

MINDFIRE PRESS REPORT

ABCs of APA Style

by

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If you are a student who is new to the nuances of American Psychological Association (APA) style and you find the process of using it somewhat confusing, join the club. Learning APA is like learning a foreign language, a necessary but daunting task. Furthermore, unless you are a very detail-oriented person or you enjoy reading reference books, finding answers in the APA manual to your basic questions about how to cite articles, books, and other publications in your research papers is not that easy.

The purpose of this report is to provide you with concrete information that will enable you to write correct APA citations easily, both in your texts and in your reference lists, for those “vital few” sources of information that constitute the majority of reference citations.

For the “trivial many” sources that constitute the minority of reference citations, which coincidentally require the most expert guidance to get right, you (like me) have the APA manual and other special reference manuals to help you.

ABC analysis, also known as 80-20 analysis, focuses on the few items that make the biggest difference. Doing this maximizes efficiency and effectiveness. For example, the management of a retail store with 1000 items for sale wants to know which of those 1000 items have the highest demand so they can manage their inventory to ensure that they always have plenty of the big sellers in stock to meet customer demand. Whether or not they run out of stock on the infrequently selling items is much less important, and, therefore, receives much less of their time and attention.

Typically, a very small percentage of the items (generally 20% or less) account for the highest percentage of sales (generally 80% or more); hence the term 80-20 analysis. The former are known as the “vital few” items. They are the ones that the store must identify and manage most carefully.

In this report, we will identify the “vital few” or most commonly referenced sources, and we will examine in detail the components of the correct, APA style in-text and bibliographic reference citations for them. Our goal is to help you maximize your productivity and effectiveness as a researcher/writer.

Why learn APA Style?

Conceived in the 1920s to make the process of communication among scholars via the publication of manuscripts easier and more effective, the style guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) are widely used in universities and in scholarly journals today. “This standardization has greatly facilitated the communication of new ideas and research and simplified the tasks of publishers, editors, authors, and readers as well as enabled linkages of electronic files across articles and publications” (American Psychological Association [APA], 2001, p. xxi).

APA style is convenient shorthand that fosters universal communication among scholars. Therefore, like it or not, those of us who want to communicate with other scholars via the journals that require APA (or those students whose universities require them to use it) have to buckle down and learn at least the basics, or ABCs, of APA style.

Common Reference Sources (The Vital Few)

While there seems to be no end to the variety of sources of scholarly evidence—such as periodicals, books, audiovisual sources, and electronic sources—some arise more frequently in scholarly research than others. If you glance at the reference list of any journal article, you will find that most of the references are for journal articles and books. Since, these constitute the “vital few” which writers must understand and use correctly if they wish to earn recognition as scholars, we will focus on them.

Before we get started, we need to cover a few preliminaries.

Cite Properly, Avoid Plagiarism

It is paramount in scholarly writing to support every assertion you make with a reference to the literature. This both bolsters your argument and ensures that the person whose ideas you are using to make your case receives full credit for them. Failure to cite the work of others (thereby creating the impression that the ideas are yours), whether intentional or not, constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism is intellectual property theft, and is, of course, completely unacceptable.

Good Things Come in Pairs

To cite a source properly in a paper (or other formal document), a writer must (a) describe it briefly in the text, and (b) provide additional information in the list of references. The in-text citation provides pertinent information required to identify the source, and, in effect, points to the full, bibliographic reference citation provided

in the reference list, where the reader can find the rest of the relevant information on the source. You must not provide one without providing the other.

Anatomy of a Book Citation

I recently wrote and published a book to help doctoral students accelerate their progress toward the degree. In it, I share my ideas, as a recent Ph.D. graduate and full-time doctoral faculty member at a leading online university, for achieving this ultimate educational goal as cost-effectively as possible. This book is entitled *Student to Scholar: The Guide for Doctoral Students*.

Let's imagine that you read my book and decide to use some of the ideas in your writing. In particular, you want to write, based on your own experiences, about the importance of starting to think about your dissertation early in your doctoral program. To that end, you decide to quote a passage from my book before introducing your own critical ideas on the subject based on your experiences as a doctoral student. Hence, you write:

Traditional thinking says that you should start by studying your field (e.g., management, psychology, education) and then, when and only when you are ready, embark on your dissertation work. In practice this leads to a more or less linear process of course work, major papers, and the dissertation. While there is nothing inherently wrong with linear notion, you must not follow it strictly if you want to accelerate your program. (Levasseur, 2006, p. 9)

In this block quote, (Levasseur, 2006, p. 9) is the in-text citation.

This in-text citation identifies who wrote the quoted material and when, as well as the exact page from which the quotation came, but does not identify the nature of the source. That is, it does not tell a reader whether the referenced material comes from a book, a journal article, a dissertation, or some other source. The full reference citation, which you place in the reference list, completes the picture.

Here is the reference citation for my book:

Levasseur, R. E. (2006). *Student to scholar: The guide for doctoral students*. Annapolis, Maryland: MindFire Press.

Now the reader knows (by its format) the rest of the story. Namely, that the quoted material comes from a book. Note that the reference citation contains (a) additional information about the author's name (to specify the exact writer, or writers, if there are several authors), (b) the full title of the book (with only the first letter of the

title and of the subtitle in capital letters—except, of course, for any proper nouns, like America or Australia, which you must also capitalize), and (c) the location and name of the publisher. As you will soon see, the reference citation for a journal article is noticeably different from this basic form for a correct, APA style book reference citation.

Anatomy of a Journal Article Citation

Journal article reference citations constitute the most common type of reference found in scholarly publications, because the number of such articles published in a field on a given topic typically far exceeds the number of books or other sources.

For the sake of illustration, let us imagine that you once again want to quote a passage from one of my published works to support a point of view expressed in another one of your papers. However, this time you are paraphrasing a section of a journal article.

Many social science researchers have examined the impact of processes that induce cooperation in groups versus that of processes that instigate competition or create internal conflict. An aggregate analysis (a meta-analysis) of over 500 such studies by Johnson and Johnson (1989) showed that cooperative processes are far superior to conflict-inducing, competitive processes in terms of group performance and member satisfaction. (Levasseur, 2005, p. 179)

In this block quote, (Levasseur, 2005, p. 179) is the in-text citation.

As with the in-text citation for the book, this in-text citation identifies who wrote the quoted material and when, as well as the exact page from which the quotation came, but does not identify the nature of the source. To complete the picture, here is the reference citation for the journal article:

Levasseur, R. E. (2005). People skills: Change management tools—leading teams. *Interfaces*, 35(2), 179-180.

Now the reader knows (by its format) that the quoted material comes from a journal article. Note that the reference citation contains (a) additional information about the author's name (for positive identification), (b) the full title of the article, as well as (c) the journal title, volume number, issue number (in parentheses), and the beginning and ending pages of the article.

Comparison of Book and Article Citations

There are some subtle ways in which APA style requires you to present features of your reference citations which bear further examination. To facilitate this comparison, we need to study the two reference citations again.

Levasseur, R. E. (2006). *Student to scholar: The guide for doctoral students*. Annapolis, Maryland: MindFire Press.

Levasseur, R. E. (2005). People skills: Change management tools—leading teams. *Interfaces*, 35(2), 179-180.

Note first that the name of the book is in italics. Highlighting with italics draws the reader's attention to the location of the quoted material (i.e., in the 2006 edition of *Student to Scholar*).

Similarly, the title of the journal (i.e., *Interfaces*) and the volume number (i.e., 35) are in italics. This makes clear to the reader the specific location of the quoted material (i.e., in Volume 35 of *Interfaces*). CAVEAT: Do NOT italicize the issue or page numbers of the journal article.

Note very carefully the way in which APA captures the information on each source presented in the respective citations. Namely, the last name of the primary author comes first, followed by the initials (not the full name) of his or her first name (and, in this case, middle name). Pay particular attention to the spacing between those initials (i.e., R. E., not R.E.) and between the initials and the year of publication. The year of publication (i.e., 2006) is in parentheses followed by a period.

The title of the article and the book are subject to the same rules of capitalization. That is, capitalize only the first letter of the first word of the title (and of the subtitle if there is one) as well as any proper nouns, like England or France. In contrast, you must capitalize all of the major words in the journal's title.

The location of the publisher, followed by a colon, a space, and the name of the publisher, come last in a book reference citation.

The journal title, volume, issue, and page range complete a journal article reference citation. CAVEAT: Do NOT insert a p. or pp. before your page range. It is neither necessary, nor acceptable.

Now you know the basic structure of the two most common forms of reference citation, the book and the journal article.

Of course, there many variations on these basic citations which you will need to take into account to ensure that you get each citation you provide in your publications exactly right. Fortunately, the APA manual, and a handy little book by Robert Perrin, *Pocket Guide to APA Style*, can help you to make the necessary adjustments to fit just about any situation that you are likely to encounter.

A Sample Reference List

To cement the ideas we have covered so far, let us examine the following list of citations excerpted from the reference list of Barling, Weber, and Kelloway (1996), an excellent article on the effects of transforming leadership:

Barling, J., Fullugar, C., & Kelloway, E. K. (1992). *The union and its members: A psychological approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1987). Toward a behavioral theory of charismatic leadership in organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review*, *12*, 637-647.

Drucker, P. F. (1995, February). *Really inventing government*. *Atlantic Monthly*, *275*(2), 49-52, 54, 56, 57, 60, 61.

Note that the first reference citation is for a book and the last two are for articles.

Each citation has a unique feature that makes it different from the very basic form for a book or a journal article shown earlier. Let us analyze some of these unique characteristics.

First, the first two reference citations have multiple authors, which happens frequently in scholarly publication. Note (a) that commas separate the authors' names, (b) that a comma follows the next-to-last name (which is not the practice in general business writing), and (c) that an ampersand (i.e., "&") replaces the word "and" before the last author's name. Even when there are only two authors, as in the second reference citation, a comma still separates the names, and an ampersand still precedes the name of the second author.

Second, the third reference citation, for a magazine article, while similar to a journal article citation, does differ in some respects. Note, particularly, that the month of publication (i.e., February) appears with the year of publication in parentheses, even though the issue number also appears in parentheses after the volume number (i.e., *275*(2)).

How would you know that you had to put the month of publication in the reference citation for a magazine article? How would you know that you have to separate multiple authors' names with serial commas and an ampersand? How would you know how to cite any of the myriad of sources of information used in scholarly writing? For these “trivial many” the answer is simple. The APA manual or some other APA guide—like Perrin (2007)—would provide you with the necessary information to write each citation correctly.

Avoiding Common APA Errors

Students make many of the same errors when they first work with APA style. In this section, we will examine some of the most common situations that confuse my doctoral students. The goal is to show you what to do to avoid making these APA mistakes in your work.

Use of and vs. &

When a source has two or more authors, like Smith and Jones, then follow this simple rule:

Separate the names by “and” unless the names appear in parentheses. Then separate them by an ampersand (&).

For example, to introduce a quotation found on the first page of a hypothetical work by Smith and Jones, you might write:

Smith and Jones (2000) said, “Birds of a feather flock together” (p. 1).

Alternatively (and equally correctly), you might write:

“Birds of a feather flock together” (Smith & Jones, 2000, p. 1).

Similarly, you might cite the hypothetical work of three authors in either of these ways:

Tinker, Tailor, and Spy (2005) said, “A leopard can’t change its spots” (p. 10).

“A leopard can’t change its spots” (Tinker, Tailor, & Spy, 2005, p. 10).

Note the use of “and” or “&” as required.

Serial Comma

In business communication, you typically punctuate three or more terms in a series (e.g., X, Y, Z) as follows: X, Y and Z.

However, in APA style, you punctuate them as follows: X, Y, and Z.

Note the extra comma after the term preceding the word “and.”

Thus, Tinker, Tailor, and Spy is correct; not Tinker, Tailor and Spy.

Location of Quotation Marks and Periods

Which is correct, A, B, or C?

A: “Birds of a feather flock together.” (Smith & Jones, 2000, p. 1)

B: “Birds of a feather flock together.” (Smith & Jones, 2000, p. 1).

C: “Birds of a feather flock together” (Smith & Jones, 2000, p. 1).

If you said “C” you are paying attention, since we covered this quotation earlier. Think of “C” as a complete sentence that includes the quote and the in-text citation, and which, therefore, requires a concluding period.

CAVEAT: If your quote is 40 or more words in length, you must present it in a block quote. Here is an example from page 3:

Traditional thinking says that you should start by studying your field (e.g., management, psychology, education) and then, when and only when you are ready, embark on your dissertation work. In practice this leads to a more or less linear process of course work, major papers, and the dissertation. While there is nothing inherently wrong with linear notion, you must not follow it strictly if you want to accelerate your program. (Levasseur, 2006, p. 9)

In the case of a block quote, (a) there are no quotation marks, (b) the in-text citation follows the period in the concluding sentence, and, therefore, (c) there is no period after the in-text citation.

Volume and Issue

Which is correct, A, B, or C?

A: Levasseur, R. E. (2005). People skills: Change management tools—leading teams. *Interfaces*, 35(2), 179-180.

- B: Levasseur, R. E. (2005). People skills: Change management tools—leading teams. *Interfaces*, 35(2), 179-180.
- C: Levasseur, R. E. (2005). People skills: Change management tools—leading teams. *Interfaces*, 35(2), 179-180.

The correct answer is “B,” but why?

Hint: It has something to do with what you must italicize in a journal article citation. [The information is on page 5 if you need to refresh your memory.]

Use of p.

When you provide the exact page specification for a quotation or a paraphrase in an in-text citation, which is always recommended to help the reader find the text in the original source if desired, you must include it as follows:

Conger and Kanungo (1987, p. 640).

Note the space between the abbreviation for page (i.e., p.) and the page number (i.e., 15).

If the citation is from more than one page, then it might look like this:

Conger and Kanungo (1987, pp. 642-643).

CAVEAT: As mentioned on page 5, in reference citations you must NOT insert a p. or pp. before your page range. It is neither necessary, nor acceptable.

A comparison of the two in-text citations to the reference citation below illustrates this point:

Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1987). Toward a behavioral theory of charismatic leadership in organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review*, 12, 637-647.

Indenting Reference Citations

In the reference list, start the first line of each reference citation at the left margin. Indent all subsequent lines in the reference citation by one-half inch. Alternatively, use the paragraph formatting feature of your software to create a half-inch hanging indent to achieve the same spacing and allow you to make changes without having

to reformat your references. (The machine will do it for you automatically while preserving the hanging one-half inch format).

As an example, here is the sample reference list from page 7:

References

Barling, J., Fullagar, C., & Kelloway, E. K. (1992). *The union and its members: A psychological approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Conger, J. A., & Kanungo, R. N. (1987). Toward a behavioral theory of charismatic leadership in organizational settings. *Academy of Management Review*, *12*, 637-647.

Drucker, P. F. (1995, February). *Really* inventing government. *Atlantic Monthly*, *275*(2), 49-52, 54, 56, 57, 60, 61.

Capitalizing Titles and Subtitles

Although we covered this already (on page 5), so many people make this particular mistake that it is worth mentioning again.

Which of these two hypothetical reference citations is correct?

Smith, J., & Jones, M. (2000). The Migration of Similar Birds: An Integrative View. *Birdwatchers Journal*, *26*(3), 1-4.

Smith, J., & Jones, M. (2000). The migration of similar birds: An integrative view. *Birdwatchers Journal*, *26*(3), 1-4.

The second one is correct. The title and subtitle of the first citation have many words in capital letters that should be in lower case.

Avoiding Plagiarism when Citing

Many students inadvertently plagiarize when they are first learning APA style. Three primary ways in which this happens are (a) when students rely too heavily on direct quotations, (b) when they fail to use their own words when paraphrasing, and (c) when they fail to provide an in-text and reference citation for a source they are quoting or paraphrasing.

Let's examine each type of error briefly.

Problem A: Too Many Quotes

A rule of thumb about quotations that I encourage my students to follow is to keep the percentage of quoted material in each document to less than 10%. The reason for this is simple. Whereas every assertion that a doctoral student makes must have evidence (in the form of a citation from the literature) to support it, the overall work must primarily represent the student's critical thinking, not that of others.

Stringing together a whole series of quotations connected by the odd comment does not constitute doctoral-level work. On the contrary, students must demonstrate their ability to use higher order critical thinking skills by comparing, contrasting, analyzing, synthesizing, integrating, and evaluating the work of others. Just understanding and being able to explain and apply the ideas of others is not enough in doctoral work.

So, how does a doctoral student get off the horns of this dilemma (i.e., having to cite to support critical thinking, but not being able to quote more than 10% of the time)?

Citation of the work of others (to give them credit) is the requirement, not quotation of their work. Citation takes the form of either direct quotation or paraphrasing. Hence, the answer is to paraphrase the work of others most of the time, rather than quote the work of others. Keep the quotations to a salient few sections of your overall work where you feel the author(s)' words own words are necessary to inform the reader.

Problem B: Not Using Your Own Words

One of the most common errors of well-meaning students is literally to copy most of the words of another writer for fear of not expressing the ideas properly. While this may look like a compliment to the author, it often results in inadvertent plagiarism.

Just changing a few words in the original, even if you provide an in-text and reference citation, is plagiarism.

One good way to avoid this egregious error is to read the original source, look away, and then write what you remember in your own words. Then, be sure to provide the proper citation in APA style. You must do both—rephrase in your own words and provide the proper citation—to avoid plagiarizing the original source.

Here is an example based on one of the earlier quotes:

Traditional thinking says that you should start by studying your field (e.g., management, psychology, education) and then, when and only when you are ready, embark on your dissertation work. In practice this leads to a more or less linear process of course work, major papers, and the dissertation. While there is nothing inherently wrong with linear notion, you must not follow it strictly if you want to accelerate your program. (Levasseur, 2006, p. 9)

In lieu of this quote (to keep the overall percentage under 10%), imagine that you decide to paraphrase this material. So, after reading and putting it aside, you come up with something like the following:

Levasseur (2006) argued that a good way to accelerate a doctoral program is to start thinking about a dissertation topic early in the program (p. 9).

This gets at the main point, but in your own words, not the author's.

Problem C: Not Providing Required Citations

By convention, readers of scholarly work consider anything that you do not provide a citation for in your writing to be your ideas. So, to avoid plagiarism, review everything you write with an eye toward proper attribution of credit.

If you have cited something, then you are fine. However, if not, ask yourself this question: Are these my ideas or someone else's? If it is not clear, to be safe provide an in-text citation and a corresponding reference citation in the reference list.

Thus, even though you as a doctoral students must write in the third person exclusively (i.e., no "I" or "you" statements, or the equivalent, permitted), you can still express your unique scholarly voice by carefully crafting documents that provide solid evidence in support of a high-level analysis of a given topic.

Conclusion

As stated upfront, the purpose of this report was to provide you with concrete information that will enable you easily to write correct APA citations, both in your texts and in your reference lists, for those "vital few" sources of information that constitute the majority of reference citations.

To that end, we examined the form of the most commonly encountered in-text and reference citations for books and journal articles. We also discussed many common situations that lead to errors in applying APA style.

Hopefully, as a result, you are now better prepared to learn and apply this new language of scholarly communication.

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