

Clarkson College Writing Lab APA Frequently Asked Questions (Using the 7th edition APA manual as a reference)

The First Few Pages

What should I include in my title? Do I need a running head?

According to APA (2020), “The *title* should summarize the main idea of the paper simply and, if possible, in a way that is engaging for readers” (p. 31). APA (2020) does not have a recommended length for titles, but it does state the title should be “focused and succinct” (p. 31). For example, a title may read, Teaching Literature and Health Care: A Humanist Approach. The general topic is teaching literature and healthcare. The specific focus is the humanist approach. The subject and focus are clear. Try not to go overboard with your title. Section 2.4 addresses the paper title.

Per the APA 7th edition, student papers do not require a running head unless the instructor for a class requires it. A student paper only requires page numbers, which will be right justified. Figure 2.2 shows a sample student title page.

What should my title page look like?

A student title page will look different from a professional title page. The header will include page numbers right justified. The title will be in bold, centered, and 3-4 lines down from the top of the page (APA, 2020, p. 32). The student’s name (the author name) will follow the title with one double-spaced line between the two. The next line will include where the student attends school, including the name of the department. So, this line might read Graduate Nursing Department, Clarkson College. Next include the course number and name, followed by the instructor’s name on the next line, and finally the assignment’s due date (written in month, date, and year; e.g., February 5, 2020) for the assignment (APA, 2020, p. 30). Section 2.3 and Figure 2.2 address student title page requirements.

What is an abstract? What should I include in my abstract?

The abstract is a summary of the essay, and it should be no more than 250 words (APA, 2020, p. 38). Included in the abstract should be a sentence or two that introduce the topic and its significance, a few sentences that explain how the essay will explore and discuss the topic, and a sentence or two that allude to the essay’s conclusions. Remember that the abstract is on the page after the title page (page 2), with the word “Abstract” in bold and centered at the top of the page, followed by the abstract paragraph that is not indented. The abstract paragraph itself is not centered. An abstract may not be required for student papers, but it is at the discretion of the instructor. Section 2.9 describes the abstract for a paper.

Does my title belong above the body of my essay, as well as on the title page?

Yes, your full title, using standard title capitalization, bolded, and centered should appear both on your title page and above the body of your essay. See Section 2.11 for details.

Should the words, Abstract, and, References, at the top of their respective pages be in bold print?

Yes, the words “Abstract” and “References” are in bold, but they are not underlined and are not italicized. Center them at the top of their respective pages. Sections 2.9 and 2.12 confirm this.

Should there be any space between my header and the words “Abstract” and “References”?

No, the words “Abstract” and “References” belong on the top line of the page and are followed on the next double-spaced line by the abstract paragraph and first reference citation, respectively. Again, consult Sections 2.9 and 2.12.

** For a great example of exactly what your essay should look like, see page 61 in the APA manual.

Citing Sources

How often should I include the years of publication of my sources?

APA (2020) states that the author and date should generally be included in every in-text citation. In-text citations include a parenthetical citation, which includes the author and year (and possibly additional information) enclosed in parentheses, or a narrative citation, which has the author and year incorporated into the sentence. After a narrative citation with the author and year appearing in a paragraph, subsequent narrative citations do not require the year (APA, 2020, p. 265). This rule applies for every paragraph. The year should be included in every parenthetical citation. See Sections 8.1, 8.11, and 8.16 for APA’s explanation of this.

What happens when there is more than one author of a source?

Within the body of the essay, follow the rules in Section 8.17. (These rules differ when listing reference citations on the references page. See Section 9.8 for details.)

- For one or two authors, list all authors’ last names every time.
- For works with three or more authors, write the last name of the first author followed by et al. in every citation (including the first).

How often should I quote a source? How often should I paraphrase?

APA states in Section 8.25 that it’s best to paraphrase sources versus quoting directly because it allows you, the writer, to integrate the content into your paper and stay consistent with your writing style. APA suggests using direct quotations when providing an exact definition, when the original quote states the information in an interesting or brief way, or when you want to respond to something the author said. Always remember, however, that your voice should remain the primary voice in the essay. Don’t let your sources talk for you!

What are the rules of a block quotation?

Block quotations are used for quotes of 40 or more words. They are called block quotations because they form their own block of text within an essay. Every line of the quote will be indented once and double spaced (forming an indented block). There are no quotation marks around the quote (the block format and your introduction to the quote let the reader know it is a quote). And, the period follows the sentence rather than the parenthetical citation, which is different than the traditional in-text citation format. See Section 8.27 for a longer discussion of block quotations. You will see that block quotations also include a signal phrase to lead into the quote. Use block quotations sparingly!

Titles In-Text and on the Reference List

Notice that the punctuation and capitalization of some titles are different in the body of an essay than they are on the reference list. Listed are a few commonly used types of titles. Sections 6.17 and 9.19 provide more information on in-text and reference page formatting.

Book Title

- In-text: *The Place of Grammar in Writing Instruction*
- On the reference list: *The place of grammar in writing instruction*

Journal Title

- In-text: *Nursing Education Perspectives*
- On the reference list: *Nursing Education Perspectives*

Journal Article Title

- In-text: "Digital Object Identifiers: Are They Important to Me?"
- On the reference list: Digital object identifiers: Are they important to me?

How do I cite a quotation if there are no page numbers?

With the advent of online source material, this question is becoming more and more common. APA (2020) requires every quotation to include a page number, so what does a writer do when there is no page number? APA suggests three alternatives:

- You can use a heading or section name instead of a page number:
The study notes that "42% of patients died after the treatment" (Johnson, 2019, Outcomes section).
- You can use a paragraph number:
Recommendations include "smoking cessation and adoption of a healthy diet" (Smith, 2018, para. 3).
- You can use a combination of a heading with a paragraph number:
The use of music has been shown to "significantly reduce the instance of delirium in 75% of patients" (Jackson, 2019, Music Intervention section, para. 8).

The goal is that the reader can easily find the quoted information. Section 8.28 provides examples of each.

My DOIs or URLs are really long on my reference page; can I fix this?

APA states that you can shorten DOIs or URLs using specified tools to generate or retrieve them; it is recommended that you confirm the shortened URL takes you to the site identified. Section 9.36 addresses this topic.

How do I format my reference page?

The reference page is on a new page after the body of the essay with the word “References” bolded and centered at the top of the page. References are listed alphabetically, and the entire page is double spaced. Each citation should have a hanging indent of 0.5 inches. See Sections 2.22 and 9.43 for more information.

I have a source with a lot of authors; how do I list them in the reference list?

All names (last names followed by initials) up to and including 20 authors should be included in a reference page listing. Use an ampersand (&) between the final two author names if there are more than two authors. If there are 21 or more authors, include the first 19 authors’ names, insert an ellipsis (...) and then add the final author’s name. No ampersand is used if there are more than 20 authors. Section 9.8 provides much more detail on how to format the author component of a reference.

Miscellaneous

Is there a specific font I should use in my paper?

APA (2020) does not stipulate a specific font or font size (although your instructor might). Rather, APA (2020) suggests a font that is “accessible to all users” (p. 44). APA also recommends using the same font throughout the paper. Recommended fonts and sizes include 11-point Calibri, 11-point Arial, or 12-point Times New Roman. See Section 2.19 for specifics.

How many spaces should I have after a punctuation mark?

Per Section 6.1, one space should follow any punctuation at the end of a sentence, a comma, a colon, a semicolon, periods that separate parts of a reference list, and periods in the initials of names.

Is “health care” hyphenated?

No; it should be two words with no hyphen. See Section 6.12 with more information on hyphenation.

If I’m listing three items (such as blue, purple, and red), should I include a comma before the “and”?

Yes, absolutely! This is called an Oxford comma, and you can consult Section 6.3 of the APA manual to verify this fact.

What is the deal with numbers? When should I spell out numbers, and when should I write them numerically?

There are many rules about numbers given by APA in Sections 6.32-6.39. Generally speaking, numbers zero through nine are spelled out, and numbers 10 and above are in numeric form. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Consult the above sections to ensure you are writing numbers correctly.

I don't understand headings. What are they? How do I determine the level of heading?

Headings are used to aid the organization of an essay. A Level 1 heading is used for the top level or main sections of the paper. Level 2 headings are subsections of Level 1, Level 3 would be a subsection of Level 2, etc.

The formats for each level of heading are found in Section 2.27. Please note: APA (2020) states that the introduction of an essay does not need an "Introduction" heading; the title at the top of the page serves as the Level 1 heading for the introduction (p. 47).

The levels of heading are as follows:

- 1 Centered, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading**
- 2 Flush Left, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading**
- 3 Flush Left, Boldface Italic, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading**
- 4 Indented, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading Ending With a Period.**
- 5 Indented, Boldface Italic, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading Ending With a Period.**

For understanding, observe the following example: A general category in an essay may be Literature Review. In a sub-category under Literature Review, the author wants to discuss the literature's Methods and Outcomes, each comprising a subcategory of the Literature Review category. Furthermore, under the Outcomes subcategory, the author wants to divide his or her discussion into Positive and Negative Outcomes. Thus, the author has five headings. Under which level does each heading belong?

Literature Review (Level 1)

Methods (Level 2)

Outcomes (Level 2)

Positive Outcomes (Level 3)

Negative Outcomes (Level 3)

Table 2.3 and Figures 2.4 and 2.5 offer examples of the formatting for each heading level.

Notice how specific APA is with capitalization, boldfacing, punctuation, etc. Be sure to pay special attention to these specifics as you work with headings, citations, title pages, and just about every other APA formatting issue.