

APA Writing Format

This guideline was written to handle the growing confusion for students regarding APA format due to increasing exposure via the internet. There is only one official APA manual, but it is often updated over time when needs arise. When an update comes out, it becomes the official APA manual governing the writing of science and psychology papers. However, the older versions can still be found and are often still used by many institutions. Furthermore, researchers and professors use variations of the APA style to suit their needs and publication demands (for example, Chicago Style, IEEE Style, AAA Style; not to mention MLA Style used for English papers). The Thames Valley District School Board has an online-only version, On Your Own, based on the official fifth APA manual (and includes MLA and Chicago Style). The board also still supports an older version of On Your Own, available online and in print, which is based on the fourth edition of the official APA manual. Therefore, it is understandable that much confusion exists as to which style is the correct style to use.

Clarity and consistency are most important with APA Style so we will use the following guideline in my class as our definitive manual to write papers and how they will be marked when APA formatting is required. My goal is to simplify APA for high school students, so I may circumvent some of the rules just to make it easier as I am only trying to help you learn how to make a proper science report; I am not creating a complete guideline as one already exists (the official APA manual). Therefore, I have outlined the major, most commonly needed, instructions but there are numerous rules to cover the immense variety of situations that can exist, so if a situation is not covered here, refer to the **official APA guide** posted on my website.

Issue

People initially do not understand the need to follow a specific APA writing format; however, APA style is very layered such that writing conventions used imply or convey critical information or context to the experienced reader. A subtle change in format may not seem like an issue for the casual reader, but this change may affect the meaning and thus, the integrity of the report. Furthermore, ensuring every report is written the same way ensures consistency and reliability, two very valuable aspects of any well-written report. Above all else, maintain consistency within the same report, thus, whatever you do, make sure you always do it the same way, even if it is incorrect; if the same style is used, the report will make sense.

Title Page, Abstracts, Titles and Running Head

The running head is placed at the top of every page in an APA report and is made up of a portion of the title. Often during editing and reading of long reports, pages are removed and collated in a different order; thus, the running head ensures that reports do not get mixed. However, reports in high school rarely are long enough to worry about this; therefore, do not use a running head. Also, long papers are often summarized into an abstract which also aids in indexing published papers for easier retrieval. Again, since high school papers are not that long and are not being published, do not include an abstract.

APA papers always have a title page as the first page and is numbered as such. This page does not contain any graphics and content is centered on the page both horizontally and vertically. We will deviate from APA here a little to meet the needs of high school so include the title, the teacher and the date. You can also include the course and the school if you wish. Use proper title formatting by capitalizing key words and use proper punctuation. Do not underline anything on the title page. If you use a title page, you must repeat the title centered, but not underlined, at the top of the first page of the report. Also, if you use a title page, the reference page title is also centered, but not underlined at the top of the reference page. If you would like to forgo the use of a title page, which does make sense since high school papers are not published and are usually short, we will borrow a convention from another style. If there is not a title page, the title of the report is centered and underlined at the top on the first page and the date is underlined in the top right corner of the paper. Also, if a title page is omitted, the reference title is also centered and underlined at the top of the reference page. The key is consistency.

If there are further titles for major sections within a long report, the title is centered, but never underlined, and if there are sub-section titles, they are not underlined and aligned flush with the left margin. Short, non-experimental-based papers typically do not require interior titles or sub-titles so only use them if absolutely necessary.

Spacing

APA papers are always double spaced (some software defaults to 1.5 spacing, so make sure you check). There are no extra spaces between paragraphs, titles, titles/sub-titles and paragraphs and references. Paragraphs are always indented and there are always two spaces following colons and end-of-sentence punctuation.

APA papers are always single-sided for ease of editing and copying. However, if you wish to save paper, it will be acceptable to double side your work. Again, this does not agree with APA, but makes sense for high school.

Special Wording and Punctuation

Two APA format issues are fairly widely known. The entire paper is to be written in past, third-person or non-person tense. Actually, this is not quite as true as people believe and numerous exceptions exist for special conditions. For example, conclusions can be present tense. The task of maintaining proper tone and tense because quite a hurdle for high school students and the focus really should be on completing proper science. So we will focus on consistency; decide what tone and tense you wish to use or think is appropriate and apply it consistently throughout the paper.

The second issue deals with contractions. Often, students are told that abbreviations (short-forms) and contractions (words like can't) should not be used. Actually APA does not specify this exactly but outlines very specific rules about how to use abbreviations which often contradict other grammar rules that are quite entrenched in other papers. This creates quite a bit of confusion and ultimately errors. So, do not use abbreviations or contractions.

However, often scientific reports require the use of units such as grams. It is appropriate to use the proper SI short form for units. Keep in mind proper grammar. If something is more than one word when written in full, this is also reflected in the abbreviation. For example 40 grams becomes 40 g not 40g. The 40g version has developed and become commonplace due to text messaging which can limit character use so saving space is a paramount. This is improper spelling and should not be used.

Always use the metric system in terms of proper units and writing numbers. If numbers are large, consider using scientific notation but never use spacing or commas to separate numbers (this is an American convention). In addition, conventions exist for how small numbers are written as well. Numbers zero to twenty are written out in full if they are countable or qualitative, but not if they are part of a measured quantity. Numbers greater than 21 are expressed numerically.

Finally, we should outline some grammar issues, some of which are APA related and some are just for consistency. There can be considerable differences between American, Canadian and British grammar rules and different institutions often adopt an intermingling of these so some clarity is needed for consistency. Here is a list of the most common rules we will observe:

refer back should just be refer
towards should be toward
irregardless should just be regardless
regards should just be regard
its for possessive; it's represents the contraction of it is (although, remember contractions should not be used)
if you use however, moreover, therefore and etcetera, you can use comma, word comma sometimes, but you can always use ; word comma so use ; word comma—for examplethis represents a safe approach;
therefore, lets incorporate this into all of our work.

Prepared by K. Zuber

