Title of Essay

Your Name

Name of Your College/University

Abstract

This paper serves as a template that can be downloaded onto your own computer. Simply replace the existing text with your own text; be sure to retain the formatting that exists in this template. This paper discusses and illustrates some of the formatting rules found in the APA style guide, including the abstract, body, and the references page. Abstracts are typically less than one page in length, approximately 150 words. This word restriction requires a concise, objective summary of the topic/argument and presentation of results or conclusions. Therefore, the abstract is written upon completion of the paper. Personal opinions should not be included in the abstract; this must be an objective overview of the paper. Notice that the first line of the abstract is not indented; rather, it is left-aligned. Meanwhile, the right margin looks “jagged;” this format is known as “flush left.” At the end of the abstract, there should be a page break to separate the abstract from the body of the paper. Two significant resources for writing in APA style include a video which demonstrates how to use features in Microsoft Word to set up the paper in a specific style guide format (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ODakMMqvIs>) and the online writing lab at Purdue University (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/18/).

Title of Essay Centered on the First Line

Online college students often wonder why the APA style guide is required for their written assignments. After all, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychology Association* specifies guidelines for the preparation of scientific manuscripts for researchers who submit their papers to scholarly journals for publication. With that specific purpose, why should college students be required to adhere to these guidelines? This question serves as the introduction to the discussion of implementing the APA style guide in written assignments. The introduction to the paper should present the topic or research question in an interesting way that will pique the reader’s interest. An introduction makes the “purpose, worth and need” (Algozzine, Spooner, & Karvonen, 2002, p. 25) for the paper explicit to the reader. “A common practice in preparing this section of the article is to use several paragraphs to discuss other studies pointing to different opinions or raising questions that have been answered in the study,” according to Algozzine, Spooner, & Karvonen (2002, p. 25).

This paper presents three distinct reasons for the APA style guide requirement: first, use of APA style facilitates readability through consistent formatting; second, the APA format reduces the likelihood of committing plagiarism; and third, the APA format ensures that readers who are interested in the references cited may find the original sources. These reasons are all part of the creation and transmission of knowledge in the academic world.

**Consistent Formatting Enhances Readability**

The *Publication Manual of the American Psychology Association,* commonly referred to as the APA style guide or informally as APA format, provides rules and examples of formatting a manuscript. Formatting refers to how the pages are set up, and also how citations of original sources are presented.

**Page Formatting**

In the body of the paper, each page should contain the title of the paper in the page header. Additionally, the page number should appear in the top right corner, also in the page header. Each paragraph in the body should be doubled-spaced and indented by one-half inch. The margins should be 1” all around. The author should use 12 point Times New Roman font, except where the APA format indicates use of another font (such as for titling Figures).

**Headings**. To enhance readability, the author should use headings to organize the flow of the paper. Headings provide clarity regarding the outline, or hierarchical organization of the topics in the paper. There are five levels of headings, according to the *Publication Manual* (2009). Level 1 headings (such as the heading “Consistent Formatting Enhances Readability” above) should be centered and boldface. Just as in titles, the main words in the heading are uppercase, while the smaller words remain lowercase.

***Additional levels of headings***. Level 2 headings (such as “Page Formatting” above) should be left-aligned, boldface, and exist on its own line in the paper. The main words in the Level 2 heading are uppercase, while the smaller words remain lowercase. Level 3 headings (such as the heading “Headings” at the beginning of the previous paragraph) appear at the beginning of a paragraph and should be indented, boldface, and followed by a period. Level 3 headings contain both uppercase and lowercase letters, as appropriate. Level 4 headings (such as “Additional levels of headings” above) appear at the beginning of a paragraph, and should start with an uppercase letter but followed by lowercase letters; the heading should be both italicized and boldface, with a period at the end (Hawks, 2010).

*Example of last level of heading*. Finally, the last level of headings should introduce a paragraph, be italicized, be capitalized at the beginning, and end with a period. It is not necessary to use all five levels of headings in a paper; only papers that contain this depth of organization require these different types of headings. A good rule of thumb is to first outline the paper to see how many levels of organization are included; for each level in the outline, the appropriate heading should be used in the text of the paper.

**Reduce Likelihood of Committing Plagiarism**

When writing papers, students must consult other sources in order to demonstrate their ability to learn from others, advance an argument, and compare differing aspects of the counter-arguments. This is how academics (people who are also known as scholars) advance the knowledge in their fields. Additionally, researchers must explore the literature prior to conducting their own research studies; reference to other scholarly works is essential. The greatest concern for any author should be appropriately citing the sources used in their papers. Failure to do so results in a charge of plagiarism. For academics and researchers, this can be a career-ender; for college students, this can result in failing the assignment, failing the course, or being expelled from school. Thus, adhering to the APA style guide is one way to engage with the academic community in an ethical manner. Citations occur in two ways: in-text citations, and the references page.

**In-text Citations**

When referencing ideas or concepts that are already published, the college student should give proper credit to those authors. The best way to acknowledge the authors is to cite the artifact (article, book, webpage, etc.) as it is introduced in the written assignment.

**Examples of citing a source.** College instructors have used a variety of methods to teach students how to identify proper usage of APA style (Smith & Eggleston, 2001; Luttrell, Bufkin, Eastman, & Miller, 2010). In one example, the Scientific Writing course was developed as a one credit course to help psychology students master the elements of APA style. The course instructor explained that the course focused on “database searches, title pages and abstracts, reduction of language bias, in-text citations, numbers and abbreviations, and reference lists” (Luttrell et al., 2010, p. 193).

Notice the first instance of citing sources in the preceding paragraph. In the first example, the citation consisted of two sources which reported methods for teaching students how to use APA style. The two sources were listed alphabetically in parentheses. In the second example, following a direct quotation, the source was listed along with the page number on which the direct quote could be found. These are the two primary ways in which students will credit the original authors for their words, thoughts or concepts, thus reducing the likelihood of committing plagiarism.

**The References Page**

Every college-level writing assignment should conclude with a References page. At the end of the paper, insert a page break to separate the References page from the body of the paper. Upon closer inspection of the References page in this template, notice that the running head (title of the paper) continues to appear in the top header, along with the page number in the right hand corner. The word “References” is centered on the first line of the page. Each source is listed, following a specific format. The “hanging indent” format is used, in which the first line of the source is left-aligned, while the additional lines of the source are indented one-half inch. This format enhances readability. The sources are listed in alphabetical order, which helps readers to find the sources that they wish to investigate further. Pay special attention to the requirements for punctuating, italicizing, and spacing the entries. For additional help with these specifications, the writer may consult the online writing lab (OWL) at Purdue University (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>).

Note that every entry in the References page should be referred to in the body of the paper (hence, the name “References.”) It is not appropriate to list sources in the References section that have not been used in the body of the paper. Conversely, every source that is used in the paper should also have an entry in the References page. Even though writers may consult several sources prior to writing the paper, they may find that they will not include several of the sources. It is helpful to keep a list, or make index cards, for sources that are actually used in the paper. Before turning in the paper, writers should check to make sure all sources have been accounted for through in-text citations and on the References page.

**APA Style Helps Readers Find Original Sources**

As noted previously, the References page is one way in which writers can reduce likelihood of plagiarism. Additionally, the References page is a resource which readers will want to consult as they consider their own research interests. Every writer has learned that consulting the References page of published articles leads to a goldmine of resources that may not have appeared in the initial database search. Thus, by providing a References page, each writer is contributing to the academic conversation by assisting other writers with resources.

**Conclusion**

APA style provides strict guidelines for the preparation of academic papers; these guidelines facilitate the transmission of knowledge from writer to reader. Authors who wish to publish their manuscripts must adhere to the proper formatting guidelines in order to be accepted (Robins, 2009). College students who wish to be successful in demonstrating their knowledge must likewise adhere to the proper formatting guidelines. The benefits of applying the APA style include enhanced readability, reduced likelihood of committing plagiarism, and increased facility for readers to pursue the cited sources for their own research purposes. For these reasons, it is important for college writers to understand and apply the APA format when completing written assignments. Hopefully, students will realize that the written assignment is not just a course requirement; it is potentially a part of the academic tradition in which writers share their thoughts and ideas so that new knowledge can be created and transformed by others in the academic community.

References

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