Using APA Style for Writing a Research Paper

Most research papers and other research works in the humanities--including history, English, art, and music--are usually done according to MLA style, a form designed by the Modern Language Association. However, most research writing in the social sciences--including psychology, education, economics, and sociology--usually requires the APA style, a form presented in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*.

Like MLA style, APA style includes in-text citations of source material and a list of sources referenced in the text. However, the format and guidelines for these components differ. This brief guide will provide you with basic information about the requirements of APA style.

The following steps apply to the composition of any research paper:

- Step 1: Select a Topic
- Step 2: Find Sources
- Step 3: List Sources
- Step 4: Take Notes
- Step 5: Refine Your Thesis and Outline
- Step 6: Write Your First Draft
- Step 7: Revise Your First Draft
- Step 8: Prepare Your References List
- Step 9: Write Your Final Draft
- Step 10: Submit Required Material

Using APA style, however, requires some changes to Steps 3, 6, 8, 9, and 10 so that your paper will conform to the guidelines for that style. These steps are explained in the rest of this guide.

**STEP 3: LIST SOURCES**

As you conduct research on your topic and locate potentially useful sources, you will list these sources in a preliminary bibliography formatted according to APA style guidelines. The sources that you actually use in the paper—meaning those that you refer to by name or quote—become part of the References list at the end of the paper. The following examples illustrate the format used for different types of sources. For additional examples, visit the APA website at [http://www.apastyle.org](http://www.apastyle.org)
Form for Printed Sources

Books
A Book by One Author

An Anthology

Two or More Books by the Same Author

A Book by Two or Three Authors

A Book with a Corporate Author

Articles
Article in a Journal

Article in a Weekly or Biweekly Magazine

Article in a Newspaper, Author Unknown

Article or Other Written Selection in an Anthology or Textbook

An Article in an Encyclopedia

Government Publications
National Institute of Mental Health. (2000). Who pays the piper? Ten years of

Published Proceedings of a Conference

A Lecture, a Speech, or an Address
Kern, D. (1997, October 2). Recent trends in occupational medicine. AMA Convention, Memorial Hospital, Pawtucket, RI.

A Personal Interview

Films, Filmstrips, Slide Programs, Videotapes, and Television Programs

Form for Electronic Sources
This is the basic form for Internet and World Wide Web sources for your bibliography and References list entries:

- Author’s last name, first name initial, and middle name initial
- Date of publication
- Title of article or book
- Title of the online periodical
- Volume number (issue number if available)
- “Retrieved from” followed by the full electronic address (URL)

Online Services—Library and Personal (database with full texts)

If you reference material that you obtained from an online database, either a library subscription service or a personal subscription service, format the entry like a regular print citation. Doing so will allow people to retrieve the print version of the material even if they do not have access to the database you used.

Professional Site

Personal Site
Web log (blog)

Book

Article in a Journal Online

Article in a Magazine Online

Article in a Newspaper Online

Review Online

Government Publication Online

An Article in an Encyclopedia

Personal E-Mail Message
E-mails are not included in the list of references, though you parenthetically cite them in your main text: (R. Davis, personal communication, March 4, 2009).
**STEP 6: WRITE YOUR FIRST DRAFT**

Regardless of the documentation style you are using for your research paper, you will need to adhere to the rules of that style to avoid plagiarism, which is discussed in Chapter 16.

**Documentation: In-text Citations, APA Style**

In the text of the research paper, APA style requires only a brief parenthetical source reference keyed to a complete bibliographical entry in the references list at the end of the paper. For most parenthetical citations, you will need to provide only the author’s last name and the year of publication for the source. Although it is not required, you might also include the page number. Documentation for some of the most common types of sources is discussed in the following sections.

**References to Articles and Single-Volume Books**

Articles and single-volume books are the two most common types of works you will be referring to most often in your research paper. When citing them, either mention the author’s name in the text and note the source’s publication date in parentheses immediately after the citation or acknowledge both name and publication date in the parenthetical reference, separating them with a comma. If punctuation is needed, insert the mark outside the final parenthesis.

- **Author’s Name Cited in Text:** Adams (2002) argues that health insurance is the most important benefit of all.

- **Author’s Name Cited in Text, with page number:** According to Ivarson (2003), “There is no such creature as a ‘fringe benefit’ anymore” (p. 27).

- **Author’s Name Cited in Parentheses:** In fact, fringe benefits are growing in importance as a part of an overall salary package (Ignatio, 2003).

**References to Works of Unknown Authorship**

If you borrow information or ideas from an article or book for which you cannot determine the name of the author, cite the title instead, either in the text of the paper or in parentheses.

- **Title Cited in Text:** According to an article titled “Let Employees Determine Their Own Benefits” (2003), another variation that is growing in popularity is the cafeteria-style program

- **Title Cited in Parentheses:** Another variation that is growing in popularity is the cafeteria-style program (“Let Employees,” 2003).
References to Internet Material

Treat Internet material as you would other material, using the author-date style if possible. If the author’s name is not available, give the title. Use page and paragraph numbers only if they are available; usually, they are not.

References in Block Quotations

Direct quotations longer than 40 words should begin on a new line and be indented five spaces from the left margin. Maintain double-spacing and omit the quotation marks. Place the parenthetical citation outside the end punctuation.

STEP 8: PREPARE YOUR REFERENCES LIST

Using the same form as in the preliminary bibliography, prepare a References list (a list of works you have referred to or quoted and identified parenthetically in the text).

STEP 9: WRITE YOUR FINAL DRAFT

Write the final version of your research paper with care for effective writing and accurate documentation. The final draft will probably include the following parts:

1. **Title page**, including the title of the paper, the author's name, and the institutional affiliation.

2. **Abstract**, a single paragraph summarizing the key points of your paper

3. **Main Body**, the text of the paper

4. **References**, an alphabetized list of all of the sources you cite your paper

See the sample student essay at the end of this guide for examples of each part.

STEP 10: SUBMIT REQUIRED MATERIALS

Submit your research paper with any preliminary material required by your instructor. Consider using a checklist to make sure you have fulfilled all requirements. A comprehensive checklist might look like the one on the next page:
Research Paper Checklist

___ Title page

___ Abstract

___ Documented essay (text)
   ___ Approximate total number of words
   ___ Approximate number of words quoted (Usually, more than 20 percent quoted words would be excessive.)

___ List of sources used (References list)
   ___ Number of sources used

___ Preliminary materials, such as preliminary bibliography, note cards, and rough draft, as required

___ Double-spaced text, one-inch margins