**Title of Essay**

Your Name

Name of Your School or College, Name of Your University

Course Number: Name of Course

Name of Your Instructor

Date

**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 Psychological 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. The introduction should conclude with a thesis statement: one sentence or two which clearly expresses the essay’s main point. In this case, students should follow APA Style because doing so enhances readability, reduces the likelihood of committing plagiarism, and ensures that readers who are interested in any referenced material may find the original sources.

The body of the essay usually begins with the second paragraph (or later, if the introduction takes up more than one paragraph). In the body, the author presents reasons why the thesis statement, above, is valid and provides reasoning, examples, and other supporting evidence necessary for the reader to understand the writer’s position. For example, this paragraph introduces the idea that the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological 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 how citations of original sources are presented.

Each additional paragraph further develops the ideas set forth in the thesis statement. This paragraph advances the idea of format by presenting specific instructions. In the body of the paper, the page number should appear in the top right corner. Each paragraph in the body should be double-spaced and indented by one-half inch. The margins should be 1” all around. The author should use a consistent font throughout, such as 12-point Times New Roman, 11-pt. Arial, or 11-pt. Calibri. Avoid flashy or showy fonts; the paper should maintain a professional appearance.

In APA Style, *title case* refers to those words in a title which should be capitalized. Use title case for the title of your essay and all headings. Capitalize: (1) the first word of a title, (2) the first word of a subtitle, (3) the first word after a colon, dash, or punctuation, (4) major words and hyphenated major words (e.g., “Self-Report,” not “Self-report”), and (5) words of four letters or more (American Psychological Association, 2019, Chapter 5.7). Note that these rules for title case apply to titles and headings, not the how capitalization should be used in ordinary text. Use standard capitalization rules for ordinary text.

Another feature of academic essays involves the use of sources. 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 counterarguments. This is how academics (people who are also known as scholars) advance the knowledge in their fields. Researchers must also 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.

The best way to acknowledge the authors is to cite the artifact (article, book, webpage, etc.) as it is introduced in the written assignment. Citations occur in two ways: in-text citations, and the references page.

**Examples of Citing a Source**

Subheadings, such as the one above, should be used sparingly in short essays. They are used here because the discussion on citing sources forms a distinct section within the larger paper. Note that the above heading is a Level 2 heading (flush right, bold type, not italicized). Consult the APA Style Guide for further information on subheadings. Most short essays, however, do not use subheadings.

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 this 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 unless the assignment does not require the use of sources. At the end of the paper, insert a page break to separate the References page from the body of the paper. Notice that the page number continues 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.

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 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 written assignment is not just a course requirement; it has the potential to be part of the academic tradition in which writers share their thoughts and ideas so new knowledge can be created and transformed by others in the academic community.

**References**

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