

Sample APA Paper for Students Interested in Learning APA Style 7th Edition

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Abstract

The abstract should be a single paragraph in block format (without paragraph indentation), and the appropriate length depends on the journal to which you are submitting, but they are typically about 200 words. (Students should consult their instructor for the recommended length of the abstract.) Section 3.3 of the APA manual (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020) has additional information about the abstract. The abstract is important because many journal readers first read the abstract to determine if the entire article is worth reading. The abstract should describe all four parts of a quantitative, empirical paper (i.e., Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion). Consider writing one or two sentences summarizing each part of a paper, and you'll have a nice abstract. And notice that keywords describing the paper typically appear after the abstract, although these may or may not be necessary for a student paper.

Keywords: APA style, sample paper, research, writing

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Before getting started you will notice some things about this paper. First, everything is double-spaced. Second, margins are 1-inch wide on all sides. Third, there are several headings in bold used throughout to separate different parts of the paper. Fourth, there is (almost always) exactly one space after each punctuation mark. Fifth, the upper left of each page has an abbreviated title (called a “running head”) in all capital letters, and the upper right has the page number. Try to pay attention to all of these details as you look through this paper.

Now that those details are out of the way, you should know that this first part of the paper is called the “Introduction” section, yet it does not have a heading that actually says “Introduction.” Instead, the title of the paper is typed at the top of the first page; be sure to center the title and put it in bold). The APA’s journal article reporting standards (JARS) provide a lot of detail about what should go in the Introduction section; see section 3.4. of the APA (2020) manual.

In brief, in this section you would often start with a topic paragraph that introduces the problem under study. The importance of the topic should be pretty clear from the first paragraph or two of the Introduction. The bulk of the Introduction section is background literature on the topic. Here a literature review is often very helpful to provide a theoretical or empirical basis for the research. Try to provide the reader with enough information on the topic to be able to conclude that the research is important and that the hypotheses are reasonable. Any prior work on the topic would be useful to include here, although prior work that is most directly related to the hypotheses would be of greatest value.

Remember to cite your sources often in the Introduction and throughout the manuscript. Articles and books are cited the same way in the text, yet they appear different on the References page. For example, an article by Cronbach and Meehl (1955) and a book by Bandura (1986) are written with the authors' names and the year of the publication in parentheses. However, if you look on the References page they look a little different. Remember that APA style does not use footnotes or anything like that for citations. Three other things about citations are important. When a citation is written inside parentheses (e.g., Cronbach & Meehl, 1955), an ampersand (“&”) is used between authors' names instead of the word “and.” Second, when citing an author's work using quotations, be sure to include a page number. For example, Rogers (1961) once wrote that two important elements of a helping relationship are “genuineness and transparency” (p. 37). Notice that the page number is included here. Unless a direct quote is taken from a source, the page number is not included. Third, if you have more than two authors, the in-text citation would have the first author's last name followed by “et al.” (The period follows “al” but not “et” in “et al.”) So even though Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz all contributed to a 1998 article on the Implicit Association Test, the citation would just be Greenwald et al. (1998).

The last section of the Introduction states the purpose of the research. The purpose can usually be summarized in a few sentences. Hypotheses are also included here at the end of this section. State your hypotheses as predictions (e.g., “I predicted that...”), and try to avoid using passive tense (e.g., “It was predicted that...”). (Yes, it's perfectly fine to use pronouns such as “I” and “we” in an APA-style paper.) You will notice that hypotheses are written in past tense because you are describing a study you have finished.

Method

The Method section is the second of four main parts of an empirical paper (see Section 3.6 of the APA [2020] manual). (Be aware that some papers are reviews of the literature and therefore would not have a separate Method section, whereas some other papers are qualitative research reports that would have different reporting standards.) There are typically three or four major subsections in the Method although there can be more. These subsections are separated by headings which are described in section 2.27 of the APA (2020) manual.

Participants

This brief section describes the people who participated in your study. (They should be called “participants,” not “subjects,” by the way.) Mention the number of participants, the percentage of female and male participants, the mean age (where “mean” is abbreviated *M*), and their ethnicity or cultural background. Any other demographic information would be appropriate here.

Research Design

Experimental studies often have a section in the Method describing the design of the study. Typically the independent variables in the study would be described here. For example, the study might involve a 2-by-2 design with one independent variable being treatment/control conditions and the other independent variable being perhaps a demographic variable. It would be helpful to describe dependent variables in this subsection as well.

Measures

This section describes the tests or instruments used to collect data. It would be appropriate to describe any questionnaires that you used. For example, if you used the Marlowe-

Crowne Social Desirability Scale in your research, you may say that the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSD; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) comprises 33 true-false items that measure social desirability. You would also provide the reader with information regarding the MCSD scores' reliability and validity. Do this for each and every measure used in the study. In the event that the purpose of your paper is to develop a new questionnaire, you may wish to describe reliability and validity in the Results section (see below). However, you would only do this for a scale-development project.

The Measures section of the Method is where you often see a third level of heading. Because of this, I'll make two points about headings below.

Format of Headings

Even though I'm getting a bit off topic, this section is a subsection within the Measures section. We know this because the "Format of Headings" heading is in italics, whereas the "Measures" heading above it is not. Thus, "Method" (bold and centered) is the main section, "Measures" (bold and flush left) is a subsection of the Method, and "Format of Headings" (bold, italicized, and flush left) is a subsection of the Measures section. The APA (2020) manual shows the five possible levels of headings in section 2.3. It's not likely that a paper would use more than three levels, but it certainly is possible.

Organizing Ideas

Headings and subheadings can help you to organize your ideas. Some advice I would give is to use lots of subheadings when writing a paper because, in my view, this can help to organize one's ideas. Sure, it's possible to overdo it, but think of headings as an outline, and make sure that you write about whatever the heading says in that section.

Procedure

This section describes in great detail the data-collection procedures. Describe how participants were recruited, whether they participated alone or in groups, how informed consent or assent was obtained, what they were asked to do, how they were compensated for their participation, etc. It is hard to make this section too detailed. You should describe the procedure in a way that another researcher could conduct the same study (i.e., replicate it) just by reading about the procedure.

Results

The Results section may be the most difficult to write, at least until you get a little practice with reporting statistical analyses. This is the section where the results of the data analyses are presented. Section 3.7 in the APA manual (APA, 2020) will help a little bit. It's often helpful to use tables (see Table 1) to help describe your results, especially when you have a lot of data to report, such as means and standard deviations. Table 2 provides another example of a table, this one describing correlations. Figures are also helpful to graph statistical results or diagram some aspect of the procedure. Figure 1 provides an example. Note that the format for tables and figures are similar in the 7th edition of the APA (2020) manual.

You may find it helpful to remind the reader of the hypothesis before presenting each result. It is also a good idea to tell the reader what type of data analysis was done (e.g., correlation, ANOVA) before it is presented. For traditional quantitative studies, state what alpha level you adopted; an alpha level of .05 is the standard. Although you should be sure not to try to interpret or explain your results here, it is appropriate to state whether or not your hypotheses

were supported. Just don't try to explain why the hypotheses were or were not supported; that's why you have the Discussion section.

Discussion

The Discussion is the fourth and final section of the paper (see section 3.8 of the APA [2020] manual). This is the part where you interpret and explain your results. Try to explain why you found what you did in your study. Is it what you predicted? If not, why? You may have to think about your results in a theoretically meaningful way. Also, how do your findings fit in with previous theory and literature? Are your results consistent or inconsistent with what has been found in the past? If they are inconsistent, how can you explain this? Include citations here when relevant, even if you already cited those sources in the Introduction. The explanation and interpretation of results will probably be the biggest part of the Discussion.

There are at least two additional parts of the Discussion. First, include limitations of the study. Describe the ways in which the internal or external validity of the study may have been compromised. Was the sample biased? Were the measures problematic? Think about what you would do different next time if you conducted a similar study. Future research ideas are often discussed when limitations are discussed.

Second, describe the implications of your findings to theory and practice. Answer the question, "How does my study add to psychological theory?" Also, think about practical applications of your findings. Perhaps give some additional directions for future research. When you've done that, you have written a paper in APA style!

References

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Table 1*Sample Table Describing Fake Data*

	Variable A		Variable B	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Group 1 (<i>n</i> = 100)	32.61	8.95	17.08	5.25
Group 2 (<i>n</i> = 100)	33.02	9.17	16.91	5.13

Note. These data were totally made up. They are just presented to give you an idea about how to present information in a table.

Table 2*Convergent and Discriminant Validity of Depression Scale*

Variable	Correlation
<i>Convergent Validity</i>	
Self-Esteem	.44*
Hopelessness	.51**
<i>Discriminant Validity</i>	
Social Desirability	.11
Anxiety	.22

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1

A Terribly Obvious Diagram of the Major Sections of a Quantitative Research Paper

