APA Basics

Abstract, Introduction & Formatting/Style Tips

Psychology 280 Lecture Notes

APA Formatting

- Basic word processing format
  - Double spaced
  - All margins 1"
  - Manuscript page header on all pages except graphs
    - Should be .5" from the top of the page
  - 12 pt Times New Roman or Courier font for text and tables
  - 12 pt Arial or Helvetica font for figures
  - Don’t double space after the end of a sentence
  - Don’t justify any part of an APA paper
  - Pay attention to headings

Resources
- http://www.apastyle.org/
- APA Style Helper 5.1

APA Sections

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Introduction
- Methods
- Results
  - Tables and graphs
- Discussion

Title Page

- Manuscript page header
- Running head for publication title
- Title
- Byline and institutional affiliation
- Page 1 of the research report

Title Page

- Running head
  - Abbreviated title (no more than 50 characters including punctuation and space)
  - Used for publication as the heading at the top of each journal page
  - Good idea to include the names of your variables in the title
    - Example: Effect of Anxiety on Mathematical Problem Solving
  - Flush left
  - Top of page, below manuscript header
Title Page (con't)

- Title
  - Type in uppercase and lowercase letters
  - Centered between left & right margins
  - Positioned in the upper half of the page
  - Two or more lines? Double space
  - Try for 10–12 words

A good recipe for titles to work with when reporting the results of an experiment is:

- (Dependent Variable) as a Function of (Independent Variable)
- The Effects of (Independent Variable) on (Dependent Variable).
- Another option is to use the main finding as the title, for example, Prenatal Alcohol Impairs Passive Avoidance Learning in Rats.

Title Page (con't)

- Author Byline and institutional affiliation
  - Found on the next double spaced line under the title
  - Names of authors in order of their contributions
  - Institutional affiliation is under the authors name on the next double spaced line
  - For purposes of this class ...........
    - Only one author (yourself) as you will be independently writing your report
    - See example given in class for exact formatting

A good recipe for author bylines to work with when reporting the results of an experiment is:

- Place your name on the next double spaced line
- Include institutional affiliation if needed
- For purposes of this class ...........
  - Only one author (yourself) as you will be independently writing your report
  - See example given in class for exact formatting

Abstract (con't)

- Brief, comprehensive summary of the study
  - 120 word maximum
  - Page 2 of the research report
  - Written AFTER the study is completed
  - For your research proposal, you will write an abstract with the basics of your study, but will leave space for the final results and discussion areas

Abstract (con't)

- Center the word Abstract on this page, then begin typing on the very next double-spaced line (i.e., do not insert any extra blank lines here).
- Type this section as a single (double spaced) paragraph in block format (i.e., do not use indentation).
- The purpose of this section is to provide a brief and comprehensive summary of the study. It is very important because it is all that many people will read. It should include a brief description of the problem being investigated, the methods used, the results, and their implications.

It should be accurate (do not include information here that is not in the body of the manuscript), self-contained (spell out abbreviations), concise (120 word maximum), and specific (begin this section with the most important information and limit it to the four or five most important concepts, findings, or implications of the study).
- As part of the theme of being concise, use digits for all numbers except when they begin a sentence.
- Avoid citing references in the abstract.
- Paraphrase rather than quoting.
Abstract (con’t)

- Use past tense for introduction/procedures/results and present tense for discussion.
- It is a good idea to write this section last (after all of the other sections are written). You might try taking the lead sentences from the various sections of the manuscript and integrating them.

Introduction

- Purposes
  - Introduce the problem
  - Develop the background
  - State the purpose and the rationale for the study

Introduction (con’t)

- Begins on page 3 of the research report
- Start this page by retyping your title (centered), then begin typing the section (on the next double spaced line) using normal (5 space indented) paragraphs.
- Do not type the word Introduction.

Introduction (con’t)

- APA suggested questions to consider before writing introduction
  - Why is this problem important?
  - How do the hypothesis and experimental design relate to the problem?
  - What are the theoretical implications of the study, and how does the study relate to previous work in the area?
  - What theoretical propositions are tested, and how were they derived?

Introduction (con’t)

- Tell the reader WHY you conducted the study
- Inform reader of research questions
- How it relates to past research
  - Need to cite past research
  - Two major ways of citing past research
    - Jones (1982) found that …
    - Several investigators (Jones, 1982; Jones, 1983; Wade, Roberts, & Brown, 1975) have reported that …
  - Studies should be arranged alphabetically according to the first author. If multiple studies by one author, arrange by earliest study within author
  - See handout distributed in class for more information
- How it is different from past research (if applicable)

Introduction (con’t)

- It starts out broad and becomes more and more specific.
  - Should begin with an opening statement of the problem under study.
  - Next, you might begin by defining any relevant terms or theories you are using
  - Then go on to review the relevant literature. Avoid an exhaustive and historical review.
  - Then go on to make clear the connection between previous research and the present work.
  - State your hypothesis or hypotheses
  - It should be clear to your reader the link between the research hypothesis, prior research and the current research design by the end of the Introduction.
Introduction (con’t)

- The final paragraph usually contains a statement which clearly and explicitly states why the study was performed, such as
  - The purpose of this study was to...
  - OR
  - The present study was designed to investigate the...
  - Be especially careful not to use a sentence of this type earlier in your introduction.
- Thus, this section should contain an absolute minimum of four paragraphs: the general introduction, the literature review, the connection of the present study to the literature and the explicit statement of purpose.

APA Style Tips

- Provide the conceptual definition of your terms before you begin discussing the term. For example, you shouldn’t be talking about the relationship of “locus of control” to another variable if you haven’t discussed the conceptual definition of locus of control yet.
- Explain your ideas fully. Be meticulous, even nit-picking, in saying exactly what you mean.
- To help maintain a consistent tone throughout the paper, avoid direct quotes. Only use quotes if there is something unique and special conveyed by not just the author’s ideas, but the particular words used to express those ideas.

APA Style Tips (con’t)

- Any idea that is not yours needs a citation whether it is a direct quote or not. You don’t have to include a citation in every sentence, but the reader needs to be clear where your information came from.
- Each new paragraph, even if you are continuing to cite from the same source, needs a citation.
- Paraphrasing too closely from your sources is a form of plagiarism.
  - See plagiarism handout distributed in class
  - You will be turning your articles in with your article summaries and your research proposal so be careful

APA Style Tips (con’t)

- Avoid using a psychological term or expression when you don’t mean it. Example to avoid: “The notion that people dislike inconsistent thoughts correlates with the need to behave consistently with our attitudes.” (Don’t use the term “correlates” unless you are referring to a computed statistical correlation.)
- Other terms to be careful with: significant, hypothesized.
- Avoid absolutes and immodest expressions. The word ‘PROVE’ and all variations of it are off limits (try using any of the following words instead: suggest, support, show, indicate).

APA Style Tips (con’t)

- Also avoid words like ‘completely’, ‘absolutely’, ‘always’, etc. Avoid expressions like “These results conclusively demonstrate that researchers have been all wrong in the past.” Try to be more moderate: “The findings of the present research did not replicate past findings....”
- Avoid overly complex sentence structures. If you’ve started accumulating many punctuation marks or clauses in a single sentence, your sentence is probably too complex for the reader to understand easily.
- Work on transitions between ideas. A good transition will lead the reader from one idea to the next smoothly – the reader won’t have to wonder why you’ve switched topics.

APA Style Tips (con’t)

- Passive voice is somewhat accepted in psychological writing, but active voice is much better
- Use active rather than passive voice where possible
  - Use Participants were instructed to...
  - Rather than, Participants were given instructions to...
  - Use Smith conducted the experiment.
  - Rather than, The experiment was conducted by Smith.
- You can use the 1st person from time to time (e.g. “I hypothesized that...”), but try to avoid its overuse.
  - Only use “I” or “we” when it refers to actions you are exclusively referring to yourself.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APA Style Tips (con’t)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avoid using an overly colloquial or chatty writing style. Absolutely avoid slang and <strong>do not</strong> use contractions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your overall tone needs to be formal, not too scientific (but your paper shouldn’t sound like a computer program wrote it.)</td>
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<td>Don’t start a sentence off with a numeric, write it out instead.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watch out for common grammar problems – see page 297 in your Cozby text for a good discussion</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<td>As indicated in the 5th edition of the APA Publication Manual, dictionaries are not the best guide to spelling in the electronic world.</td>
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<tr>
<td>This is an extremely fast moving environment and common usage develops quickly, leaving print resources easily bypassed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The APA Style site will attempt to be more responsive. Below is a list of common terms and their current (as of 2001) preferred spelling.</td>
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<td>- <strong>database</strong></td>
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<td>- <strong>DOI</strong></td>
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<td>- <strong>e-journal</strong></td>
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<td>- <strong>e-mail</strong></td>
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<td>- <strong>FTP</strong></td>
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<td>- <strong>Internet</strong></td>
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<td>- <strong>LISTSERV™</strong> (tm) – the generic term is electronic mailing list</td>
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From: [http://www.apastyle.org/spelling.html](http://www.apastyle.org/spelling.html)

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The End

Lecture information from APA Manual, Cozby text and University of Wisconsin APA Resources