

APA Frequently Asked Questions

(Using the 6th edition APA manual as a reference)

The First Few Pages

What should I include in my title and running head?

According to APA, “A good title is easily shortened to the running head used within the published article” (2010, p. 23). Thus, your title should be specific to your topic, and your running head should be a shorter version. In addition, titles should allude to both the general subject of the paper and the specific focus. For example, a title may read, Teaching Literature and Healthcare: A Humanist Approach. The general topic is teaching literature and healthcare. The specific focus is the humanist approach. The running head would likely read TEACHING LITERATURE AND HEALTHCARE. The subject and focus are clear, and the title is easily abbreviated to form a running head.

Try not to go overboard with your title. APA recommends limiting the title to fewer than 12 words (2010, p. 23). Making the topic succinct and fewer than 12 words lessens confusion and awkwardness for your reader.

What is an abstract? What should I include in my abstract?

The abstract is a summary of the essay. It should range from 150-250 words (APA, 2010, p. 27). Included in the abstract should be a sentence or two that introduce the topic and its significance, a few sentences that explain how the essay will explore and discuss the topic, and a sentence or two that allude to the essay’s conclusions. In other words, the abstract is a succinct summary of the essay.

Remember that the abstract paragraph is not indented and belongs by itself on the second page of the essay. Simply center the word, Abstract, at the top of the page, and begin the abstract paragraph on the next line. (The abstract paragraph itself is not centered.)

Does my title belong above the body of my essay, as well as on the title page?

Yes, your full title, using standard title capitalization should appear both on your title page and above the body of your essay (usually the top of the third page).

Should the words, Abstract, and, References, at the top of their respective pages be in bold print?

No, the words Abstract and References are not in bold, not underlined, and not in italics. Simply center them at the top of their respective pages.

Should there be any space between my header and the words Abstract and References?

No, the words Abstract and References belong on the top line of the page and are followed on the next line by the abstract paragraph and first reference citation, respectively.

** Remember that the entire essay is just double spaced, so the next line is the next double-spaced line.

For a great example of exactly what your essay should look like, see Figure 2.1 in the APA manual.

Citing Sources

How often should I include the years of publication of my sources?

The general rule about including a source's year of publication in an essay is once per source per paragraph *and* in every parenthetical citation. (A parenthetical citation is an in-text citation enclosed in parentheses.) See Sections 6.11-6.13 for APA's explanation of this.

What happens when there is more than one author of a source?

Within the body of the essay, follow the rules in Section 6.12.

(These rules differ when listing reference citations on the references page. See Section 7.01 for details.)

- For one or two authors, list all authors' last names every time.
- For three, four, or five authors, list all authors' last names the first time and the first author's last name followed by et al. every subsequent time.
- For six or more authors, list the first author's last name followed by et al. every time, including the first time.

How often should I quote a source? How often should I paraphrase?

APA is not terribly specific about this. However, the consensus among faculty seems to be to paraphrase rather than use quotations whenever possible—only using quotes to say something better than you could ever say it. Always remember, however, that your voice should remain the primary voice in the essay. Don't let your sources talk for you!

What are the rules of a block quotation?

Block quotations are used for quotes of 40 or more words. They are called block quotations because they form their own block of text within an essay. Every line of the quote will be indented once and double spaced (forming an indented block). There are no quotation marks around the quote (the block format and your introduction to the quote let the reader know it is a quote). And, the period follows the sentence rather than the parenthetical citation, which is different than the traditional in-text citation format. See Section 6.03 for a longer discussion of block quotations. Use block quotations sparingly!

Titles In-Text and on the Reference List

Notice that the punctuation and capitalization of some titles are different in the body of an essay than they are on the reference list. Listed are a few commonly used types of titles.

Book Title

- In-text: *The Place of Grammar in Writing Instruction*
- On the reference list: *The place of grammar in writing instruction*

Journal Title

- In-text: *Nursing Education Perspectives*
- On the reference list: *Nursing Education Perspectives*

Journal Article Title

- In-text: "Digital Object Identifiers: Are They Important to Me?"
- On the reference list: Digital object identifiers: Are they important to me?

How do I cite a quotation if there are no page numbers?

With the advent of online source material, this question is becoming more and more common. APA requires every quotation to include a page number, so what does a writer do when there is no page number? Essentially, you need to use a heading in quotation marks followed by a paragraph number. For example, "John Doe said hello" (2010, "Conversation of One," para. 2).

There is a nice, easy to follow discussion of the specific rules for non-paginated material in Section 6.05 of the APA manual.

Miscellaneous

If I'm listing three items (such as blue, purple, and red), should I include a comma before the "and"?

Yes, absolutely! See Section 4.03 of the APA manual to verify this fact.

What is the deal with numbers? When should I spell out numbers, and when should I write them numerically?

There are many rules about numbers given by APA in Sections 4.31-4.38. Generally speaking, numbers zero through nine are spelled out, and numbers 10 and above are in numeric form. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Consult the above sections to ensure you are writing numbers correctly.

I don't understand headings. What are they? How do I determine the level of heading?

Headings are used to aid the organization of an essay. A Level 1 heading is the general category; any sub-category under the general category would be a Level 2 heading. Any sub-sub-category under a sub-category would be a Level 3 heading, etc. The formats for each level of heading are found in Section 3.03. Please note: APA states that the introduction of an essay does *not* need a heading (2010, p. 27).

The levels of heading are as follows:

- 1 **Centered, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading**
- 2 **Flush Left, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading**
- 3 **Indented, boldface, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.**
- 4 ***Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.***
- 5 *Indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.*

For understanding, observe the following example:

A general category in an essay may be **Literature Review**. In a sub-category under Literature Review, the author wants to discuss the literature's **Methods** and **Outcomes**, each comprising a subcategory of the Literature Review category. Furthermore, under the Outcomes subcategory, the author wants to divide his or her discussion into **Positive** and **Negative** Outcomes. Thus, the author has five headings. Under which level does each heading belong?

Literature Review (Level 1)

Methods (Level 2)

Outcomes (Level 2)

Positive outcomes. (Level 3)

Negative outcomes. (Level 3)

Notice how specific APA is with capitalization, boldfacing, punctuation, etc. Be sure to pay special attention to these specifics as you work with headings, citations, title pages, and just about every other APA formatting issue.