The Basics of APA Formatting

APA is the acronym for the American Psychological Association, a group that sets formatting guidelines for academic writing in the behavioral and social sciences. *As always, check with the professor’s instructions for the assigned paper in case it differs.

APA requires the essay to follow these formatting guidelines:
- One inch margins all around,
- ½ inch indentation
- Left aligned
- Include a title page
- Double spaced text throughout the entire essay
- One space after the period at the end of a sentence
- Use standard available fonts such as Times New Roman 12 pt, Calibri 11 pt, Georgia 11 pt, or Arial 11 pt

Title Page
- The title page text should be centered and double spaced.
- The actual title is properly capitalized, bold face, and three to four lines down from the top of the paper.
- Student papers include (a) author, (b) department and college, (c) course code and name, (d) instructor, (e) due date (spell out month and use four-digit year), and (f) page 1 at top right corner.
Abstract
APA requires an abstract for professional papers. Student papers do not require them unless instructed by the professor. The abstract will be its own page, with the word Abstract, centered and in bold, written on the first line of the page. An abstract is a single paragraph, without indentation, and usually 150-250 words in length. The abstract will be page two of your essay. This section is a concise, comprehensive summary of the purpose and content of the paper. Please note the running header here is only for professional papers or if required by a professor.

If keywords are used, Keywords is italicized and indented on the very next line. Use a colon after Keywords and list the key words, separated by a comma. The actual keywords are not italicized.

Abstract example

When institutions administer student evaluations of teaching (SETs) online, response rates are lower relative to paper-based administration. We analyzed average SET scores from 264 courses taught during the fall term in 3 consecutive years to determine whether administering SET forms online for all courses in the 3rd year changed the response rate or the average SET score. To control for instructor characteristics, we based the data analysis on courses for which the same instructor taught the course in each of three successive fall terms. Response rates for face-to-face classes declined when SET administration occurred only online. Although average SET scores were reliably lower in Year 3 than in the previous 2 years, the magnitude of this change was minimal (0.11 on a five-item Likert-like scale). We discuss practical implications of these findings for interpretation of SETs and the role of SETs in the evaluation of teaching quality.

Keywords: college teaching, student evaluations of teaching, online administration, response rate, assessment
Main Body
Main body begins on the very next page. Notice that you have a page number in the top right. This will be page two unless there is an abstract, which will make it page three. The title is restated, at the top, centered, in bold.

Example of main body

Heading Levels
Different heading styles are used when a paper consists of many large and detailed sections, which may overwhelm the reader. The paper may benefit from breaking up large sections into smaller subsections. APA has five different levels of headings to follow. Remember, in title case heading, most words are capitalized.

Note that the first paragraphs of a paper are understood to be introductory. Therefore, the heading “Introduction” is not needed. Do not begin a paper with an “Introduction” heading because the paper title at the top of the first page of text acts as the Level 1 heading. If a subsection is needed in the introduction, begin with a Level 2 heading.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Heading Style</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Centered, Bold, Title Case Heading</td>
<td>Results (Level 1, bold and centered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Left Aligned, Bold, Title Case Heading</td>
<td>Spatial Ability (Level 2, bold, left justified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Left Aligned, Bold Italic, Title Case Heading</td>
<td>Test One (Level 3, bold italics, left justified)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Indented, Bold, Title Case Heading, Ends with a Period</td>
<td>Teachers with Experience. (Level 4, bold, indented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Indented, Bold Italics, Title Case Heading, ends with a period</td>
<td>Teachers in Training. (Level 4, bold, indented)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example of heading level (outline format)

**Results** (Level 1, bold and centered)

Text begins as a new paragraph.

**Spatial Ability** (Level 2, bold, left justified)

Text begins as a new paragraph.

**Test One** (Level 3, bold italics, left justified)

Text begins as a new paragraph.

**Teachers with Experience.** (Level 4, bold, indented) Text continues on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.

**Teachers in Training.** (Level 4, bold, indented) Text continues on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.

**Teaching Assistants.** (Level 5, bold italics, indented) Text continues on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.

**Test Two** (Level 3, bold italics, left justified)

Text begins as a new paragraph.
The Reference page will be the last of your paper, but it is very important. This page ensures proper credit is given to those works who are cited within the paper. The different format options are determined by type of reference work such as book, journal article, website, or even video.

Note that the page numbering continues in the upper right-hand corner. The word Reference is centered and in bold. All references are double spaced. After the first line, all lines in a reference should be indented .5 inches from the left margin (hanging indent). Each source cited in the text of the paper MUST appear in the reference page. References are ordered alphabetically by author’s last name.

Example of a reference page

References


References used in creating this handout


Purdue Online Writing Lab (2021, October 28). *APA headings and seriation. Purdue OWL.*

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/apa_headings_and_seriation.html