WRITING CENTER
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Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

Basic APA Format

When you write a paper, often times your professor will ask you to format it according to specific guidelines. These guidelines are used for a number of reasons. First, it sets a standard for the look and style of your paper, making it easier for a professor to grade it. It also helps you properly document your research sources and avoid plagiarism. Different classes will use different types of formatting. For example, English classes typically use MLA format (see our handout on MLA for more information). However, psychology classes, and other scientific disciplines, often use APA format. APA stands for The American Psychological Association. The following handout will provide a basic explanation of APA format as well as a sample document in APA format. You can always look to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, Sixth Edition for more information.

Basic Features of the APA Style

- Use Times New Roman font, 12-point size.
- Double-space the whole paper.
- All margins should be set to 1 inch.
- Every page should have a header included at the top left side, along with page numbers inserted at the top right side.
- Include a page header at the top of every page (called a “running head” in APA). Insert page numbers into the top right of the header. Then type "TITLE OF YOUR PAPER" in the header using all capital letters. Align the title to the left. The running head is a shortened version of your paper's title and cannot exceed 50 characters including spacing and punctuation. This “running head” will appear on every page of the paper.
- Most APA papers have four major sections: a title page, abstract, main body, and
  reference page.

- APA papers begin with a title or cover page as the first page.

Features of the Title Page

The "title page" of an APA paper is the very first page. This page should only have the information on it described below. The main body of the paper does not start on this page.

- At the top of your title page, you will include the page number in the upper right hand corner.
- Your title page will also include the "Running Head "described above.
- In the center of the title page, include the title of the paper (no **bold**, *italics*, or underlining), below that add your name, and below that add your school affiliation. (There is a sample at the end of this handout.)

The Abstract

In many APA papers the second page (after the title page) contains an "Abstract." This may not always be required, so be sure to check with your professor if you are unsure. An abstract is basically a summary of your paper in one paragraph.

Features of the Abstract

- At the top of the page, centered, type "Abstract" (no **bold**, *italics*, or underlining).
- Under the "Abstract" heading, and without an indentation, write a brief and clear summary on the key points of your paper. This should contain your topic, research questions, methods, results, participants, data analysis, and conclusion based on your findings. You can also tie it to other research or make predictions.
- Limit the abstract to 150 to 250 words.
- Optionally, you can include keywords. If you choose to do so, skip to the next line, indent, and type "*Keywords:*" followed by a list of words that best describe your work.

Main Body

In the Main Body of your paper, you will have an introduction followed by your main ideas and analysis. Some characteristics you'll want to pay attention to are

organization, writing style, bias, grammar usage and mechanics. You want to be sure to write clearly and concisely, and stick to factual information. APA papers are not focused on poetic, or emotionally charged language. For example, an APA paper would say: “the five year old cat walked half a mile in thirty minutes” rather than “the happy cat glided down the street swiftly and joyfully for a while.”

Features of the Main Body

- You can add subheadings to break up large sections of text. These subheadings should explain what is talked about in that section. Some typical subheadings used in APA papers are:
    - Introduction
    - Methods
    - Data Analysis
    - literature Review
    - Conclusion

  Your professor may tell you what subsections they want you to include in your paper, so pay close attention to the instructions. You can also refer to section **2.06-2.10** in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.

- Another next major feature of the Main Body will be in-text citations. This is how you cite your sources and avoid plagiarism. One of the best source for a complete guide on in-text citations is the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. Also https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/2/10/ is another good source of information on APA. We will briefly discuss some basic features of in-text citations below, and in the sample paper on page 5 of this handout:

About Parenthetical in-text Citations

When using parenthetical citations, try to keep them brief and to the point. Whether you use a direct quotation (add an author’s exact words), or choose to paraphrase (summarizing the author’s idea in your own words) you will also have to include citation information. Citations include the author or authors last names, the year of publication, and sometimes a page number, in parentheses. For example: (Carstensen, 1992, p. 199). If the source does not have page numbers, such as a website, then they can be

left out.

Adding Parenthetical in-text Citations

There are various places you can put in-text citation.

Direct Quote –This is when you use the exact words that the author used.

The citation can be placed at the end of the sentence, if that is where the quote ends.

Example:

Although some may disagree, the fact remains that “age is associated with an increased motivation to derive emotional meaning from life and a simultaneous decreasing motivation to expands one’s knowledge base” (Carstensen, 1992, p. 199).

The citation can also appear throughout the sentence. For example, if the author’s name is used as part of the sentence, then the year would follow the name, but the page number would still follow the end of the quote.

Example:

Carstensen (1992) explains that “age is associated with an increased motivation to derive emotional meaning from life and a simultaneous decreasing motivation to expand one’s knowledge base” (p.199).

Even if the quote is in the middle of a sentence, the citation should still follow the quoted information to show the difference between the quoted material and your own words.

Example:

She stated, "Students often had difficulty using APA style" (Jones, 1998, p. 199), but she did not offer an explanation as to why.

Paraphrasing – This is when you rephrase the quote in your own words. Similar to the rules for a direct quote, the citation for a paraphrase can appear throughout the sentence.

Example:

According to Carstensen (1992), people become more inclined to find emotional meaning in the later years of their life, but less inclined to expand their knowledge (p.

199).

The same rules apply even if there are multiple authors.

Example:

According to Carstensen and Jones (1992), people become more inclined to find emotional meaning in the later years of their life, but less inclined to expand their knowledge (p. 199).

You can list up to 6 authors. After 6, you can list the first author followed by “et al.”

Example:

The text states, "Students often had difficulty using APA style" (Harris et al., 2001)

Ellipses, Brackets, and Broken Up Quotes

Ellipses show omitted (or left out) words in a quotation:

Example:

“Age is associated with…decreasing motivation to expand one’s knowledge base” (Carstensen, 1992, p. 199).

Brackets show added words by you in order to interject information, correct a verb tense, or add any necessary wording. The brackets tell readers that the words are *yours*, not the source’s:

Example:

“Gender is not the sole determinant of woman’s [nor man’s] identity” (Hooks, p. 77, 1994).

Lastly, ‘broken up quotes’ refers to the action of separating one quote into two parts in one sentence. Usually, this is done to add analysis between the quote sections:

Example:

Alfred North Whitehead (1927) exemplified this point, noting “the ideal of a University is not so much knowledge as power” (p. 26), while also raising the

essential issue that the true goal of the university "is to convert the knowledge of a boy into the power of a man" (p. 27).

See the sample paper at the end of this handout for more examples.

The Reference Page

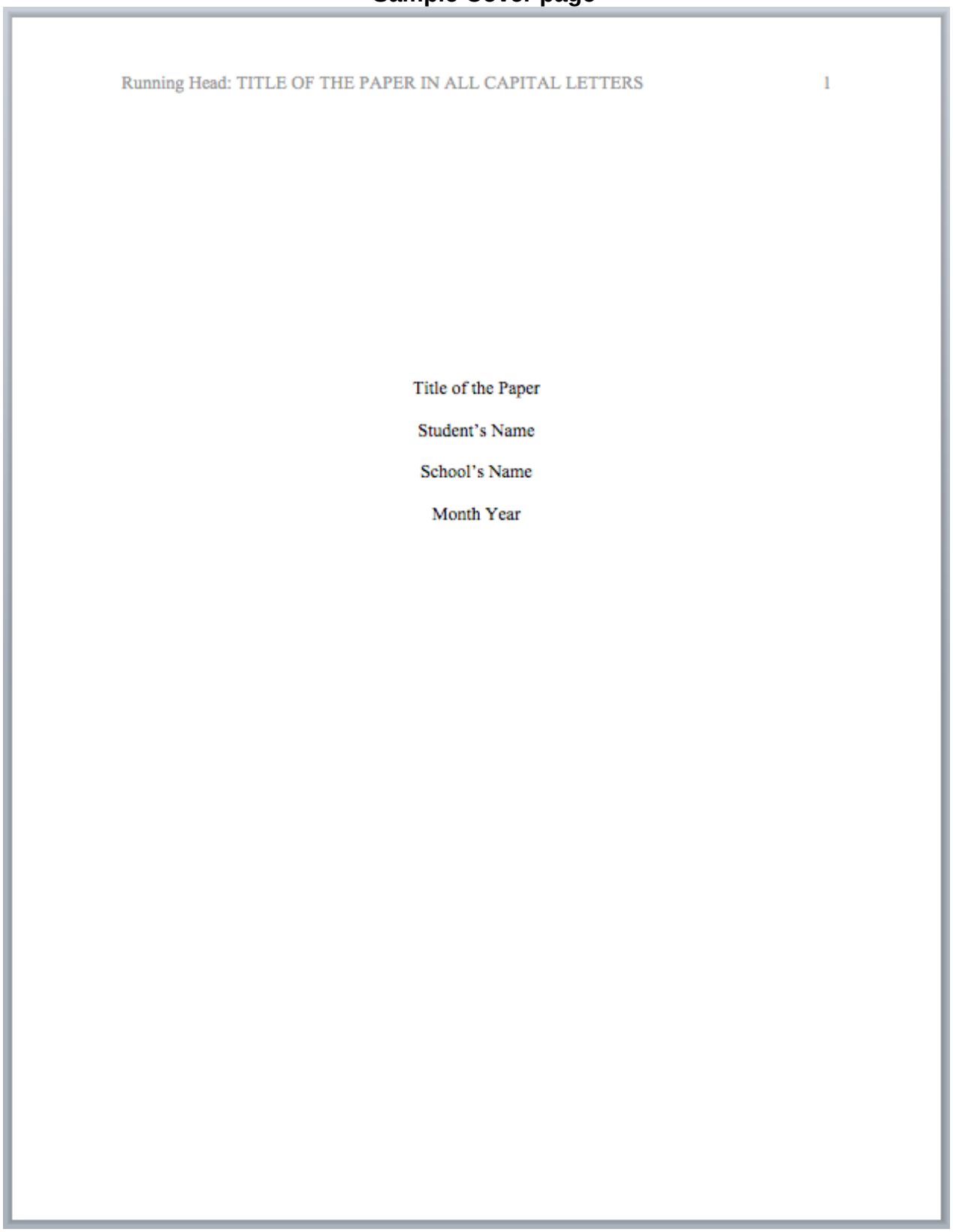
The References page is one of the most important pages in the essay. Here, you provide more information on the sources you listed in the in-text citations throughout the paper. For example, if you have used an online resource for research help, then you must cite it in order to avoid **plagiarism**. Plagiarism is the use of another author's work without providing credit. The punishments vary, but it can ultimately lead to suspension or even expulsion (see the Writing Center's Plagiarism handout for more information).

Features of the References Page

- All sources should be sorted alphabetically.
- All sources should have a *hanging indentation:* Here's how to do that in Microsoft Word: Within the "Format" area, click "Paragraph." In the "Indentation" section, click the drop down list under "Special" and choose "Hanging."

Figure 2 Image of the Paragraph menu in Microsoft Word

Sample Cover page



Running Head: TITLE OF THE PAPER IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS 1

Title of the Paper

Student's Name

School's Name

Month Year

Figure 3 Sample of an APA cover page

Sample APA Paper Page with Sample in-text Citations

INTRODUCTION

This is a sample APA paper. Mainly, it will focus on how to incorporate quotes and paraphrasing and how to cite sources in the text of an APA paper. Also, pay attention to the informative rather than literary style of the writing. Notice how the heading is in all capitol letters and this introduction section is explaining the main purpose of the paper.

DISCUSSION

The discussion section of an APA paper usually discusses the topic in a more in-depth way. There are several ways to add in-text citations to an APA paper that will be demonstrated in the next few paragraphs.

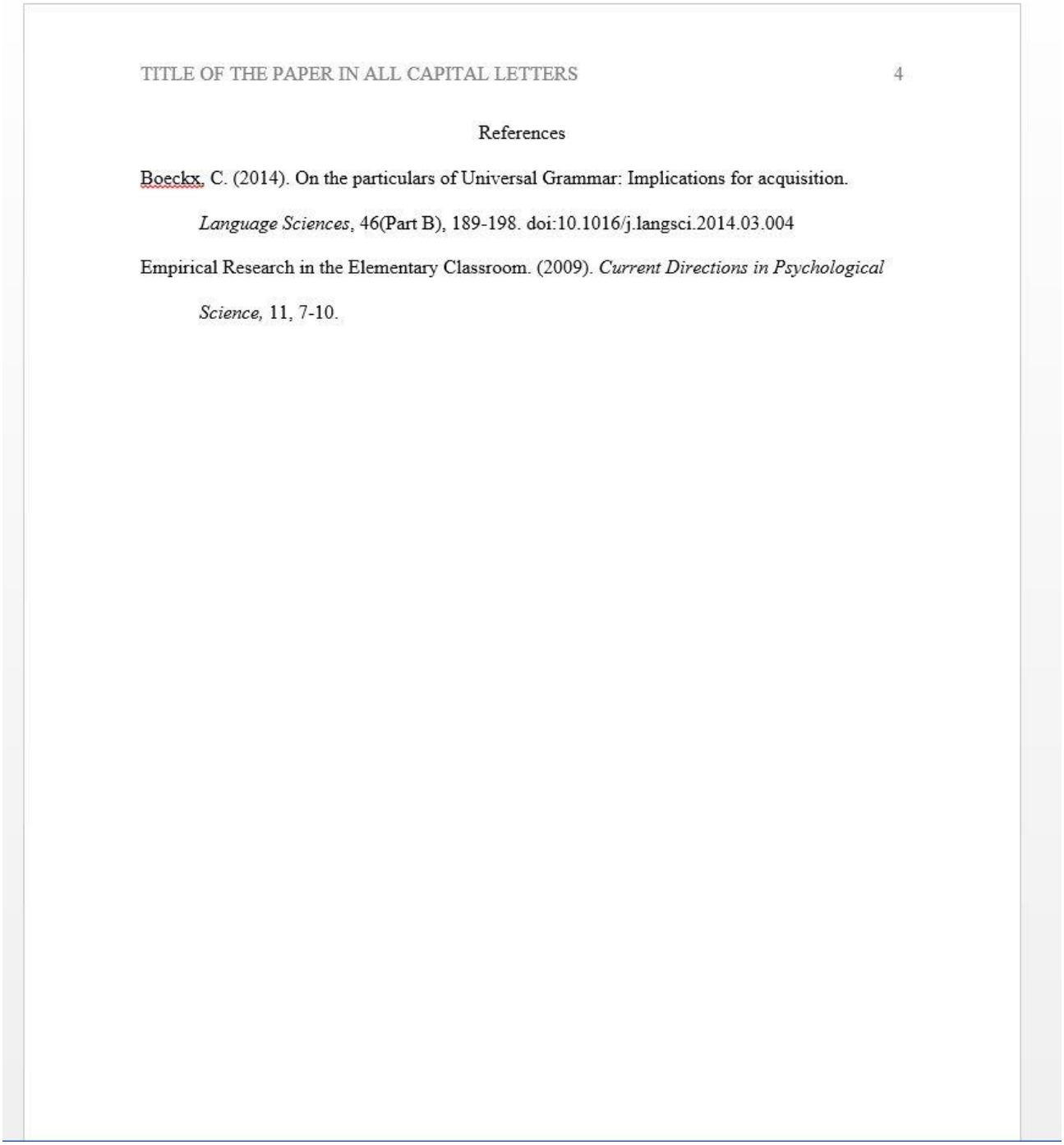
If you use the authors name in your sentence, you then put the year in parenthesis after their name, and the page number, if there is one, at the end of the sentence like this: Boeckx (2014) note that "previous accounts on variation that make a case for lexical and/or syntactic parameters" (p.123). Always make sure to explain in your own words why the quote is important. Also, make sure to create a new paragraph every time you introduce a new idea.

If you do not use the title or the authors name in the sentence, then the citation will go at the end like this: The study states, "The cues that aid the learner are identified and schematically integrated in the form of an acquisition algorithm" (Boeckx, 2014, p. 123).

Many people will explain an author's ideas in a summary format where they do not use direct quotes. This is called paraphrasing. Paraphrasing still needs to be cited. If you are making a general summary of the entire paper you do not have to include a specific page number. Here is an example: The study shows that language acquisition begins to occur as soon as a baby is born (Boeckx, 2014).

Figure 4 Sample of an APA page formatted

Sample reference page



TITLE OF THE PAPER IN ALL CAPITAL LETTERS 4

References

Boeckx, C. (2014). On the particulars of Universal Grammar: Implications for acquisition. *Language Sciences*, 46(Part B), 189-198. doi:10.1016/j.langsci.2014.03.004

Empirical Research in the Elementary Classroom. (2009). *Current Directions in Psychological Science,* 11, 7-10.

Figure 5 Sample of an APA 'References' Page