guide provides a brief overview to the parts most pertinent to the community college student.

Format (How the Paper Looks)

The APA style has a clear set of guidelines for how the paper should look. This is how you should format your paper in APA style:

- Type and print your paper on white, letter-sized (8.5 x 11-inch) paper.
- Double-space your paper.
    - Do this by setting the line spacing options in your word processing software, *not* by pressing the Enter key at the end of each line.
- Set your text in 12-point size, Times New Roman typeface.
    - Your instructor may also ask you to use Arial or Helvetica instead of Times New Roman.
- If you are using a word processor other than Microsoft Word, make sure all margins are set to one inch.
    - This is the default setting in Microsoft Word.
- Indent the first line of each main paragraph by half an inch.
    - Indent your paragraphs using the Tab key or by setting the indents on the ruler in your word processing software. Do not use the spacebar to create indents.
- Create a running header following the APA guidelines.
- Type the title at the top of the first main page (after the title page and abstract, if present), centered.
    - Capitalize each word in the title except for articles, conjunctions, and prepositions.
    - Use the same size and typeface for the title as the rest of the paper; do not use any special formatting other than centering the text.

- If your instructor asks you to include headings, type them centered, in title case, and in bold text. Subheadings should also be in bold text, but they should be in normal sentence case and aligned to the left.
    - If your instructor gives you specific guidelines for headings, follow your instructor's rules instead.
    - Remember that "heading" and "header" are not the same thing; "header" refers to the title and page information at the top of every page, while "heading" refers to a title for a section of the paper.
- Use italic text only for titles of complete works, and in rare cases, for emphasis.

Front Matter

Unlike MLA format, APA format requires a substantial amount of front matter – that is, material that comes before the main paper. This includes two main parts: a title page and an abstract.

Title Page

Formatting the title page in APA style is a fairly straightforward process:

1. Create the running header.
    a. In Word, double-click in the top margin and check the "different first page" check-box on the green "Header and Footer Tools" tab on the ribbon.
    b. Type "Running head:" and then the title in ALL CAPITAL LETTERS.
    c. Press the Tab key until your cursor is on the right-hand side of the page, then insert a plain page number at the current position.
    d. Select the text of the header and change it to Times New Roman, size 12.
    e. Repeat the process on page 2 *without* adding "Running head:"
2. Double-click inside the margins and use the Enter key to move the cursor to a little above the halfway point of the page.
3. Center the text by pressing Ctrl+E (in MS Word).
4. Type your title, your first and last name, and the name of the college.
    a. Also include any additional information your instructor requires.
    b. Put each piece of information on a separate line by using line breaks (press Shift+Enter).

Abstract

Longer papers (more than five pages or so) typically require an abstract. At the community college level, an abstract is sometimes required and sometimes not. If you are unclear, ask your instructor. An abstract is fairly simple; it's just a basic overview of your paper.

- Put the abstract on the second page of your paper, after the title page but before the main paper.
- Type the word "Abstract" centered at the top of the page.
- Write a brief, 150-200 word overview of your paper.
    - Write your abstract as a single paragraph and do not indent it.
- If you are including keywords, start a new line under your abstract paragraph, type "Keywords:" and then type your keywords in italic text and separated by commas.

Generally, it's easier to write your paper first and then go back and do the abstract; since the abstract is an overview of the paper, it's much easier to write if you already have a paper to summarize.

Inline Citations (How the Sources Are Cited)

Just like in MLA format, when you write a paper in APA format that requires you to cite sources, you must include inline, parenthetical citations. Any time you use information from an outside source (whether you quote it directly or put it in your own words), you have to cite where that information was originally found. In the APA format, a proper inline citation includes the author's last name and the year of publication. If the citation is for a direct quote, it should also include a page number (preceded by "p."), or a paragraph number if it comes from a Web source with no page numbers (preceded by "par.").

- Each citation should include the author's last name and the year of publication, separated by a comma.
   - One author: (Smith, 2006)
   - Two authors: (Jones & Brown, 2012)
   - Three authors: (Johnson, Davis, & Armstrong, 2014)
   - More than three authors: (Phillips et Al., 2007)
- If the source is authored by an organization, the citation should use the organization name
   - Government agency: (Centers for Disease Control, 2010)
   - Group authorship: (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2012)
   - Organization: (Human Rights Campaign, 2014)
- If no author is known, an alternative source should be used. If no other sources can be found and it is not possible to change to a different topic, the citation should contain the first few identifiable words of the title, in quotes (for articles) or italics (for complete books).
   - An article entitled "How Technology Affects Our Brains": ("Technology," 2013)
- When a citation is used at the end of a sentence, it should come before any ending punctuation.
   - Example: Japan, which has long been known for its earthquake preparedness programs, was devastated by the quake, which destroyed thousands of buildings and killed tens of thousands of people (Stimpson, 2011).
- When a citation is used in a direct quote, it should be outside of the quote but before the ending punctuation.
   - Example: According to a professor at Virginia Tech, Congress has been treating FAEMA "like a patient in triage. [They] must decide whether to treat it or let it die" (Roberts, 2006, p.16).
- If the author's name is given in the text, the citation does not need to include it.
   - Example: Congress has been treating FEMA, according to Prof. Patrick Roberts (2006) of Virginia Tech, "like a patient in triage" (p.16).

References Page (How the Citations Are Acknowledged)

Simply citing your sources in the text of your paper is not enough; you also need to have a list of references at the end of your paper. This list will include the full information about each of your sources. The formatting of the page is not too complicated:

- The title "References" should appear at the top of the page, centered.
- The header, font, and line spacing should all match the rest of the paper.
  - Don't create the References page as a separate file. Use a page break (Ctrl+Enter) instead.
- The entries on the References page should be arranged alphabetically.
- Each entry should be treated as a paragraph, with a half-inch *hanging indent*.
  - Create a hanging indent using the ruler in your word processing software.

Every source that you cite in your paper needs to have a matching entry on your References page. Concurrently, every entry on your reference list should be cited somewhere in your paper. In other words, don't include sources on your reference list unless you've actually used them in some concrete way in your paper. Inline citations generally only need a name and year, but the References page needs much more information than that.

The APA style prescribes which pieces of information you need to include and the order in which you need to include them. The best rule to follow is to use your best judgment: you can't include information you don't have, but make your absolute best effort to find all the information you can. Don't assume that information is unavailable just because it's not immediately visible. For some sources – especially Web pages – you may have to check several places to find the information you need. For instance, the article you're using as a source may not mention a specific author, but the author's name might be given in the Web site's "about us" section. Usually, an APA reference lists the author's name, the year, the name of the source, the name of the larger work that contains the source (if there is one), the publication information, and finally where you found it.

There are three kinds of sources you're most likely to use: peer-reviewed journals, books, and Web articles. Of course, there are many other kinds of sources, but these are the three you will encounter frequently. On your references list, they should look something like this:

Peer-reviewed journal:

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Last Name, I. (Year). Title of article: Capitalize the first word of the
     subtitle. Title of Journal, volume(issue), pages. URL <or> DOI (if
     present).
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Marcoux, J. & Létourneau, L. (2014). Examining the Canadian government's
     resistance to including socioeconomic concerns in genetically modified
     seeds regulation: A policy transfer and multilevel approach. Review of
     Policy Research, 31(2), 105-124. doi:10.1111/ropr.12057
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Book:

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Last Name, I. (Year). Title of work: Capitalize the first word of the
     subtitle.  City, ST: Publisher.
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Carr, N. The shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains. New York,
     NY: Norton.
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Web article:

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Last Name, I. (Year). Title of article: Capitalize the first word of the
      subtitle. Title of Complete Work [, volume(issue) if present]. DOI <or>
      Retrieved from [URL].
Perez, E. (2015). Report shows US officials struggled to assess usefulness of
      post-9/11 warrantless surveillance. CNN Politics. Retrieved from
      http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/25/politics/nsa-warrantless-surveillance-
      report/
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Keep these things in mind on any of your references:

- Pay attention to capitalization.
  - Most titles in APA references use sentence capitalization (i.e. only capitalizing the first word) rather than the title case you might expect.
- Do not use first names, only first initials.
- Include the *complete* Web address if there is no Digital Object Identifier (DOI).
  - When you give URLs (Web addresses), always include the complete address, not an abbreviated version of it. If you are using a National Geographic article, for example, give the URL for *that specific article*, not just "nationalgeographic.com." A link to the homepage is not sufficient.

Additional Writing Center Resources

- Citing Sources
- Formatting in Microsoft Word
- MLA Format: A Quick and Easy Guide

Further Reading

- Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL) guide to APA format: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01
- *Strategies for Successful Writing* by James A. Reinking and Robert von der Osten (2014, Pearson)
- *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 6th Edition (2010, American Psychological Association)