

American Psychological Association (APA) Documentation Style, 7th Edition

This handout begins with general guidelines about the parts of a paper you need to document and then presents a brief overview of the APA documentation system as described in the 7th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2019).

General Advice for Learning and Using APA Style

- Create an APA paper template document with all of the aspects of an APA described here (title page, abstract, etc.). Each time you start a new paper, open that template and tailor it. This will save you time, help you get started, and ensure that you have all the aspects of your APA paper correctly formatted without referring to a guide each time.
- There's a lot about APA style that you might quickly and naturally memorize, especially when you use the rules repeatedly. For example, you may soon memorize the basic rules for in-text citations and how to make the reference for a journal article and book. These are often the most common things you'll do in an APA paper. Generally, though, it may not be helpful to memorize this information. APA style changes, there are a lot of details, and you probably have a lot of other information that's much more important to keep in your head!
- Pick an APA guide (like this one!) and become familiar with it. When you need to find the answer about something, you'll easily be able to quickly find the answer.
- Observe the consistencies of APA features in the papers and books you read.

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1. Overview of APA Style

The APA documentation system is commonly used in the social sciences. APA style exists so that readers across different disciplines in the social sciences have a standard format for papers and citations, which makes it easier to find what you're looking for when you're looking at published work. Compared to other documentation styles, APA style emphasizes the date the work was published. The date something was published will appear each time that you mention it. APA also emphasizes empirical research, which is why there are lots of rules and formats for citing works published in academic journals, but you might not find a clear rule about how to cite a Tweet or other non-academic or research-based sources.

2. APA Title Page

Title pages have all the identifying information of your paper on a separate page at the beginning of your document. The text on the title page should be in the middle of the page, double-spaced, and there should be a page number in the top right corner of the page. Note that the content of a cover page is different if you are submitting a paper for publication in an academic journal. Here is all of the information that you need to include for a title page for a course paper and the format:

Title of the Paper [bolded and centered]

Your Name

University Name

Course Name

Instructor's Name

Date (month, day and year)

Example:

1

**Mathematics Instruction in K-3:
First Year Teacher Experiences in the Greater Chicago Area**

Bucky Badger

University of Wisconsin-Madison

CURRIC 240: Teaching, Schooling, and Education

Professor Affi

December 15, 2021

3. Abstract

An abstract is a short (usually 250-500 word) paragraph that summarizes your paper and appears as the second page of an APA paper.

Do you need an abstract?

You don't always need to include an abstract in your APA paper if you're submitting it for a course. Check your assignment requirements to see if it mentions an abstract. When in doubt of whether or not you should include an abstract, you should include it.

What is the format of an abstract?

Abstracts should appear on the second page of your paper. The first line of the page should be the word "Abstract" centered and bolded. The text of the abstract should begin on the next line and should **not** be indented. The page should be double spaced. After the abstract, you should indent and italicize the word "keywords" followed by a colon, and then list 3-5 keywords of your paper. Keywords might be what someone would search to find this paper.

What should be included in an abstract?

The abstract should be a one-paragraph summary of your paper. Typically abstracts include the following information for a paper that presents original research: a brief statement of the topic/problem, context, research question, data sources, methods, results, analysis, implications. If your paper is not presenting original research (e.g., a literature review), you may want to include the following (if relevant): a brief statement of the topic/problem, context, research question, overview of main points, directions for future work on this topic. Overall, the abstract should be a paragraph-long summary of your paper.

Advice: Write your abstract after you've written the rest of your paper. Trying to write it earlier can be difficult because you don't yet know what all you'll say, so it's difficult to summarize.

Example:

Abstract

Mathematics education in grades K-3 provides the foundation for all future quantitative reasoning education. Research has demonstrated that this period of mathematics education is key to students' future success in quantitative reasoning (Alibali & Moore, 2019; Anderson et al., 2020; Zhang, 2017). This literature review explores empirical action research published in the last ten years about K-3 mathematics education. The most common finding across research is that teaching to promote positive relationships with mathematics are significant (Anderson et al., 2020;

Cardenas & Li, 2014; Rishi, 2016; Zhang, 2017). While there is much quantitative and qualitative research on this topic, more mixed-methods research is needed to more deeply understand K-3 mathematics education.

Keywords: Early-Elementary Education, Mathematics Education, Action Research

4. What to Cite

Be sure to document all the sources you've used when writing your paper. Your sources can include articles from journals, books, chapters in a book, data sets, and much more. You'll need to cite sources in your paper when you write:

- direct quotations
- paraphrases and summaries of ideas and information from sources
- information and ideas that are not common knowledge or are not available in a standard reference work
- data from someone's research or from an organization's data set
- any ideas that you learned from another source

When in doubt of whether or not you should cite your source, you should cite it! The next sections will example how to cite your sources. You'll need to cite them in the text of your paper and in a reference list at the end of your paper.

5. Parenthetical (In-text) Citations

Parenthetical (in-text) citations should appear in the body of your text whenever you write information that came from a source. In-text citations include authors' last names and the year that the source was published.

The basic format for an in-text citation is (Last Name, YEAR) for information that's paraphrased and (Last Name, YEAR, p. #) for direct quotations. For example:

(Alibali, 2019) – for one author

(Alibali, 2019, p. 37) – for one author with a quote

(Alibali & Moore, 2019) – for two authors

(Alibali et al., 2019) – for more than two authors

For more information about the different numbers of authors and types of authors and the different ways to present this information, see below:

One Author

You have three main options for placing citations depending on the structure of your sentence:

1. If you don't mention the author's name in the sentence, place the author and year within parentheses at the end of a sentence, and be sure to use a comma:

Examples:

Researchers have studied how children represent mathematical problems (Alibali, 2019).
A case study of the implementation of Iowa's new 3rd grade math curriculum revealed that students benefit from visual representations (Zhang, 2017).

2. If you mention the author's name, place only the year within parentheses:

Examples:

Alibali's (2019) mixed-methods study found that children represent mathematical problems best on paper.

In a case study of a 3rd-grade classroom, Zhang (2017) explored the implementation of a new curriculum.

3. Integrate both the author and year into your sentence (APA calls this a "narrative citation"):

Example:

In 2019, Alibali used mixed methods to study how children represent mathematical problems. This research responds to Zhang's case study from 2017 of a 3rd-grade classroom's use of a new math curriculum.

Two Authors

The rules for in-text citations with two authors is the same as with one author, but there are some additional details. When using a parenthetical citation, you should use a "&" between the two last names. When writing the authors' name in the text, use the word "and."

Examples:

Researchers have studied how children represent mathematical problems (Alibali & Moore, 2019).

Alibali and Moore's (2019) mixed-methods study found that children represent mathematical problems best on paper.

In 2019, Alibali and Moore used mixed methods to study how children represent mathematical problems.

Three or More Authors

The rules for in-text citations with two authors is the same as with one author, but you must also add "et al." after the first author's name. Note that in "et al." nothing is capitalized, there's a space between "et" and "al" and there's a period after "al" regardless of any additional punctuation.

Examples:

Researchers have studied how children represent mathematical problems (Alibali et al., 2019).

Alibali et al.'s (2019) mixed-methods study found that children represent mathematical problems best on paper.

In 2019, Alibali et al. used mixed methods to study how children represent mathematical problems.

Note: This is a change from the 6th edition of the APA Publication Manual. Following the 6th edition, the first time you cited a source with 3 or more authors, you'd have to list all the names, but after the first time, you'd use the first author and then "et al." This update is much simpler, but if you've used APA style in the past, you'll need to forget this old rule!

More Than One Source in the Citation

Often when you make general statements or arguments, you are drawing on multiple sources. In APA papers, it is very common for in-text citations to include more than one source. When referring to more than one source, include them all in the parenthetical citation in alphabetical order and separated by semicolons.

Example:

Mathematics education in grades K-3 provides the foundation for all future quantitative reasoning education. Research has demonstrated that this period of mathematics education is key to students' future success in quantitative reasoning (Alibali & Moore, 2019; Anderson et al., 2020; Zhang, 2017).

This in-text citation indicates that all three of these sources make this claim.

Organization as Author

Sometimes sources don't have specific authors. For example, you might cite a government report, a memo from the United Nations, or a non-profit or non-governmental organization. In this case, you use the name of the organization just like you'd use the author's name.

Examples:

Some have argued that the Voting Rights Act should be interpreted broadly (NAACP, 2021).

According to the NAACP (2021), the Voting Rights Act should be interpreted broadly.

In 2021, the NAACP argued that the Voting Rights Act should be interpreted broadly.

Direct Quotes

Direct quotes are when you use the author's words exactly in your text. When you take their words exactly, you should put quotation marks around the words that come directly from the source. All the rules for in-text citations with direct quotes are the same as above, but you'll also need to add the page number in the following format: (Last Name, YEAR, p. #). Regardless of the structure of the sentence, the page number should go after the quote (not with the author or year if they are in the text of the sentence).

Examples:

Research has found that children represent mathematical problems “in different ways” (Alibali, 2019, p. 34).

In a case study of a 3rd grade classroom, Zhang (2017) explored “the implementation of new curriculum” (p. 190).

In 2019, Alibali et al. used mixed methods to study how children represent mathematical problems “in different ways” (p. 34).

Some Extra Details about In-text Citations

- The period should always go after the last parentheses when the citation is at the end of the sentence.
- There are lots of uncommon exceptions or additional rules (e.g., when you have two authors with the same last name, two works with the same authors published in the same year, personal communication, indirect sources, etc.). Don’t attempt to memorize these. You can always find the rule for your circumstance on the [APA Manual website](#).

Advice:

- It’s not necessarily helpful to correctly format all your in-text citations as you draft your paper. In fact, sometimes interrupting your writing to go look up a specific date could distract your focus. However, be sure to leave yourself enough information to fully cite and format your in-text citations as you draft.
- In your final review process, look for in-text citations that make broad statements that multiple sources agree with. Then, you can cite more than one source for these statements.

6. Headings and Seriation

There are specific rules for the layers of headings in an APA paper. These levels help guide readers through your sections, sub-sections, and even sub-sub-sections. Use the following chart to determine the format of your section headings:

Level	Format
1	Centered, Bold, Capitalized (paragraph starts on a new line)
2	Left, Bold, Capitalized (paragraph starts on a new line)
3	Left, Bold, Italic, Capitalized (paragraph starts on a new line)

4	Indented, Bold, Capitalized, End with a Period. (paragraph continues on the same line after the heading)
5	<i>Indented, Bold, Italic, Capitalized, End with a Period.</i> (paragraph continues on the same line after the heading)

You don't need to have all of these different headings. Sometimes your paper won't have a sub-sub-sub section!

Advice:

- Format your headings in your last stage of the revision process. As you write and revise, your sections may change and move, which may change the level of the section.
- It's not necessary to memorize these rules. In the last revision stage, use an APA guide as you go through your section headings and make sure they're formatted at the appropriate level based on the level of the section.

7. References List

Your references list is a list of all of the sources that you cited in your paper. Begin the reference list on a new page, and title that page "References" (with the title centered). List only sources you have cited, and list all of these except for personal communications (e.g., interviews, letters, emails, messages from unarchived discussion groups, or any other material not accessible to your readers). The references list should be in alphabetical order. Double-space all text. Finally, the first line of each reference should start on the left of the page (not indented), and any subsequent lines of the reference should be indented (this is called hanging indentation). This helps the reader quickly skim down the list and find the entry they're looking for based on the in-text citation that indicates the name of the author.

Advice:

- Don't try to memorize the rules for different kinds of sources' references list entries!
- You can often find mostly correct 7th Edition APA citations on the library website's entry for the item you're citing, but make sure you check them to make sure they're correct.
- Websites like EasyBib or other citation creators can be helpful, but they make a lot of mistakes. You'll definitely need to check to make sure the provided citations are correct.
- If you can't find a citation format for the kind of source you want to cite, do your best!
- You will absolutely make mistakes in your references list: whether you neglected to italicize something, you are missing a space, you have an unneeded period, etc. These rules are very detailed! Proofread your references list with your APA guide on hand, but remember that your intellectual work is in the content of your paper, not in the formatting of your references list!

Here are the formatting requirements and examples of the most common types of citations

organized by the type of source (if the kind of source that you need to cite isn't listed here, go to: [APA Reference Examples](#)):

Articles in Academic Journals

General Rules: In the article's title, capitalize the first letter of the title and subtitle and any other proper nouns. The title of the article should not have quotation marks (unless the quotation marks are included in the title itself) and should not be italicized. All journal titles should have the complete title, capitalized in the way that the journal capitalizes it, and italicized. References also include a DOI, which is a Digital Object Identifier. You can usually find the DOI for your sources from the library entry or use a stable URL. For more information about DOIs, see [APA Manual, DOIs and URLs](#).

Basic Citation Form for Articles in Academic Journals:

Author, A. & Author, B. (YEAR). Title of the article: Subtitle of the article. *Title of the Journal*,
volume number(issue number), page range. DOI (if available)

Examples:

Arnett, J.J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(3), 469-480.
<https://doi-org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469>

Batterton, J. & Horner, S.L. (2016). Contextual identities: Ethnic and national identities of international and American students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 20(5), 472-487. <https://doi-org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/10.1177/1028315316662979>

Kodama, M. C., McEwen, M.K., Liang, C.T.H., & Lee, S. (2002). An Asian American perspective on psychosocial student development. *New Directions for Student Services*, 97, 45-59. <https://doi-org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/10.1002/ss.38>

Books

General Rules: Book titles should be italicized and capitalized in the same way that you capitalize article titles (capitalize the first letter of the title and subtitle and any other proper nouns).

Basic Citation Form for Books:

Author, A. (YEAR). *Title of book: Subtitle of book*. Publisher. DOI (if available)

Examples:

Arnett, J.J. (2014). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi-org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/90.1802/ss.91>

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.

Edited Books (No Author)

Editor, A. (Ed.). (YEAR). *Title of book: Subtitle of book*. Publisher. DOI (if available)

Example:

Erikson, E. H. (Ed.). (1959). *Identity and the life cycle: Selected papers*. International Universities Press.

Chapters in Edited Books

Author, A. (YEAR). Title of chapter. In A. Editor (Ed.), *Title of book: Subtitle of book* (pp. #-#). Publisher. DOI (if available)

Example:

Klope, M., & Hendry, L.B. (2011). A systemic approach to the transitions to adulthood. In J.J. Arnett (Ed.), *Debating emerging adulthood* (pp. 53-76). Oxford University Press.

Dissertations and Theses

Author, A. (YEAR). *Title of dissertation or these: Subtitle*. [Doctoral dissertation/Masters thesis, Name

of Institution]. Database or Archive Name. DOI (if available)

Examples:

Chatterjee, A. (2018). *The testability of regular logic structures*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign]. IDEALS. <http://doi.hdl.handle.net/2142/21902>

K'aol, G.O. (2015). *Perceptions of craftsmen and apprentices regarding self-employment skill acquisition in the Kenyan informal sector*. [Masters thesis, UW-Madison]. Proquest. <http://doi.net/492949>

Electronic Sources

Electronic sources can be more complicated to cite than print sources because there is less standardization of the presentation of this information across the internet. Often the APA reference rules will ask for a piece of information that you can't find on the website. That's ok! Include as much information as you can while following these guidelines.

Websites

Author, A. (YEAR, Month Date). *Title of page*. Site name. URL

Examples:

Lee, C. (2017, February 1). *How to cite the UpToDate database in APA style*. APA style blog.

<https://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2017/02/how-to-cite-the-uptodate-database-in-apa-style.html>

Navigating the transition to the 7th edition APA style. UTA libraries.

<https://libguides.uta.edu/apa/changes>

Note: In this second example, there was no author and no date. That's ok! I included what I could, and the URL is there, so anyone can find the source. This is common!

Online News Articles:

Author, A. (YEAR, Month Date). Title of article. *Title of Publication*. URL

Examples:

Charles, D. (2021, June 22). What's the best way to help the climate and people too? NPR.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/06/22/1003382636/home-improvement-could-be-a-1st-step-toward-climate-justice>

Richgels, J. (2021, June 21). Frontier Airlines resuming Madison-Las Vegas non-stop flights.

Wisconsin State Journal. https://madison.com/wsj/business/frontier-airlines-resuming-madison-las-vegas-nonstop-flights-aug-13/article_d613a89b-f9ce-579c-ac11-c16da77ded8a.html#tracking-source=home-top-story-1

Data Sets

Author, A. or Name of Group (YEAR). *Title of dataset* [Data set]. Publisher. DOI or URL

Examples:

United Nations Children Fund (2013). *Gross enrollment ratio of girls to boys in primary education*

[Data set]. UNdata.

<https://data.un.org/Data.aspx?q=girls+education&d=SOWC&f=inID%3a234>

World Bank (2019). *GDP per capita* [Data set]. World Bank Data.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

8. APA and Social Justice in Research

APA style has been updated on a regular basis since 1952. Updates in the 7th edition include more consideration for different types of knowledge. In previous editions of APA, if a source wasn't published, it wasn't considered worthy of being cited. This leaves personal communication,

indigenous knowledge, anything that's not published but still is important and valuable to your topic out of your papers. Updates in the 7th edition ask authors to cite sources not explicitly mentioned in the guide as "personal communication" and/or by clearly explaining the context for where the information originates. Academic publications are not the only sources that you can use to understand the topics that you're writing about. For more about how to cite "personal communication" see [APA Manual: Personal Communication](#).

9. Additional Resources

[Sample APA Paper](#) (Google Doc, UW-Madison login required)

Check out this sample APA paper to get a comprehensive view of what the paper could look like (including the title page, abstract page, body of the text, and references).

[Sample APA Student Paper](#) (Google Doc, UW-Madison login required)

Download this sample APA paper template to start your papers with all the APA formatting and features ready for you.

[APA Manual 7th Edition](#)

This official website on APA style covers its most common features. For any additional information (e.g., formatting tables, citing a reference type that isn't mentioned above), visit this website or get a physical copy of the *APA Publication Manual*.

[The Writing Center](#)

Finally, the UW-Madison Writing Center can support you with using APA documentation style. We have [one-on-one instruction](#), and we offer [workshops](#) about using APA.

Questions about this guide? Please contact Dottie Mayne, Faculty Associate in the Writing Center, at dmayne@wisc.edu.

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