

A Guide to APA Formatting

All information on this handout comes from the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* 6th edition. Please consult this manual for more information and/or detailed examples (each writing center location has a copy of it if you do not have your own). Note that the writing center does have a separate handout for citations titled “A Quick Guide to APA Citations.”

Abstract

An abstract is a short summary of your entire paper (150-250 words). Your audience should be able to look at this and understand what you discuss without reading the whole paper.

Appendices

- If you only have one, just label it “Appendix”
- If you have more than one, label them with capital letters (e.g. Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.)
- The label is centered and not bold, just like “References” on your references page
- Appendices should appear in the order you refer to them in the body of the paper
- Each appendix should be on a separate page
- Label tables and figures with the letter of the appendix followed by a number representing the order they appear (e.g. Table C3 for the third table in Appendix C)
 - » Just use “A” to label tables and figures in a lone appendix

Headings

First-Level Headings Are Centered, Bold, and Capitalized Like Titles

Second-Level Headings are Flush Left, Bold, and Capitalized Like Titles

Third-level headings are indented, bold, capitalized like a normal sentence, and end with a period. The body text begins immediately after the heading.

Fourth-level headings are the same as third-level headings, except that they are also italicized. The body text begins immediately after the heading.

Fifth-level headings are the same as fourth-level headings, except they are not bold. The body text begins immediately after the heading.

Note: Do not use a heading for the introduction of your paper. It is assumed that the beginning is the introduction.

Notes About Writing Style

- Eliminate wordiness and redundancies*
- Avoid informal or conversational expressions, jargon, and ambiguity
 - » Remember that your ideas need to be clear to everyone
- Active voice is preferred, although passive voice may be acceptable in some cases*
- Reduce bias in your writing*
- Avoid using contractions

*The writing center has a handout on this topic if you would like to learn more about it. Handouts can be found in print in the writing center or online at <http://gvsu.edu/wc/handouts-32.htm>

Numbers

Use numerals to express numbers:

- 10 and above
- in an abstract or visual (chart, table, graph, etc.)

- › that come before a unit of measurement (5 in., 30 cm., etc.)
- › in statistical and mathematical formulas, included percentages, proportions, fractions, ratios, etc.
- › representing time (10:30), dates (February 28, 2013), age (30 years old), and money (\$50)
- › in a series (Grade 10, Book 4, etc.)

Use words to express numbers:

- › that begin a sentence
- › that represent a number of days, months, or years (twenty-eight days into February, thirty years ago, etc.)
- › in common fractions (one-half, one-quarter, etc.)
- › that have a universally accepted usage (the Twelve Apostles, Five Pillars of Islam, etc.)

Other things to know

- › Ordinal numbers (first, second, third) will be written (as a numeral or a word) the same way you write the cardinal numbers (one, two, three) (50 = 50th, twenty = twentieth)
- › Use a 0 before a decimal point when the number can exceed 1, but not when it cannot (as is the case with statistical significance)
- › Use commas to separate groups of three numbers (1,000,000) EXCEPT in:
 - ››page numbers ››degrees of temperature
 - ››binary digits ››acoustic frequency
 - ››serial numbers ››degrees of freedom

Tables and Figures

- › They need to add some sort of value to the paper
- › They should be labeled “Table #” or “Figure #”
- › They should have brief and clear titles
- › Number them in the order they are mentioned in the text
- › They should be concise and consistent
- › Only discuss the highlights of tables and figures in the text
 - ›› You do not need to use a table or figure if you discuss all of the data it contains in the body of the paper
- › Do not refer to a table or figure’s location (“...in the table below...” or “...in the figure on the next page...”) when discussing it in your text: just refer to it by name (“...in Table 7...”)
- › Limit the use of lines when creating tables
- › Figure captions should immediately follow the labels

Title Page and Headers

- › The paper title, your name, and the name of your university needs to be centered
- › The term “Running head:” will appear on the left side of the header, followed by a shortened version of your title in ALL CAPS, and a page number on the right
- › The header on subsequent pages will be identical to the header on your title page, except you will NOT include the term “Running head:”
 - ›› You will need to make your first page different when editing the header