

# Learning apa format for students psychology essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In this paper we will explore how to properly format an APA style paper. This example will be of use to introductory psychology students who have never had any exposure to APA format. For senior students, this paper may serve as a useful reminder of the key elements of APA style.

Frequently, students are required to write psychology papers. However, in doing so, there are two broad skills that need to be learned. The first skill is related to the content of the paper. For example, a student writing a paper about dreaming is likely to incorporate the ideas of Freud (1953) or even Hobson and McCarley (1977). The second skill is tied to properly formatting the paper. In psychology, we make use of the format developed by the American Psychological Association (APA: 2001). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the various aspects of APA format for psychology students.

In psychology, there are two types of APA style papers. One format, which I call the quantitative paper, includes a method, results and discussion section. In statistics and research methods courses, you will tend to adopt the quantitative approach. I have published a number of articles in this format (e. g., Dyce & O'Connor, 1994). In this course you are not collecting and analyzing data, therefore, you do not include subtitles for the methods, results and discussion sections. The paper that you are going to write is a qualitative paper. This style of paper does not involve statistical analyses, rather, it involves a synthesis of ideas (e. g., Dyce, 1994).

## 1) Title Page

The first thing students need to learn how to master in APA format is the title page. First, you will notice that the title page is numbered in the upper right corner. In fact, all page numbers are marked in the upper right hand corner. Please note the margins are one inch all the way around and the entire content is double spaced with 12 point font. As well, a good suggestion is to use "Times New Roman" for the text font.

Second, you will notice something called "Running head." To access the header in Microsoft Word 2007, at the top of Word select "Insert." Under the tab "Insert" you will find something called "Header." Select Header and click on the first option called BLANK. Click on the greyed area and then type in the following... "Running head: LEARNING APA FORMAT." However, when you get to page two of your document, click on the head in the document. When you do so, look to about the center of tab section of Word and find DESIGN. Under this tab, select "Different first page." Then type the words "LEARNING APA FORMAT" (of course, your words will be different...) and click on the red X in the upper right hand corner of the document. If you do so, this will bring you back to your regular document.

Finally, on the title page of your article, your name, and institution are located in the center. In my case, the title of the paper is Learning APA Format for Psychology Students. Just below the title you will put your name. For many academic papers, there are multiple authors. The question is... who goes first? A natural answer to this question would be to put the names in alphabetical order. However, in academic papers, the individual who does most of the work is often the lead author. Below your name, you will put your institution, and in our case it will be "Universal University."

## 2) Abstract

The second page is called the Abstract. The word abstract is centered and placed at the top of the page. The abstract itself is a short summary of the paper. In fact, you might be wise to write the abstract after you have finished your paper. The publication manual suggests that the abstract has a number of characteristics. The abstract is accurate as it does not include information that does not appear in the body of the paper. It is concise (i. e., 120 words or less). The purpose of the abstract is to report, not to evaluate. “ A well-prepared abstract can be the most important paragraph in your article” (APA, 2001, p. 12).

## 3) Body of the Paper

The third page is where you start the body of your paper. The title that you used on the first page of your paper is also used at the very top of the third page. In fact, the titles that appear on the first and third page are exactly the same. The title is centered.

In the first paragraph, you will want to broadly introduce your topic. Authors often begin with the “ broad strokes” of the research area they are about to describe. Next, you describe more specifically what you are going to talk about. You may take a paragraph or two to introduce your topic.

On the third and subsequent pages of the paper, there will be numerous opportunities to discuss other author’s ideas. Simply stated, you do not necessarily need to have an entirely original idea for a psychology paper (particularly a student paper). Making reference to another author’s ideas

can be done in two ways. You can either paraphrase an idea or cite the author directly. When you paraphrase, you are taking another individual's ideas and then putting them into your own words. If you paraphrase, you will have to indicate where the idea came from. For example, let's consider the following paragraph.

**There many views on dreaming. On the one hand, there is the Activation Synthesis Hypothesis (ASH: Hobson & McCarley, 1977). Proponents of the ASH believe that dreams are largely physiological, starting with bursts of electrical energy from the pons, with the cerebral cortex later trying to make sense of this energy. In sum, Hobson and McCarley (1977) do not believe that dreams are meaningful. On the other hand, individuals such as Freud believe that dreams are loaded with meaning. Freud (1953) suggested that there are two components to dreams. The manifest content is the storyline, whereas the latent content is the underlying meaning. According to Freud, “ blah blah blah” (1900, p. 52).**

You will notice that in this paragraph, I am paraphrasing and directly quoting authors. To avoid plagiarism, you will need to use one or more of these strategies. For example, in the above paragraph I paraphrase the ideas of Hobson and McCarley. In doing so, I do not directly lift these author's ideas (i. e., I am not using their ideas word for word). In brief, when using an idea from some source, you need to indicate where this idea came from. Not only is this proper formatting, but it also gives readers the opportunity to check the original source for themselves. You may be saying to yourself, “ how do readers know where to look?” This is why we have a reference section that is

found at the very back of the paper (we will talk more about this in a moment).

You will also notice that in the bolded paragraph that I directly “ quote” Freud. I am sure Freud never said “ blah blah blah” but you get the idea. Whenever you directly (exactly) use someone else’s ideas, you need to indicate the author, the year that the article/book was published and the page number from where the idea came from. It is very important to master this formatting otherwise you might be accused of plagiarism. Consider these factitious examples...

**Freud (1900) suggests that “ dreaming is the royal road to the unconscious” (p. 25).**

**“ Dreaming is the royal road to the unconscious” (Freud, 1900, p. 25).**

**Freud suggested that “ dreaming is the royal road to the unconscious” (1990, p. 25)**

You will note that in all three examples, the quote is exact, and the author, year and the page number are listed. If an article/book has multiple authors, the author’s names must appear in the body of the paper in the order that they are listed in the original work. Consider these factitious examples...

**Freud and Dyce (1900) suggest that “ dreaming is the royal road to the unconscious” (p. 25).**

**“ Dreaming is the royal road to the unconscious” (Freud & Dyce, 1900, p. 25).**

**Freud and Dyce suggested that “ dreaming is the royal road to the unconscious” (1990, p. 25)**

Notice the difference between the use of “&” and “ and”. The “&” (shift 7 on your keyboard) is called ampersand. Ampersand is used when you source or quote within parentheses, whereas the word “ and” is used outside of parentheses. For example, in the first example above, I use Freud and Dyce (1900) whereas in the second example I use Freud & Dyce, 1900, p. 25.

Let’s suppose you want to paraphrase my lecture ideas (or email) in your paper. The way to do so is as follows...

**It has been suggested that classical conditioning was developed by Pavlov in the early 1900s (J. A. Dyce, personal communication, October 5, 2005).**

However, personal communications will not appear in the reference section. In fact, it is one of the few exceptions where a cited author does not appear in the reference section. In general, an author that is listed in the body of paper must appear in the reference section, and vice versa. Use personal communications when the data is not recoverable.

I have noticed in recent years that many students use YouTube for presentations. If you use this kind of source for your paper, list it as follows in the body of your paper...

The date (2009, October 10) refers to the date when the video was watched.

Dyce (2009, October 10) indicates that...

#### 4) References

The final page of your paper is the reference page, and it occurs on an entirely new page. The reference page lists all of the references that you used in your paper. The word “References” appears at the top and is centered (see my example at the end of this paper). The authors are listed in alphabetical order according to the first author of the paper. For example, consider these factious articles.

**Freud, S., & Dyce, J. (2001)**

**Flinstone, F., & Rubble, B. (2001)**

**Cat, T., Dogs, J., & Fish, T. (2001)**

With this particular collection, the “Cat” article would appear first, then “Flinstone” and then Freud. You would not reverse the names in the references list. For example, it might be tempting to reverse the names Freud and Dyce, because they are in improper alphabetical order. However, for a single article, the order must remain the same way as it does in the original article. The lead author must remain the lead author.

The various sources that you use can take the form of books, journal articles, or a chapter from a book. The following are some examples of formatting that are loosely taken from the APA manual.



### **One author, journal article**

Dyce, J. A. (2000). The psychology of rats, cats, and wild dogs. *Journal of Animal*

*Behavior*, 34, 35-45.

### **Two authors, journal article**

Dyce, J. A., & Kulak, A. (2000). The psychology of selling a house. *Journal of Selling*,

50, 56-89.

### **Magazine Article**

Dyce, J. A., & Kulak, A. (2000, October 10). What's another word for thesaurus? *Science*,

450, 445-446.

### **Newspaper article**

Dyce, J. (2005, October 1). The marital benefits of the expression “ You are right” and “ I am

sorry.” *The Washington Post*, pp. A4.

### **Book**

Dyce, J. (1900). *How to live more than 100 years and not show your age*. Washington,

DC: American Publication Press.

## **Encyclopedia**

Dyce, J. (1980). The merits of procrastination. In the new encyclopedia Britannica (Vol.

25, pp. 50-51). Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.

## **YouTube**

Dyce, J. A. (2009, October 10). What is psychology? [Video file]. Retrieved from

You will notice for these references that the first line is flush to the left, and every other line is indented. In other words, the first line “overhangs” the other lines. You will also notice that there are a variety of ways in which

material can be cited. Pay close attention to the location of periods and spacing.

There are other sources that you could use for your paper, and the APA manual is filled with different ways in which material is cited (see chapter 4 of the 5th edition). If you have other questions about APA format, you could take a look at the manual. As of 2009, the 6th Edition has been published. In my opinion, the 6th edition is better organized than the 5th edition.

Alternative, you might conduct a “ Google” search using the key words “ APA format” and see what you come up with. Although there are many nuances to APA format, following the examples in this paper should give you a very good start on how to write a psychology paper.

#### 5) Final Comments

K. M. S Throughout this paper, I have discussed the basics of APA style. However, formatting is only one part of proper writing skills. More importantly, students need to learn how to write. Learning how to write academic papers is not an easy task and takes years to master. The three most important words for good writing are “ edit, edit, edit.” The goal of which is to be as clear and concise as possible. Often when composing something, it is difficult see our mistakes, and we often blur by them when reviewing. For this reason, it is useful to put your paper down for a day and then reread your work (alternatively, get a friend to “ proof” your paper). Allow yourself enough time to write as rushed work is easily identifiable. As an example, it took about one day to put this sample paper together. If you consider that I am familiar with APA style and write fairly well, the process of

putting your paper together is likely to take longer. Heed this advice and you should receive a good grade on your paper.

Additions provided by A. E. Finally, if you feel that more needs to be added to this paper or there are mistakes, I would ask that you download the paper, make the changes, initial the changes with a textbox (see below), and then email the paper back to me (jamie.dyce@gmail.com). I will then repost the sample paper to the website.