How to Format a Student Essay in APA Style 6th Edition

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Abstract

Student papers typically **do not** require an abstract. Unless an instructor specifically asks for an abstract, students should not include one in their APA assignment. If asked to include an abstract, it must be formatted according to APA Style. The abstract appears on its own page, as page two after the title page. The word “Abstract” should be the heading for this section and in the centre of the page. Do not indent the first line of the abstract paragraph. All other paragraphs in the paper should be indented. The abstract is a brief summary of the paper, allowing readers to quickly review the purpose and main points of the paper. The abstract should be between 150 and 250 words and should be written as a single paragraph. Abbreviations and acronyms used in the paper should be defined in the abstract, and keywords may be included at the end. The term “Keywords” is used in italicized font, indented from the left as a regular paragraph, one double-space below the abstract. Keywords appear after this label, separated by commas in a list, and do not need to be listed in any specific order. For example, a paper on “The Ethics of Law Enforcement” that discusses abuse of authority and police brutality would include keywords, such as “law enforcement,” “abuse of authority,” and “police brutality.” Do not use a period or punctuation after the last keyword. If the keywords run onto a second line, the second line is not indented.

*Keywords*: APA format, essay structure, headings, in-text citations, reference list

This APA Sample follows the guidance of the American Psychological Association’s 6th Edition APA manual.
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Students often find writing academic essays difficult. The writing process is slow, researching a topic can be strenuous, and formatting a paper for APA Style can be intimidating. However, APA Style is not as intimidating as it looks. Similar to other academic formats, APA Style has rules that outline how information should be presented and citations should be formatted. Although difficult at first, APA is quite simple once its rules are broken down.

APA Style has four main sections of the essay structure: the title page, the abstract, the body of the essay, and the references page. For APA Style, every page is written in the same font. Therefore, the title page, abstract, body pages, and references page should all be typed in 12 point Times New Roman. Additionally, text on every page of the paper should be double-spaced, including text on the title page, abstract, and references page. If the essay is to be handed in as a physical copy, each page should be printed only on one side of the paper, so that the pages are not double-sided.

Additionally, every page features a running head in the top left and a page number in the top right corner. In APA Style, the title page counts as the first page of the paper, and therefore requires a page number. The running head on the title page is also unique, as the title page is the only page that should have the term “Running head:” before the title of the essay. Every subsequent page of the essay should simply have the title of the essay in capital letters in the top left corner and the page number in the top right. The running head should be no more than fifty characters long, including spaces. If the title of the paper is longer than fifty characters, the running head can be a short variation that uses the main idea of the title. For example, if the title of the paper is “The Role of Compulsive Texting in Adolescents’ Academic Functioning,” then a
possible running head for the paper could be COMPULSIVE TEXTING AND ACADEMIC FUNCTIONING.

The title page includes the following key elements: the title of the paper, the author’s name and institution, the course code and name, the instructor of the course, the date that the paper is due, and the word count. The title of the paper should be centred, and three or four double-spaced lines down from the top margin of the page. Double-space between all elements of the title page.

The body of the essay formatted in APA Style is similar to how the body of the essay would appear in most academic essays. The title of the essay should be centred and typed in 12 point Times New Roman font. The body of the paper starts one double-space below the title. The paragraphs that make up the body of the paper require the first line to be indented. Each paragraph should be between five to eight sentences and should only contain one idea per paragraph. Academic papers should only be written in the third-person perspective. Students should not use pronouns, such as “I,” “we,” or “my” unless directed to do so by their instructor.

**APA Elements and Organization (Level-1 heading)**

**Headings (Level-2 heading)**

APA Style has five levels of headings to identify the topic or purpose of the content within each section. Level-1 headings are used as the main level to introduce a topic and the additional headings are used to identify subsequent sections. Some headings follow what is known as Title Case. Title Case is a style of capitalization in which words that are four or more letters, and the first word of the title, are capitalized. Level-1 headings are boldface, centred, and in Title Case. Level-2 headings are boldface, flush left to the margin, and follow Title Case.
Level-3 headings are boldface, indented, do not follow Title Case, and end with a period. Most student papers do not need further subsections past a Level-3 heading.

There is no need for a heading titled “Introduction” as the paper title at the top of the first page of body text introduces the paper. Therefore, all further headings are considered subsections of the title. For subsections within the introduction, use Level-2 headings, and so on as required. After the introduction, use a Level-1 heading when advancing to the next main section of the paper. For example, the next main section of a research paper may be given a Level-1 heading “Methods.”

**In-Text Citations (Level-2 heading)**

In APA Style, an in-text citation is required every time you present information that you have gathered from a source. Therefore, you are required to provide an in-text citation every time you paraphrase or directly quote information, or when you copy or adapt images or figures (even if they are freely available on the internet or licensed in the Creative Commons). It is perfectly acceptable to have paragraphs in which almost every sentence has a citation, since you want to show your readers that you have done your research on the topic.

The number of authors affects how to format their names in the in-text citations. A source with one or two authors appears the same each time it is used in-text. For a source with three to five authors, include the last name of every author in the first in-text citation. For each subsequent citation to the same source, just use the first author’s last name followed by “et al.” For a work of six or more authors, just use the last name of the first author followed by “et al.” in every in-text citation. Unless a source has eight or more authors, all authors will appear in the reference page citation. See the following subsection for examples. For a group author or
company, first cite the name of the group as well as the abbreviation, then use the abbreviation only for the subsequent citations. For example: (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2020) for the first citation, and (NIMH, 2020) for the rest. It is best to consult the APA Reference Guide or a librarian to ensure sources are cited correctly.

**Formatting in-text citations.** This is a Level-3 heading. In-text citations in APA Style follow two simple formats. In both formats, you must include three key pieces of information about your source: the author’s last name, the year that the source was published, and the page number that you had found the information on. If the source does not have a page number, then provide a paragraph number or a section heading. Note that direct quotations require a page, paragraph or section heading whereas paraphrased information highly encourages the inclusion of a page, paragraph or section heading, but does not require it. If in doubt, ask your instructor what they require for paraphrased information.

All examples in this sample paper include page numbers. Note that in some cases, it does not make sense to include a page number, paragraph number, or section heading for a paraphrase. For example, if you were to paraphrase a main idea from multiple pages of a source, it would not make sense to cite all the pages. However, if you were to paraphrase the main idea of a specific paragraph or page, it is encouraged to provide the specific page number in the in-text citation.

The first style of in-text citation is called a parenthetical reference, in which the above information should be contained within parentheses at the end of the paraphrased or quoted source. As the citation is considered part of the sentence, it appears before the period. For example, if a source has three to five authors, the first in-text citation would look something like this: Significant training for EMS providers is a key factor to improve suicide prevention
(Lygnugaryte-Griksiene, Leskauskas, Jasinskas, & Masiukiene, 2017, pp. 1-2). Subsequent in-text citations to this source would just include the first author’s surname et al., date, and page number (Lygnugaryte-Griksiene et al., 2017, p. 4). For a source with six or more authors only cite the first author et al. for all in-text citations. For example, “a career in law enforcement is a significant cause of physical and psychological stress” (Lockie et al., 2019, p. 1).

The second style of in-text citation is called a narrative citation, in which the author of the source information is referred to as part of the sentence. In this type of citation, when the author’s name is used in a sentence, the year follows the author into the sentence and the page number comes after the quote or paraphrase. As mentioned earlier in this paper, when a work has three to five authors, cite all authors the first time. In subsequent citations, just cite the first author. For example, a direct quote would appear something like this: Lygnugaryte-Griksiene, Leskauskas, Jasinskas and Masiukiene (2017) state that “one key factor to improving suicide prevention lies in adequate training for EMS providers” (p. 1). The next in-text citation will appear as Lygnugaryte-Griksiene et al., (2017) further state that “there is a need for continual, repeated, and standardized suicide prevention training” (p. 2).

If the source being cited has six or more authors, all in-text citations will just include the first author’s surname, year and page number. A paraphrased example would look like this: Lockie et al. (2019) found that a law enforcement career may cause physical and psychological stress (p. 1).

When writing narrative citations, the date must be included in the first reference in a paragraph. You do not need to repeat the date if you cite the same source in a narrative citation again in the same paragraph. The following example shows that the “they” in the second sentence in the same paragraph refers to the same source. Therefore, it is safe to remove the date
in the second sentence. Lockie et al. (2019) found that a law enforcement career may cause physical and psychological stress (p. 1). They claim that future law enforcement officers are prepared for the physical, mental, and psychological challenges of the job in the police academy (p. 1).

It is important to remember that you must repeat the year if a parenthetical reference appears between the two narrative citations, or, if your two narrative citations appear in separate paragraphs. For example: Lockie et al. (2019) state that a career in law enforcement is a significant cause of physical and psychological stress (p. 1). Many individuals that are hired and attend the academy do not graduate and pursue a career in law enforcement after being overwhelmed by the amount of pressure and stress of the job (Lockie et al., 2019, p. 1). Lockie et al. (2019) claim that future law enforcement officers are prepared for the physical, mental, and psychological challenges of the job in the police academy (p. 1). Because there was a parenthetical citation in the sentence after the first narrative citation, the date must be repeated in the second narrative citation.

Using Quotation Marks in APA (Level-1 heading)

When directly quoting from a source, the quote must be contained within quotation marks. The in-text citation should appear outside the quotation marks, before the period. For example: Law enforcement can be described as “a demanding profession that can place high levels of physical and psychological stress on those employed in this vocation” (Lockie et al., 2019, p. 1). The citation is a part of the sentence, so it should appear before the period.

When directly quoting a large amount of information, APA Style requires it to appear as a block quote. A large quote is defined as forty words, or three or more sentences. Block quotes
do not require quotation marks and should not be boldface or italicized. Every sentence of a block quote must be indented, so that the appearance of the quote resembles a centred block of text, as the name suggests. Block quotes also require an in-text citation. Introduce your block quote with a phrase followed by a colon. You can either cite the source in parentheses after the quotation’s final punctuation or cite the author and year in the narrative before the quotation and place the page number in parentheses after the quotation’s final punctuation. Do not add a period after the closing parenthesis. For example:

Recruits may separate (i.e., they do not graduate) for a number of different reasons. These reasons may include personal reasons (e.g., they no longer want to work in law enforcement), physical training (PT) session failures (i.e., they do not complete the requisite number of sessions as mandated by the LEA or state), injury, failure in academics or scenario-based training. (Lockie et al., 2019, p. 1)

Whether a student uses a source to directly quote or to paraphrase information, they must give credit to their source by citing it. When a student does not cite their sources, they are guilty of plagiarism. When in doubt of whether to cite a source, it is always better to cite the source rather than risk committing plagiarism. You can ask your instructor, a librarian, or the writing centre staff if you are confused on whether or not to cite a source.

**Conclusion (Level-1 heading)**

An essay is complete when it has a formal conclusion. The conclusion should be one or two full paragraphs and not just a sentence or two. The conclusion should summarize all ideas presented in the body of the essay and emphasize the claim of the paper. No new information
should be presented in the conclusion. Summarizing the main points of the essay and relating them back to the thesis creates a solid conclusion that readers will be able to follow.

The “References” page follows the conclusion and should be listed on its own page. It contains a list of all the sources used in the essay. The word “References” is centred at the top of a new page. As with all other pages, it is double-spaced. Do not add extra spaces between the references. Apart from some exceptions, references cited in-text must appear in the reference list. The reference list should be arranged in alphabetical order by surname of the first author. See References page example for treatment of authors’ first names. Do NOT re-alphabetize authors’ names within each reference. Author names should be kept in the order in which they appear in the book, article, chapter, or website. Follow the “hanging indent” style, in which the first line of each reference is flush left and all subsequent lines of that reference are indented. The hanging indent style is shown on the attached example reference page. The JIBC Library can assist you with your APA References page.
References


Kwantlen Polytechnic University. (2019). *APA citation style: How often do I need to cite?* Retrieved from https://libguides.kpu.ca/apa
