

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

Scott W. Plunkett and I. M. N. Oyed

California State University, Northridge

Noh Wahnelse

University of Invisible Students

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

Author Note

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

I. M. N. Oyed, Department of Stress and Anger Management, California State University Northridge.

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

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 not exceed 120 words, unless otherwise stated. Be sure and 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 on 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 reasons the style was established. Following the style guidelines provides a consistent structure for papers from many different authors and disciplines. This is especially important for editors and readers. Also, your grade may depend upon your ability to follow these guidelines. Whoa ho! I bet THAT got your attention!

Overview of Headings

All major headings are 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 are left justified, **bold**, and title case. Notice there are no extra lines between headings and preceding or following paragraphs. All text is double-spaced.

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

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, blah blah blah.

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 the most recent edition 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, Palatino). 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, Chicago, 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 within the parentheses. 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 say the first author then

“et al.” (e.g., Letterman et al.). Also, if you restate a citation in the same paragraph, then you do not need to cite the year again (Knowitall & Allknowing; Urkel). 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.).

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 talking about.

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

Although it can be sad when you have no date, there is a solution. 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 (1) the group’s name is lengthy and unwieldy, or (2) 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 Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2003). The subsequent source cites would just use the abbreviation (DHHS). By the way, if you cite the same source in the same paragraph, then you can leave off the year (Bert & Ernie), but if the same source appears in a later paragraph, then include the year (Spears, 2007).

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 but 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 not 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., ¶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.

Internet Citations and Personal Interviews

Speaking of Internet sources, if you want a quick source for citing stuff from the Internet, such as articles or web pages, then go to this web page <http://www.apastyle.org/elecref.html> (American Psychological Association, n.d.). 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 foods: apples, oranges, and mangos. Make sure to put a comma before the word ‘and’ or the word ‘or’ when connecting three or more words/phrases.

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; Urkel, 1982; Snuffleupagus, 2006). 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., ¶ 1). If you find an error on this page, let me know because all people make errors (S. W. Plunkett, personal communication, September 9, 2009).

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 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 – thesis would be the same except say “master’s thesis”)

Department of Health and Human Services. (2003). *How to live a happy and healthy life: Free of gas at last* (DHHS Publication No. 51-0091). Washington DC: Author. (government report published by the same government agency)

Dracula, C., Frankenstein, C., & Werewolf, I. M. (2006, March). *An examination of misrepresented figures in history: Persecution instead of love*. Poster session presented at the meeting of the Monsters and Clowns Society, Los Angeles, CA. (Poster session presented at biennial meeting)

Gas, P. U. (2001a). Can you say stinky? In P. U. Skunkett & P. U. Skunk (Eds.), *Famous people leaving lasting impression* (pp. 26-47). Springfield, IL: Grover Press. (book chapter)

Gas, P. U. (2001b). Garlic, rotten eggs, and dung. The history of the scientific study of smells. Retrieved from http://pu_skunk.com/smellyworld/stinky.pdf (online document with author – notice the retrieval date is not included because this is a final version of the document)

Knowitall, I., & Allknowing, I. M. (2002, January 5). Answers to everything you ever wanted to know. *Omniscient Magazine*, 21(1), 22–29. (magazine)

- Letterman, D., Leno, J., O'Brian, C., & Plunkett, S. W. (1982). How I handle all those people who want my autograph: It is a curse. *The Journal of Notable People*, 1(2), 75–84. doi: 10.9999/s99999-999-9999-9 (journal article with multiple authors – notice there is a digital object identifier [DOI] listed. If an article does not have a DOI, then no DOI will be listed)
- Lonely, I. M., & Needy, I. M. (n.d.). *Dating guide for the busy professional*. Silicon Valley, CA: Pathetic Press. (brochure with two authors and no date)
- Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary* (10th ed.). (1993). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster. (book, no author or editor)
- Picky, I. M., Anal, I. B., Ucheat, I. C., Losepoints, U., Cry, U., Giveup, U., ... Kwitter, U. R. (2002). *The anal-retentive professor*. Prague, Germany: Freud Press. (book with more than 6 authors – only the first six and the last author are listed with ... in between)
- Plunk's teaching philosophy*. (n.d.). Retrieved September 1, 2003, from <http://www.csun.edu/plunk/teach.html> (online article with no author or date. Because it is not a final version of the document, the retrieval date is included)
- Plunkett, S. W. (1982). *The cool dude manuscript*. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Coolness, The Players University, Enid, OK. (unpublished manuscript at a university)
- Spears, B. J. (2000, December). Loss of innocence, underwear, and hair: A first person account. *Psychology Yesterday*, 20–25. (monthly periodical with no volume number)
- Spears, B. J. (2007). *The Plunk is a madman: Writings of a scorned woman*. Berkeley, CA: Jilted Women's Press. Retrieved from <http://mensuckbigtime.org/index.asp> (electronic version of a book)
- 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 Dominance Analyses Establishing Relative Weights for Sources of Academic Support and Mexican American Adolescents' Academic Success

Academic support by:	<u>Academic Motivation</u>		<u>Academic Satisfaction</u>		<u>Grade Point Average</u>	
	Females (<i>n</i> = 124)	Males (<i>n</i> = 92)	Females (<i>n</i> = 112)	Males (<i>n</i> = 88)	Females (<i>n</i> = 108)	Males (<i>n</i> = 86)
Mothers	.07	.12 ^a	.01	.02	.00	.01
Fathers	.14 ^a	.02	.03	.04	.00	.00
Teachers	.04	.04	.08 ^a	.07 ^a	.08 ^a	.08 ^a
Friends	.01	.03	.00	.06	.01	.01
<i>Total R</i> ²	.25	.21	.12	.19	.10	.10
<i>F</i> value	10.09**	5.10**	3.61**	4.70**	2.80*	2.21

Note. Mothers and fathers refer to a primary parent figure. All variables are from adolescent self-report measures except for grade point average which is from school records.

^aCompletely dominates other sources of academic support.

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

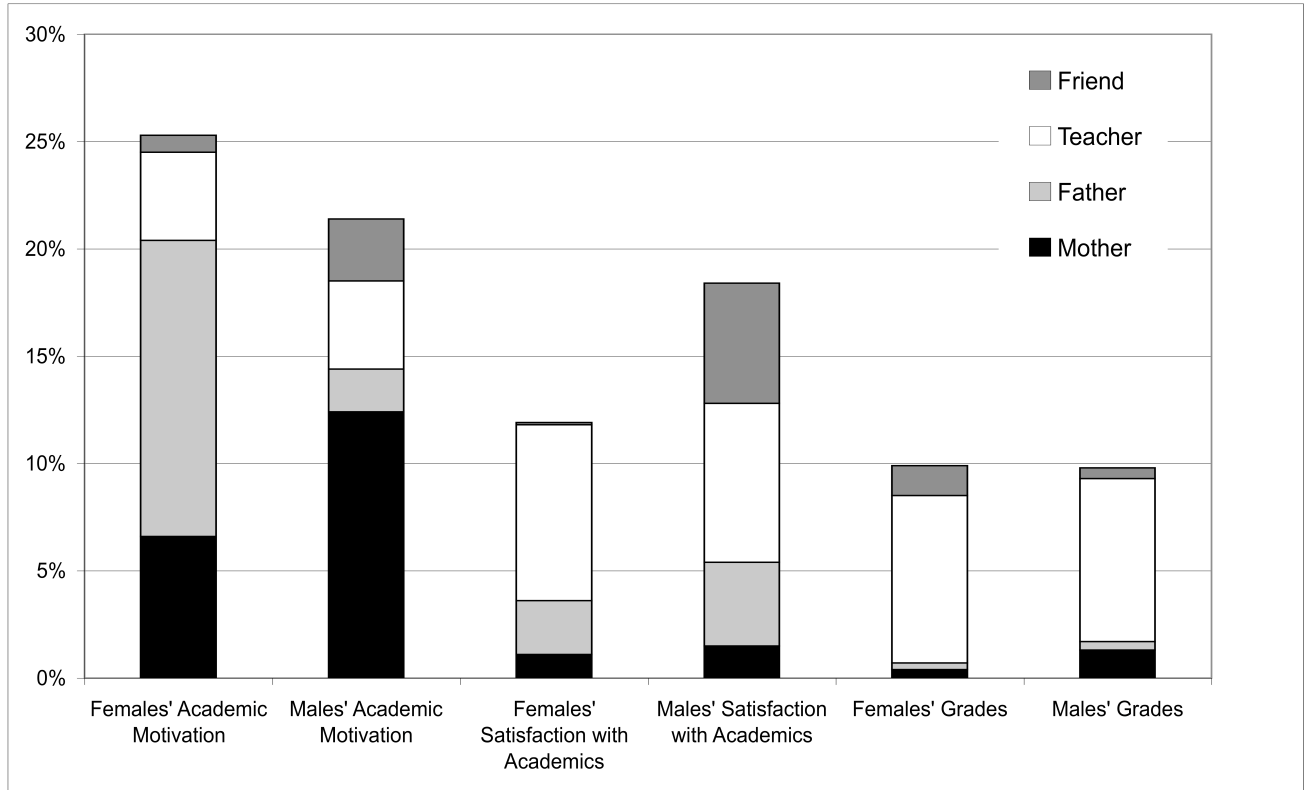


Figure 1. Relative contributions for sources of academic support and Mexican American adolescents' academic success.