

**An APA Style Sample Paper with Instructions for Formatting, Citations, and References**

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## **Writing an APA Style Sample Paper with Instructions for Formatting, Citations, and References**

The American Psychological Association (APA) is a large scientific and professional organization, large enough to have established a style of academic writing and referencing standards commonly referred to as *APA Style*. There are numerous academic writing styles from different schools and organizations throughout the world, and APA Style is one of the most common and straightforward styles to use. Many departments and schools in The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (HSUHK) expect students to use APA Style on all written work. Therefore, it is expected that you will master the skills and expectations of APA Style in your English classes and transfer these skills to your writing in other courses. Some schools may expect their students to use a different writing style, so check with your instructors and school. Regardless of which writing style you are expected to use, it is wise to do your best to adhere to the expectations of the style. This can be a tedious task; but if you take the time to do it correctly, your instructors will likely be more convinced by your writing in general. This APA Style sample paper will not only explain how to use APA Style but will also serve as an ideal example that you should use for reference.

### **Formatting**

#### ***Margins, Line Spacing, Fonts and More***

The first thing you should do when beginning a new essay or report is to format your paper; this will save you time later. Like most writing styles for students, APA Style uses one-inch margins (1" or 2.54 cm) for the top, bottom, left, and right margins. Unfortunately, this is not the default setting for many writing software platforms, so you will have to manually adjust the margins yourself (hint: you should save your settings for later papers to avoid repeating this

step in the future). Next, you will need to use double spacing (2.0) between lines for the entire document. This is rather simple, but you would be surprised how often an extra space is incorrectly added between paragraphs. The title page, the title at the beginning of the paper, and the references heading should be *center-aligned*. However, all other headings, subheadings, and the general body of the text must be *left-aligned*. Next, a page number appears at the top of each page, in the header, flush with the right margin. You do not need to add a *running head* in the header; this used to be required in older APA Style guides but is no longer expected in the newest APA Style 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. After that, you should make sure the font you use is a *serif font* and at an appropriate size. The most common font used in academic writing is 12-point Times New Roman; it is highly recommended that you use this font in all your writing. All text in your paper must use the same font, including the titles, headings, page numbers, and references. Finally, the first line of each new paragraph in the body of your paper must be indented 0.5” (1.27 cm); as a reminder, do not add extra lines or spacing between paragraphs. In contrast, references use a *hanging indent* in which the first line of each new reference is flush with the left margin, and the rest of the reference is indented.

### ***Title Page, Titles, Headings***

The *title page* is the first page of your paper; it includes nothing more than the title of your paper, your name, and other identifiable information. The title appears first, three lines down from the top margin in **bold** font. Your name and student identification number should appear two lines down from the title. After your name, in the following order: the university’s name, the course name, your instructor’s name, and the date should appear (note: only the title uses a bold font; the rest of the information on the title page is a regular font). The second page of your paper might include an *abstract*; this example essay does not include an abstract, so you

will need to check with your instructor to see if you need to include an abstract for your paper. If you do need an abstract, the word “**Abstract**” appears at the top of the second page, center-aligned, and bold font, similar to the title.

The next page is where your essay, report, etc. would begin. Flush with the top of the page, the title appears again, centered, in bold font. Do not write “Introduction” at the beginning of your paper; it is implied that the first paragraph/s will be the introduction. For longer papers, after the introduction, headings and subheadings may be used to indicate and organize different sections of the paper. However, in shorter essays, headings and subheadings are generally not used; so again, check with your instructor for their expectations. Headings and subheadings all use a bold font, but some might be *italicized* as well. Most major headings and subheadings will be flush with the left margin; however, some minor subheadings will be indented to begin a new paragraph and followed by a full stop. Pay close attention to the way titles, headings, and subheadings are formatted in this example paper. It is typically up to you, the writer, to decide how to organize information in the paper. And therefore, it is also up to you to decide how many headings and subheadings will be appropriate to organize your paper; just be very careful how this is done. You may also choose to include tables, figures, and graphs in your paper; these should be set apart from the body of the text using a bold heading flush with the left margin.

There are some useful tips to consider when writing titles, headings, and subheadings. First, it is not uncommon for a title to take up two lines of text, but more than two lines is too long. Headings and subheadings, however, should be rather short and succinct; headings and subheadings longer than four or five words are too long. The most important consideration when writing titles, headings, and subheadings is to make sure each is written in title case. Title case basically means you capitalize some words and not other words. The first letter of the very

first and very last word of a title, heading, and subheading should always be capitalized. Next, for words that fall into the categories of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns, the first letter of the word should be capitalized. All other categories of words that include prepositions, conjunctions, and articles (a, an, the) should not be capitalized (except when it is the first or last word of the title, heading, or subheading). Interjections should typically not be used in titles, headings, and subheadings. It is important that you are familiar with English's eight parts of speech to write titles, headings, and subheadings (hint: look closely at which words in the title, headings, and subheadings are capitalized in this example essay).

## **Citations and References**

### ***In-text Citation Practices***

In-text citations are rather easy to make with APA Style; however, if you are careless, mistakes quickly get out of hand. Anytime (every time!) you refer to another source of information, you must include an in-text citation to indicate to your reader that the information/idea is not your own. There are only two possible ways to create an in-text citation using APA Style. Look at the different examples in Figure 1; there are several varieties of sources using both styles of in-text citations.

### **Figure 1.**

#### *Examples of In-Text Citations*

Example 1: Work from one author

- A. Camden (2009) indicates that the most common APA Style error is not referencing paraphrased sources.
- B. The most common APA Style error is not referencing paraphrased sources (Camden, 2009).

Example 2: Work from two authors

- A. Lee and Madges (2016) explain that work from two authors should include the word “and” between the authors’ surnames when written into the text, while an ampersand (&) should be included between the authors’ surnames in a parenthetical citation.
- B. Work from two authors should include the word “and” between the authors’ surnames when written into the text, while an ampersand (&) should be included between the authors’ surnames in a parenthetical citation (Lee & Madges, 2016).

Example 3: Work from three or more authors

- A. Zafonte et al. (2011) says that in the newest APA Style 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, sources written by three or more authors only require students to write the first author’s surname followed by the abbreviation “et al.” to indicate that there are more authors of the source.
- B. In the newest APA Style 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, sources written by three or more authors only require students to write the first author’s surname followed by the abbreviation “et al.” to indicate that there are more authors of the source (Zafonte et al., 2011).

Example 4: Work from multiple sources

- A. It is suggested that when a student includes information that is found in more than one source, they only use a parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence, and include all the sources in alphabetical order, separated by a semicolon (Camden, 2009; Lee & Madges, 2016; Zafonte et al., 2011).

Example 5: Work from an organization or a source without any indicated authors

- A. The Hang Seng University of Hong Kong (n.d.) finds that it is capable of excellent teaching and learning.

- B. The university is capable of excellent teaching and learning (The Hang Seng University of Hong, n.d.).

*Note.* When a source does not have a publishing date, simply use the abbreviation “n.d.” (no date) instead of a year.

**Example 6: Work from a secondary source cited in a primary (i.e., different) source**

- A. Westbrook and Saperstein (2014, as cited in Stefanie, 2015) clarify that using a secondary source cited in a primary source is allowable but generally should be avoided; instead, try to find the original source.
- B. Using a secondary source cited in a primary source is allowable but generally should be avoided; instead, try to find the original source (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2014, as cited in Stefanie, 2015).

**Example 7: Directly quoted sources**

- A. According to Hales et al. (2004), direct quotations “should generally be avoided in APA Style. Paraphrasing of the source is more appropriate. But if a student feels it is necessary to directly quote, they must indicate the page number as well, after the quotation” (p. 12).
- B. Direct quotations “should generally be avoided in APA Style. Paraphrasing of the source is more appropriate. But if a student feels it is necessary to directly quote, they must indicate the page number as well, after the quotation” (Hales et al., 2004, p. 12).

*End of Figure 1.*

Keep in mind that the above examples in Figure 1 are not exhaustive; if you come across a source that you are unsure of how to cite, refer to an APA Style 7<sup>th</sup> Edition guide to help you cite the source correctly. Pay close attention to the different kinds of punctuation that are used when

creating an in-text citation; there are parentheses, full stops, commas, semicolons, and quotation marks used with very specific intent. Also, pay close attention to when a space is used and not used after a word, number, or punctuation mark. APA Style is very specific in how punctuation and spaces are used, so do not make careless mistakes. Some common errors include a full-stop before the parenthetical citation at the end of a sentence; this is incorrect—the full stop always comes after the parenthetical citation at the end of a sentence. Figure 2 includes examples of this as well as other incorrect and correct citations.

## **Figure 2.**

### *Incorrect and Correct Citation Examples*

#### Example 1.

*Incorrect:* The full stop should come after the parenthetical citation. (Roy, 2008) Some students make this mistake.

*Correct:* The full stop should come after the parenthetical citation (Roy, 2008).

Some students make this mistake.

#### Example 2.

*Incorrect:* Inadequate and incorrect spacing between words, numbers and punctuation are also common errors( Tyler&Johnson,2015 ;Vance etal. 2009 ).

*Correct:* Inadequate and incorrect spacing between words, numbers and punctuation are also common errors (Tyler & Johnson, 2015; Vance et al., 2009).

#### Example 3.

*Incorrect:* “Forgetting to indicate the page number for direct quotations is another mistake” (Avril, 2014).

*Correct:* “Forgetting to indicate the page number for direct quotations is another mistake” (Avril, 2014, p. 8).

Example 4.

*Incorrect:* Using the first name or initials of an author rather than their surname is incorrect, as is using months or days in the date of publication (Sally J. Stahl, 24 April 2019).

*Correct:* Using the first name or initials of an author rather than their surname is incorrect, as is using months or days in the date of publication (Stahl, 2019).

### ***Creating References***

The first thing to understand about the reference page is that it appears on a new page separated from the rest of the essay. “**References**” should appear at the top of the page in bold font and center aligned. All sources should appear in alphabetical order by the surnames of the authors (not initials or first names). All sources must be formatted with a hanging indent in which the first line of a reference touches the left margin, and subsequent lines of the reference are indented one-half inch (0.5”). All in-text citations must have a corresponding reference. Moreover, do not include references that have not been cited in your paper. It is always best to try and use trusted academic sources in your writing; but that being said, there are numerous types and kinds of sources you could reference in your writing (e.g., academic journals, books, newspapers, webpages, videos, lectures, etc.). This example paper will only discuss three of the most common sources you will be using in your writing: academic journals, books, and web sources. In order to cite other kinds of sources properly, consult an APA 7<sup>th</sup> Edition Style guide. Each of the following sections describes the basics of creating a reference for these three common sources.

**Rules for All References.** The surname of the author/s always comes first followed by a comma and any initials for the other given names of the author; each initial should be followed

by a full stop. For example, “Dennis S. Carson” would be referenced as “Carson, D. S.” If there are multiple authors, do not change the order of authors listed on the source, even if they are not in alphabetical order—the first author listed receives the most credit for the work. For example, “Glen M. Campbell, Mary Buckhoff, and John Albert Dowell” would be referenced as “Campbell, G. M., Buckhoff, M., & Dowell, J. A.” (note: pay attention to how a comma separates each author and the final author’s name is preceded by an ampersand). Do not use an et al. abbreviation in the references; list all authors’ names no matter how many there are.

Following the names of the author/s, the publication year appears in parentheses, except for webpages; webpages should include the full date that you accessed the source. After the date, the title of the article, journal, or book will appear. Lastly, any other necessary identifiable information appears.

**Academic Journals.** The title of the article you find in a journal appears in regular font followed by a full stop. The title of the journal appears next, in title case and italic font. The journal’s title is followed by a comma and identifiable information such as volume number, the page numbers of the article, and a *DOI number*. Pay close attention to the following example references and note when and where punctuation, change in fonts, and spacing occurs.

*Examples*

Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (Year). Title of article. *Title of Periodical*,  
*volume number*(issue number), pages. <https://doi.org/xx.xxx/yyyy>

Cash, T. F. (2009). Caveats in the proficient preparation of an APA-style research manuscript for publication. *Body Image*, (6) 1–6. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2008.10.003>

Franz, T. M., & Spitzer, T. M. (2006). Different approaches to teaching the mechanics of American Psychological Association Style. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and*

*Learning*, 6(2), 13–20. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ854923>

*Note.* It is often best to reformat hyperlinks if they appear, that is, remove underlining and blue font from URLs when possible.

**Books.** Books are quite simple to reference. After the author/s’ name/s and publication date, the title of the book appears in italic font and title case. This is followed by the name of the publisher. Look closely at the examples:

*Examples*

Author, A. A. (Year of publication). *Title of work: Subtitle*. Publisher Name.

Shuster, K., & Meany, J. (Eds.). (2005). *Speak Out!: Debate and public speaking in the middle grades*. International Debate Education Association.

*Note.* For books written by an editor/s, simply insert “(Ed.)” for one editor or “(Eds.)” for multiple editors after their name/s.

Yale, G. (2002). *Explaining English Grammar*. Oxford University Press.

**Webpages and Websites.** These sources can be difficult to cite and reference properly as there is often no author or publication date to be found. Quite often, you will use the name of the organization in place of an author’s name. Additionally, you will typically not find a publishing date on a website, so use the date that you accessed the website beginning with the year followed by a comma, the month, and the day (note: you only need to use the year, however, with any corresponding in-text citation). Next, the title of the page you accessed, if possible, comes next, then the name of the website, and finally, a URL. Try to format URLs so that they are not hyperlinks; in other words, make sure the URL appears in black and is not underlined (this is not required, but it looks better). A full stop should not appear after the URL. In the below examples, you will notice how the URL is often offset from the rest of the reference due to its length; this is acceptable.

### *Examples*

Group name. (Year, Month Day). *Title of page*. Site name. URL

American Psychological Association. (2020, July 27). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Seventh Edition (2020)*. APA Style.

<https://apastyle.apa.org/products/publication-manual-7th-edition>

Purdue Writing Lab. (2020, August 8). *APA Style Introduction // Purdue Writing Lab*. Purdue Writing Lab.

[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_style\\_introduction.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html)

**DOI Numbers.** A Digital Object Identifier (DOI) is a unique number assigned to many sources (not all), to make retrieval and identification easier. These numbers usually appear at the beginning of an article in either the header or footer, so look closely. If an article has a DOI number, you must include it in your reference. Most articles from recent years will have a DOI number, but articles from the late past may not. Find the DOI number in the header in Figure 3.

### **Figure 3.**

*An Example of a DOI Number*

<https://doi.org/10.24839/2325-7342.JN22.3.154>



### **Other Writing Tips and Tricks**

*Using Acronyms and Abbreviations, Misc.*

Acronyms are common in writing and are a useful way to identify commonly known organizations, places, and phrases. You will have noticed the use of an acronym in the very first line of this example essay: “The American Psychological Association (APA) is a large scientific and professional organization.” Instead of writing “The American Psychological Association” numerous times throughout this essay, I simply stated the full name of the organization once and indicated the acronym in parenthesis (APA) that would be used throughout the rest of the paper. This saves time and makes it easier for your reader to process information. For longer phrases that would be too cumbersome to write multiple times in an essay, write the full name the very first time, indicate the acronym that will be used, and continue to use the acronym throughout the rest of your essay. However, for commonly known acronyms such as URL, you do not need to write the full phrase whatsoever.

Abbreviations are similar in usage as acronyms in that they help shorten long words and phrases. However, unlike acronyms, abbreviations should be used quite sparingly in your writing. In fact, for academic writing, using only highly used and standard abbreviations is advisable; never create your own. Four very common abbreviations have been used in this example essay, etc., et al., e.g., and i.e. You may be familiar with some of these but may not know their origins or uses. All four of these abbreviations represent Latin phrases that help to indicate particular information to the reader. Etc. stands for *et cetera*, which means “and so on.” Use etc. in lists to indicate there are many more items that could be added. Et al. stands for *et alii* and means “and other people.” E.g. stands for *exempli gratia*, which means “for example.” I.e. stands for *id est* and means “in other words” or “therefore.” Again, these abbreviations should be used sparingly; in fact, you should only use e.g. and i.e. within parentheses to briefly make a point or clarify information. Et al. should only be used with in-text citations and etc. should also be avoided whenever possible. For longer examples, you should write a complete

sentence that uses one of the phrases “for example” or “for instance.”

There are some other things to consider in academic writing. For instance, you may have noticed the use of italics for the Latin words in the previous paragraph; all foreign languages should be italicized when written alongside English. Likewise, you may have noticed key terms being italicized throughout this example essay. Any time you introduce a technical, possibly unknown word to your reader, italicize the font; but all subsequent usage of the term should be regular font. Contractions should never be used in academic writing. A contraction shortens two words into one word using an apostrophe. For example, “don’t” is the contraction of “do not.” Contractions are perfectly fine to use in speech or literary works but not in academic writing. Numbers 1-9 should be spelled out, for instance, one, two, five, eight; on the other hand, any double-digit number should use numerals including 11, 2.8%, \$2,534, 0.0019, and so on. Finally, there are websites available to help you with APA Style. Purdue Writing Lab and APA Style are great resources; these are cited below in the references.

## References

- American Psychological Association. (2020, July 27). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Seventh Edition (2020)*. APA Style.  
<https://apastyle.apa.org/products/publication-manual-7th-edition>
- Hughes, J. L., Brannan, D., Cannon, B., Camden, A. A., & Anthenien, A. M. (2017). Conquering APA Style: Advice from APA Style experts. *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, 22(3), 154–162. <https://doi.org/10.24839/2325-7342.jn22.3.154>
- Purdue Writing Lab. (2020, August 8). *APA Style Introduction // Purdue Writing Lab*. Purdue Writing Lab.  
[https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_style\\_introduction.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html)