

Third Edition

A Guide to Formatting in
Psychology



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A Guide to Formatting in Psychology (3rd ed.)

This book is a formatting guide that provides a synopsis of the American Psychological Association (APA, 2019) 7th edition publication requirements for formatting manuscripts and student papers. It includes instructions for the presentation of references in text, reference lists, tables, figures and statistics, heading levels, and issues of editorial style. The intention of the document is to inform psychology students about formatting papers and manuscripts (and others who are required to adhere to the APA's 7th edition publication manual), but it is limited in its content. That is, this guide includes a brief overview of 'what goes where' when writing research reports and essays for psychology, however, much more information about writing, rather than formatting, is available in the APA's publication manual and a number of other texts where writing is the focus (e.g., Burton, 2018; Findlay & Kaufmann, 2018; Taines, 2017).

There are a number of advantages in using this guide. Probably the most useful is that not only does it tell the reader about APA formatting, it is also presented in the format required of a manuscript. This approach has been taken as the book itself can also be used as an implicit reference guide. For example, you can see that there is an indent at the beginning of each paragraph and that the document is double-spaced. As the whole document is double-spaced, there is no need for additional spacing between paragraphs or after headings. Also implicit are notions such as, one sentence does not comprise a paragraph.

Ten years have passed between the 6th and 7th editions of the APA publication manual (2009-2019) and there have been a number of changes in the most recent edition. Changes generally reflect the increased use of technology and online citations, a relaxation in type fonts, and the importance of using bias-free and inclusive language. Some changes are small such as leaving only one space following a full stop at the end of a sentence, instead of the two spaces previously required. Other changes are more substantial including alterations to

some in-text referencing and references in the reference list. One other thing to note is that students are advised to adhere to the publications manual unless instructed by their teaching staff or institution to do otherwise.

Although this is not a writing guide, it is important to acknowledge that the current APA manual includes a chapter dedicated to the use of inclusive and bias-free language. These changes include using specific categories rather than generalisations, not using nouns to describe someone with a label, and gender-neutral pronouns. Essentially these suggestions aim to reduce bias based on individual differences such as race, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, biological sex, ethnicity, disability, or mental health diagnosis. For example, instead of using the pronouns ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘his’, ‘hers’, APA prefers using ‘they’ or ‘theirs’. Avoid referring to people using adjectives as nouns such as “drug users”. It is better to use a description such as “people who use drugs”. Sometimes there is a tendency to lump people together for example, “refugees” rather than “Sudanese people from a refugee background”. Language changes over time and often there are groups of people who disagree with the terms used to describe a particular group. Where possible you may ask study participants how they would prefer to be described or consult with advocacy groups for advice. For example, the traditional owners of Australia may prefer to be referred to as First Nations Peoples, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, while others use the term Indigenous Australians. There are many more examples in the manual. The point is to minimise the bias created and exacerbated by such labelling and the simplistic use of dichotomies that can marginalise certain members of the community, especially those in minority groups.

Basic Layout Guidelines

Font

The default font for most journals is still 12-point Times New Roman style (as used in this guide) when writing for psychology or other disciplines that adhere to APA guidelines.

However, one change from the 6th edition to the 7th edition of the manual is that font type has been relaxed. Authors can now choose to use 12-point Times New Roman, or Calibri, Arial, Georgia size 11-point, or Lucida Sans Unicode 10-point. Ordinarily these regular fonts are used, but there are some exceptions to this rule. For example, bold font is now used for all levels of heading, and in some instances, the bold font is also italicised (see page 7). There are some instances in which you use regular italic font including aspects of referencing in your reference list (see pages 18-25), when labelling tables and figures (pages 9-11) and with specific aspects of presenting statistical information (see pages 12-13). Previously italics were used when referring to preferred linguistic style. This has now changed to using quotation marks for example, use a singular pronoun of “they” rather than *they*.

Spacing

Just as this formatting guide is presented, the text of your assignment is always double-spaced which means that there is a full line blank between each line of text. Because the text of your document is all double-spaced there is no need to insert an extra space between paragraphs or between references. Most software packages permit you to set your document up to be double-spaced or have a function for easy conversion of your document on completion. There are some exceptions to this rule. One exception is with regard to the title page. As you will see on the title page of this guide, there is an extra space between the title and the author and affiliation. You can also have at least one extra space before the Author Note. Tables can be single, one and a half, or double-spaced depending on the size and best presentation of the information. There is a double-space before and after a table or figure if there is text before or after. As mentioned, another spacing change between this and the last edition of the APA manuals is that you now only leave one space after a full stop rather than two.

Margins

There are no changes to margin size. Margins should be set at 2.54cm (or 1 inch) at the left, right, top and bottom of the page. This is a default size in programs such as Microsoft Word. Sometimes these margins may need to be altered for example, if binding a thesis you may need to use a 4cm margin on the left to allow for binding. You will also insert a ‘header’ for the running head of your assignment. A change from the 6th edition is that you no longer need to use the words “running head” before the actual running head. For example, in the last edition of this guide, the running head was “running head: FORMATTING GUIDE” whereas you can see it is now simply “FORMATTING GUIDE.” Text is aligned to the left, which means that you will end up with a ragged right-hand side as is the case in this guide.

Numbering

Pages are numbered at the top right corner using Arabic numerals (i.e., 1, 2, 3). Number all pages starting with the title page. More details regarding the content of research reports (sometimes called laboratory, lab. reports, or prac. reports, reflecting psychology’s emphasis on the scientific method) and essays, appear later in this text. If you are producing a longer document that requires forward pages such as contents and tables pages, these rules differ. Forward pages are numbered using lower case roman numerals (i.e., i, ii, iii) and then Arabic numerals commence with the text proper (as have been used in this document). Tables and figures are also numbered consecutively with Arabic numerals and have capital letters when referring to a particular table (e.g., ‘Table 1’). So, if you are referring to a table or a figure as a noun, you capitalise for example, “please see Table 1 below for descriptive data pertaining to all outcome variables”. You do not capitalise if talking more generally about tables or figures; if the number comes before the noun. For example, “the second figure and the first table provide a visual depiction of the data”. The first table is numbered Table 1, then Table 2, as are figures (i.e., Figure 1, Figure 2).

There are also certain rules regarding the expression of numbers in the text of your document. If a number is less than 10 it is usually written as a word (e.g., there are three ways to express...). However, there are also exceptions to this rule. If the number represents a precise measurement or is grouped for comparison with another number, use a numeral. For example, “the author wrote a one-sentence paragraph”... versus ... “the author wrote 1 of 14 sentences in...”. The other noteworthy exceptions to the rule about expressing numbers under ten as figures rather than written words, is when you are referring to time, dates, ages, samples, sub-samples, page and chapter numbers, tables, figures, and money. Hence, in this text there are a few instances in which another section of the text is referred to, and in those cases the Arabic number is used (e.g., see page 8). Other examples of the above exceptions are; “The experience continued for 3 days and 5 hours...”, or “There were 3 times as many people impacted which is a 5% increase.” Also note that the first word in a sentence is never expressed as an Arabic number. For example, you can write “Thirty participants were recruited for the study,” but not “30 participants were recruited for the study.”

Headings

Headings are used to organise a manuscript and assist readers in knowing where to find information. For example, if you want to know how many people participated in a study, or the characteristics of the sample (e. g., age), you would go to the subsection labelled “Participants” in the method section of the paper. Research reports, essays and articles may have between one and five levels of heading. How many levels you use depends on the length and content of the document. As two or three levels are usually adequate, their application is outlined in detail below. However, just in case you need more levels due to something like the complexity of a research design, the five levels of heading are illustrated below in Table 1. If you need three levels of heading such as is the case in this document, you use the first 3

of 5 headings below, whereas if 2 of 5 were needed you would only use the first two of the headings listed.

Table 1

The Five Levels of Heading According to the APA’s 7th Edition Publication Manual

Heading level	Example
Level 1	Centred Upper and Lower Case Font in Bold Type Text begins as a new paragraph
Level 2	Upper and Lower Case Font in Bold Type Aligned to the Left Text begins as a new paragraph
Level 3	<i>Upper and Lower Case Font in Bold Type, Italicised and Aligned to the Left</i> Text begins as a new paragraph
Level 4	Indented Upper and Lower Case Font in Bold Type, with a full stop. Text begins on the same line as the heading, hence the full stop.
Level 5	<i>Indented Upper and Lower Case Font, Bold Italic, Ending With a Full Stop.</i> Text begins on the same line as the heading, hence the full stop.

The title is not counted as a heading level. The title of your report or essay is written in upper and lower case letters, usually using bold 12-point Times New Roman font, and is centred on the page. The title is used at the beginning of the manuscript or assignment, so you do not need to use the word “Introduction”. It is a concise and specific statement regarding the topic and is recommended to be between 10 and 12 words in length. A good title is simple, does not contain redundant words such as “A study that examines” and informs the reader precisely regarding the content of the manuscript. Of course, the title also appears on the title page.

As mentioned earlier, a running head is an abbreviated title that appears on the top left of each page. A running head is no more than 50 characters long (including punctuation and spaces), is written in UPPERCASE LETTERS, and should be aligned to the left within the

header. Although running heads and page numbers are a requirement of manuscript submission for publishing, they serve to help keep your paper organised when constructing an assignment. Therefore, it is good practice to include a running head.

Two Levels of Heading

In order to decide how many levels of heading you require, simply ascertain how many sub-sections you wish your document to have. For example, in a simple experiment two levels of heading are usually sufficient where the method, results, discussion and references section headings comprise the first level (as they are deemed to be of the same level) and participant, materials and procedure sections of the method comprise the second level. When using two levels of heading the first level is written in upper and lower case letters, in bold font, and is centred on the page. The second level also uses upper and lower case letters, appears flush left and is bold as demonstrated below, with the text starting under the heading.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study comprised.....

Materials (or Instruments)

A survey battery included.....

Procedure

Following approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee.....

Results

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version

(continue text)

Three Levels of Heading

This document has been formatted using three levels of heading. When using three levels, the placement of headings is the same as two levels with one exception; the next break down in heading type (the third level) is bold and italic.

Results

Assumption Testing

Normality, Linearity and Homogeneity of Variance

In order to assess the status of... (continue text)

Tables

Tables are often used in the results section of a research report to display data in a concise fashion. Data is arranged in columns and rows so that they are easy to read and so that quick comparisons can be made between numbers that may represent information such as, means of specific cases, levels of variable/s, or correlation coefficients. There is no need to use a table when only reporting a small amount of data; it can be presented in text. A general rule is if you are only reporting 2 or 3 numbers, include them in the text of your report. For example, “Participants ranged in age from 17-54 years ($M = 26, SD = 15$).” If you are presenting approximately 4-20 pieces of data, a table is more appropriate. Tables may include information other than numbers such as a list of stimuli used in an experiment. The examples on the following page show how tables are presented according to APA formatting guidelines including the formatting and font type for titles. Tables must be referred to in text, for example, “Table 2 presents some fictitious descriptive data, including confidence intervals,” and “Table 3 presents fictitious correlation coefficients.” Note that Table 3 has n denoting a sub-sample (i.e., the staff group only rather than both staff and student data that is presented in Table 2).

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Full and Part-time Staff and Students on the ABC Satisfaction with Life Scale

Group	<i>M (SD)</i>	Range	95% CI
Full-time staff	19.29 (7.85)	0-49	[16.93, 21.65]
Part-time staff	29.08 (12.53)	0-50	[25.31, 32.84]
Full-time students	16.29 (7.87)	0-43	[13.92,18.65]
Part-time students	22.45 (9.04)	0-44	[19.74, 25.16]

Note. *SD* = Standard Deviation; *CI* = Confidence Interval

Table 3

Intercorrelations Between ABC Satisfaction with Life Subscales for Staff (n=44)

Subscale	1	2	3	4
Global	—	.68**	.71**	.54*
Peer		—	.82**	.60*
Organisational			—	.44*
Occupational				—

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figures

Illustrations other than tables are referred to as figures (e.g., a graph or drawing). If the content you wish to display can be done so using a table, then that is the preferred option as a table provides accurate numerical or descriptive information whereas a figure requires the reader to estimate values. Sometimes a figure is the desired option as they provide a quick way of glimpsing overall results. Figures must be referred to in text, for example, “Figure 1 is a bar graph that presents fictitious data denoting differences between volunteer and professional telephone counsellors with respect to their mean level of reported work hassles.”

Figure 1

Differences in Ratings of Operational Hassles Scores by Telephone Counsellor's Occupational Status

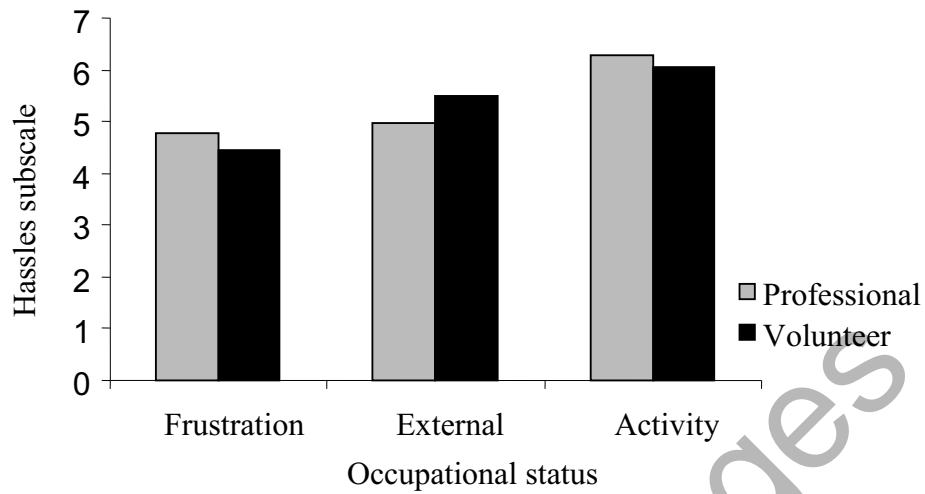


Figure 2 is a line graph that presents the same information as is found in Figure 1.

Figure 2

Differences in Ratings of Operational Hassles Scores by Telephone Counsellor's Occupational Status

