

How to Do that Annoying APA Format Stuff: A Brief Overview of the 6th Edition

Scott W. Plunkett

California State University, Northridge

Authors' names should appear in order of their contribution to the manuscript.

Noh Wahnelse and I. M. N. Oyed

University of Invisible Students

Author Note

Scott W. Plunkett, Department of Psychology, California State University Northridge.

Noh Wahnelse, Department of Paranormal Experiences and Life Events, University of Invisible Students.

I. M. N. Oyed, Department of Anger Management, University of Invisible Students.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Scott W. Plunkett, Department of Psychology, California State University Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8255. E-mail: scott.plunkett@csun.edu

Abstract

The abstract provides a brief, comprehensive summary of the paper. Abstracts should be between 150 and 250 words; although this requirement varies depending on the source (e.g., journal). For a research study, the abstract should generally summarize the introduction, hypotheses, methods, results, and discussion. Otherwise, the abstract should highlight the major ideas of the paper. For example, this paper is designed to enlighten people how to use APA formatting through a somewhat silly example. Important considerations such as formatting, headings, citations within the text, and references are addressed (not undressed).

Keywords: APA, citing, formatting, 6th edition, referencing

How to Do That Annoying APA Format Stuff: A Brief Overview of the 6th Edition

This document is an overview of how to do an APA formatted paper as outlined in the Sixth Edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2010). My hope is that this document will help you in your academic and professional endeavors. I know learning APA styles seems like a hassle and can be scary (Dracula, Frankenstein, & Werewolf, 2006), but there are legitimate reasons the style was established (not just to cause you grief). Following the style guidelines provides a consistent structure for papers from different authors across many disciplines. This is especially important for editors and readers. Plus, your grade may depend upon your ability to follow these guidelines. Whoa! I bet THAT got your attention!

Overview of Headings

There are five levels of heading recommended by APA. These are Level 1, Level 2, Level 3, Level 4, and Level 5. All major headings (i.e., Level 1 Headings) are bold, centered, and title case. What is title case? Well, it means that each of the main words is capitalized (e.g., “Each of the Main Words is Capitalized”).

Subsection Headings

All subsection headings (i.e., Level 2 Headings) are left justified, bold, and title case. Notice there are no extra lines or spacing between headings and the preceding or following paragraphs. All text is double-spaced.

Sub-sub headings. The sub-sub headings (i.e., Level 3 Headings) are (a) indented, (b) bold, (c) sentence case (i.e., only the first letter of the sub-sub heading is capitalized), and (d) followed by a period. The text immediately follows sub-sub headings on the same line. By the way, these headings are actually not called “sub-sub headings”; I just like saying sub-sub. I also like saying “bubbles.”

I didn't really have anything to say in this paragraph, but I wanted to show that the next paragraph would be indented as usual. So, with that in mind, bubbles, bubbles, bubbles.

Other Notes About Headings

You should try to avoid having only one subsection. It is best to have at least two subsections in any section. Otherwise, there is little reason to use a subsection heading. This document assumes that your paper will only use three levels of headings. If you are using more levels of headings then refer to page 62 of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.

General Formatting Guidelines

This section will give a few notes regarding some general formatting junk that you may want to know. Woo hoo! What a bonus!

Margins and Fonts

Margins and fonts. The top, bottom, left, and right margins should be one inch. Use 12-point font. You should use a conservative, serif font type (e.g., Times New Roman, Cambria). By the way, serif font means that each letter has a little ledge to stand on. Sans (i.e., without) serif fonts (e.g., Helvetica, Calibri, and Arial) should not be used (except in tables and figures) because they are more difficult to read and increase eyestrain (bummer!). Do not use script fonts because some are just annoying (e.g., **Braggadocia**) while others are hard to take serious (e.g., **Comic Sans**).

Paragraphs and Spacing

Paragraphs should be indented 5-7 spaces or $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Make sure your indent is consistent throughout the whole paper. The best way to do this is to use the tab key on your computer. All 'sub-sub' (hey, I got to say it again) headings should be indented the same as other paragraphs.

Citations and the Reference Section

If a document you cite has only one or two authors, then cite it like so (Knowitall & Allknowing, 2002; Urkel, 1998). Notice that I used a semi-colon to separate the two different citations. Also, the citations are in alphabetical order by first author's last name within the parentheses (i.e., "Knowitall & Allknowing" came before "Urkel"). If there are three to five authors, then cite all the authors and date (Letterman, Leno, O'Brian, & Plunkett, 2005). If you use the same source cite again that has three or more authors, just put the first author followed by "et al." (e.g., Letterman et al., 2005). For six or more authors, use the last name of the first author followed by "et al." the first time you use the citation (Picky et al., 2002) and throughout the document (Pickey et al., 2002). According to Knowitall and Allknowing, if you cite the same source in the same paragraph, but the authors are not in the parentheses (such as in this sentence), then you do not have to give the year again.

If there are two citations from the same author in the same sentence, then you can cite it as such (Spears, 2004, 2007). Here is a quirky situation. If you are citing two citations that have the same author and the same year, such as Gas (2001a) and Gas (2001b), then distinguish them by putting an "a" and "b" after the date. This way you will know which "Gas" I am referring to.

No Date, Group Author, and No Authors and/or Date

Although it can be sad when you have no date (boo hoo sob sob), there is a solution (yippee!). When citing a source with no date, then use 'n.d.' instead of the year (Lonely & Needy, n.d.).

According to Bert and Ernie (2006), if you are citing a group or organization that authored a document, then spell out the group's name each time. The only exception would be if (a) the group's name is lengthy and unwieldy, or (b) the abbreviation is easily understandable. If

citing this type of group/organization, then use the full name the first time followed by the abbreviation in brackets (e.g., Department of Air Quality [DAQ], 2003). The subsequent source cites would just use the abbreviation (DAQ, 2003).

When citing a source that has no author or editor (e.g., a dictionary or encyclopedia), then just put the name of the book followed by the date. For example, plagiarism refers to copying somebody else's work or ideas and trying to pass it off as your own (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1993).

How to Cite Quotations

Here is how you cite an exact quote: "I am sorry, but I am never going to apologize" (Spears, 2007, p. 23). If the quote is more than 40 words, then you should (a) omit the quotation marks, (b) use a block quote on the next line, and (c) indent the block quote $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Here is a quote from my webpage.

Quality instruction combines a thorough knowledge of the content, a mature perspective, recitation, theatrics, humor, and teacher-student contact that is adapted to both the subject matter being presented and the unique personality of each class. The instructor has a responsibility to the students to provide an open, affirming, intellectually-invigorating environment which inspires and facilitates life-long learning. (Plunk's Teaching Philosophy, n.d., para. 1)

I also indicated the paragraph number instead of page number since it was an online article. Since the author was not stated, I just used the title of the page in place of the author. Please note that the paragraph symbol (¶) is no longer acceptable. Use the word "para." instead of the symbol "¶."

Internet Citations and Personal Interviews

If you are citing an entire Web site, it is satisfactory to give the address of the site just in the text and not in the references. For example, Plunk's Home Page is a wealth of information (<http://www.csun.edu/plunk>). The reference list in the paper should only include full citations from references cited in the paper. One exception is a personal interview. If you interview someone, then you only need to cite the interview in the text and not in the reference section (I. B. Smart, personal communication, September 18, 2007).

Overview of Other APA Junk

Commas should be used between words in a series of three or more items. For example, use commas to separate the following spies: James Bond, Jason Bourne, Austin Powers, and Inspector Gadget (see Figure 1). Make sure to put a comma before the word "and" or the word "or" when connecting three or more words/phrases.

This is not APA, but I feel compelled to share my knowledge. Specifically, *e.g.* and *i.e.* are often confused. If you use *e.g.*, then you are basically saying "for example" or "such as." However, *i.e.* means "that is." So, let's say that I am speaking about fruits (*e.g.*, apples, oranges, lemons), then I would want to use *e.g.* (*i.e.*, for example).

If you are providing a list within a paragraph, then you should (a) use small letters, and (b) enclose the letters in parentheses. On the other hand, if you are providing a list that is in separate paragraphs, then:

1. Use Arabic numbers followed by a period. Notice in this example there are no parentheses.
2. Although I prefer a hanging indent, APA style has the succeeding lines flush left such as in this example.

Last Comments

If you have any questions, ask your professor (Bird, 2006; Snuffleupagus, 2006; Urkel, 1982). Remember, “The instructor has a responsibility to the students to provide an open, affirming, intellectually-invigorating environment which inspires and facilitates learning” (Plunk’s Teaching Philosophy, n.d., para. 1). If you find an error on this page, let me know because all people make errors (S. W. Plunkett, personal communication, September 9, 2010).

References

Note: Items appearing in red are just to help you figure out which type of citation is being demonstrated. The items in red should not be included in your reference sections.

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Electronic references made easy*. Retrieved April 18, 2004, from <http://www.apastyle.org/elecref.html> (online document created by a private organization with no date – notice that there is a retrieval date because this document is likely to change)

Bert, I., & Ernie, U. (2006, March). *An examination of same-sex, heterosexual male relationships*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Sesame Street Society, Los Angeles, CA. (Unpublished paper presented at an annual meeting)

Bird, B. (2006). *Towering over the world and loving it: An autobiographical case study*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Sesame Street, Burbank, CA. (dissertation not abstracted in DAI –Note: A thesis would be the same except say “master’s thesis”)

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- Snuffleupagus, A. (2006). Coming out of my life as an invisible woolly mammoth: An autobiographical case study. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section Z*.

Parapsychology, 75(2), 418. (dissertation abstracted in DAI – Note: 75 is the volume number, 2 is the issue number, and 418 is the page number)

Urkel, S. Q. (1998). Fashion faux pas: Dressing for success in a sea of polyester. *The Journal of Research Nerds*, 5(3), 122–123. doi:10.9999/s99999-999-9999-9 (journal article with one author)

Table 1

Summary of Multiple Regression Analyses Examining Factors Related to Reproductive Abilities of Famous Cartoon Animals (N = 100 raters)

Animals	Pepé Le Pew	Foghorn Leghorn	Brian (Family Guy)	Winnie the Pooh
Motivation	.43**	.04	.45**	.00
Sexiness	.23**	.00	.02	.00
Accent	.22**	.00	.00	.00
Cleverness	.08*	.10*	.42**	.01
<i>Total R²</i>	.55	.05	.48	.00
<i>F value</i>	123.09**	2.10*	94.70**	.21

Note. Standardized beta coefficients are shown. No animals were harmed in this study.

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

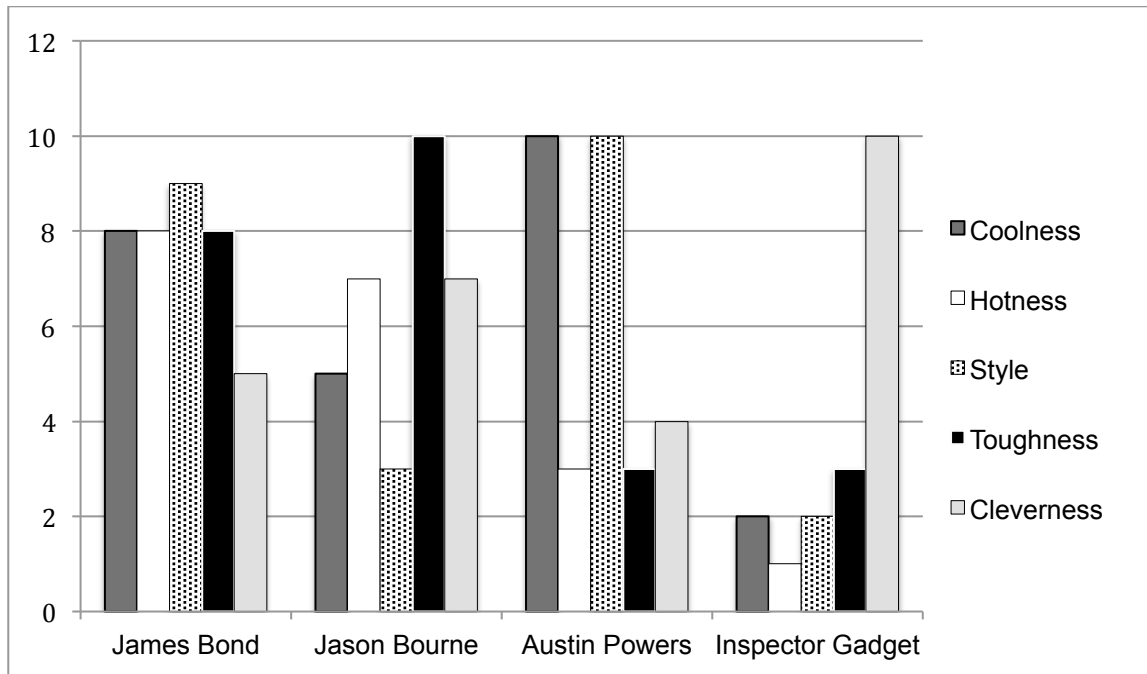


Figure 1. Ratings of spies from 1 (low) to 10 (high).