

## Conquering APA Style: Advice From APA Style Experts

Jennifer L. Hughes, Agnes Scott College; Debi Brannan, Western Oregon University; Bradley Cannon, Psi Chi Central Office; Abigail A. Camden, Agnes Scott College; Amber M. Anthenien, University of Houston

**ABSTRACT.** Learning and teaching APA style is often a challenge because of the detailed rules for the writing style. Resources that provide accurate information about APA style that are easy for learners to consume can be useful tools for students and instructors. The goal of this article is to provide information to help writers become more competent and comfortable with APA style. The first section of this article contains lists of common APA style mistakes that are made when papers are submitted for publication. Editors look for very specific APA formatting and style, and this section will cover these issues. Moreover, the second section includes a list of APA style rules frequently encountered by an APA style tutor. The third section has information to help students navigate writing assignments in a research methods class. The fourth section addresses additional APA style rules that many writers do not know about. Finally, this information can serve as a guide for writers to use when writing APA style papers.

American Psychological Association (APA) style was developed to be a rigorous standard for scientific communication (APA, 2010). These guidelines help authors to structure their papers, write more clearly and concisely, know the mechanics of style, display their results, credit their sources, and provide references (APA, 2010). Learning and teaching APA style can be a challenge because writers are not often interested in learning the intricate details of the writing style or they are intimidated by all the details involved in learning APA style. However, an accurate knowledge of APA style is an important tool for writers, instructors teaching APA style, and reviewers (McDonald, 2011).

We have written this article with the hope of helping writers learn more about APA style. In an attempt to engage students while teaching APA style, instructors have used checklists (Franz & Spitzer, 2006), templates (Franz & Spitzer, 2006; Stahl, 1987), games (Hughes, 2017), sample manuscripts riddled with APA mistakes (Smith & Eggleston, 2001), peer review of APA style in papers (Mandernach, Zafonte, & Taylor, 2016), and online tutorials (Mages, & Garson, 2010). Franz and Spitzer (2006) found that students do better with learning APA style

if the material is presented in many formats. Mandernach et al. (2016) argued that direct instruction, including requiring repeated practice and teaching meaning behind the theory of APA style, as well as a combination of the other methods listed above, is the optimal way to learn APA style. We hope this article will serve as an additional resource for those learning and teaching APA style.

This article covers common APA style mistakes. We present four lists of issues, which are seen by the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research* Managing Editor, an APA Tutor, the Editor of the journal, a graduate student who teaches APA style, and an Associate Editor for the journal. Mandernach et al. (2016) demonstrated that writers using APA style had the most difficulty with documentation (i.e., citations, quoting, and references). These are repeated themes in the advice we give, and we aim to highlight those areas as critically important for learners and teachers alike.

### Part 1: Common APA Style Mistakes When Submitting a Paper for Publication Bradley Cannon, Managing Editor

Mastering APA Style can seem like a lot to take

in, especially for students, many of whom were taught only MLA format in their prior writing courses, if any format at all. Short of reading the *APA Publication Manual* from cover to cover, what rules should one learn first? Having conducted more than 700 APA Style reviews in my role as the *Psi Chi Journal's* APA Style reviewer, I would like to encourage authors to start by considering the following 10 mistakes. Based on my experience, these mistakes occur often, and if they are not caught early, they also tend to be more challenging and time-consuming to correct later. Although many students learning APA format are not yet writing papers for publication, it is a good practice to treat all writing projects as if they might eventually be published. In the classroom, mastering APA Style will make (a) future classes less tedious, (b) material easier to consume, (c) increase confidence and self-efficacy, and (d) improve overall grades. Learning proper APA Style before (or at least early in) the review process will also help (a) prevent tedious revisions for the author, (b) increase reviewers' comprehension of the article, and/or (c) minimize publication delays. The good news is this: These mistakes are easy to avoid with only a little awareness and practice.

### **1. Missing References and Other Materials**

Before submitting a manuscript, it is crucial to make sure that all materials are openly available to reviewers that would be helpful in analyzing the article. This includes references and matching citations, tables and figures, participant demographics (i.e., age, sex and/or gender, race/ethnicity, and any other relevant demographics), and other data and facts necessary for a reader to understand the study, its validity, and the implications. For instance, authors should manually scroll through their article to make sure that all citations have a corresponding reference in the references section, and vice versa. As another example, authors should double-check that they included all tables and figures that are mentioned in the manuscript body, as well as a copy of materials such as the brand-new scale that they created. Editors and reviewers cannot assess and correct information that is not available to them, so any of these missing items are almost certain to cause a manuscript to go through an additional round of reviews.

### **2. Incorrect Verb Tense**

As a general rule, authors should use the past tense

(e.g., was, stated) or past perfect or present perfect tense (e.g., had been, have shown) throughout an empirical research manuscript. For example, “For our first hypothesis, we **expected** that participants **would** . . . ,” “Bandura (1976) **found** . . . ,” or “Researchers **have found** . . . ” Only use the present tense to discuss the implications of the results and to present conclusions (e.g., “Based on our results, people **may be** more likely to . . . ”; APA, 2010, section 3.06). Inappropriate use of the present tense can mislead readers about who did what in a sentence, or lead readers to believe that a hypothesis or finding is more understood and thoroughly tested than it really is. Learn more about verb tense in APA (2010) section 3.18.

### **3. No Permission to Reprint/Adapt**

The repercussions of committing plagiarism can be extremely costly, and yet authors sometimes overlook this. Remember: It is the responsibility of the author to obtain written permission from the original publisher to reprint or adapt anything previously published that is beyond fair use (APA, 2010, section 6.10). This includes an image, for example, taken from Google as well as a previously published table. (Yes, even if you were the original author of that table.) Obtaining permission from the publisher can sometimes take time, so this process should be started as early as possible, preferably before conducting the research. Failing to receive permission to reprint materials could force an author to make significant revisions to an article to ensure that the material is sufficiently described without use of the material itself. To determine whether permission is needed and what steps should be taken, see APA (2010) sections 6.10 and 8.04 on “Permission to Reprint” and “Obtaining Written Permission” from the copyright owner. APA (2010) section 2.12 shows how to properly cite that permission has been granted.

### **4. Interchangeable Use of the Terms Sex and Gender**

*Gender identity* can change over time (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015) and is defined “as a person’s deeply-felt, inherent sense of being a boy, a man, or male; a girl, a woman, or female; or an alternative gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender nonconforming, boygirl, ladyboi)” (APA, Divisions 16 and 44, 2015, p. 20). On the other hand, *sex* refers to the biological sex (i.e., male, female). In other words, if participants were unable to select options other than *man* and *woman*, then the term *sex* should be used, not

FALL 2017

PSI CHI  
JOURNAL OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH

*gender.* Inconsistent or inaccurate use of these terms can mislead reviewers and is sometimes challenging to correct without the author's assistance. See APA (2010) section 3.11 to learn more, or Hughes, Camden, and Yangchen (2016) for specific examples of how to word demographic questions about sex, gender, and many other demographic questions.

### 5. Missing or Noncongruent Races/Ethnicities

Many people do not realize that race and ethnicity mean different things to different people. *Race* tends to refer to skin color or physical appearance (e.g., Black, White), whereas *ethnicity* tends to refer to location (e.g., African American, European American). Authors are encouraged to use congruent language throughout (e.g., Blacks and Whites or African Americans and European Americans) as opposed to noncongruent language (e.g., Blacks and European Americans). Also, it is best to refer to people by who they are (e.g., Blacks) than who they are not (e.g., non-Whites). Again, see Hughes, Camden, and Yangchen (2016) and APA (2010) section 3.14 to learn more.

### 6. Capitalizing Scales, Subscales, Variables, and Groups

Incorrect or inconsistent capitalization can also sometimes make it difficult for readers to decipher an author's meaning. For example, *Fearful* the subscale or *fearful* the emotion are not necessarily the same thing. Scales (e.g., *Sensation-Seeking Scale*) and subscales (e.g., *Sensation-Seeking Disinhibition scale*) should always be capitalized as shown, whereas variables (e.g., *happiness*) and conditions and groups (e.g., *information* and *no-information* conditions) should be lowercased. An exception to this rule occurs if variables appear with multiplication signs (e.g., *Happiness × Hunger*). See APA (2010) sections 4.18–4.20 for more examples.

### 7. Writing in the Passive Voice

Writing in the passive voice can be awkward to read and generally wastes space. Moreover, many authors do not know that each page often costs some journals money to print and/or lay out for publication. Therefore, authors should watch out for and generally replace passive verbs and phrases (e.g., "was/were" and "There was/were"). For example, change "There were three participants who we eliminated from further analyses" to "We eliminated three participants from further analyses." See APA (2010) section 3.18 to learn more.

### 8. Not Including Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs)

Most major academic journals now use DOI numbers, which function as hyperlinks to specific articles, issues, or publications. For example, <https://doi.org/10.24839/2325-7342.JN22.3.154> is the DOI for this invited editorial. As opposed to URLs, DOIs are permanent and can be updated by the publisher so that the same DOI hyperlink will lead to the latest version of an article, even if the article's URL changes. DOI numbers should be placed at the end of all journal references in clickable hyperlink form as shown above, not by listing the doi as doi:10.24839/2325-7342.JN22.3.154 (McAdoo, 2017). DOI numbers can be found online for most articles or by using the "Search Metadata" tool at <https://doi.crossref.org/guestquery>. DOIs were first introduced in 2000, but many journals have created DOIs for their past articles going back far before that year. If a journal article does not have an assigned DOI number *and* the article was found online, state "Retrieved from [insert URL]" instead (APA, 2010, section 7.01).

### 9. Misuse of Abbreviations

APA (2010) states that abbreviations are occasionally helpful for communicating complex scientific terms. However, the manual also explains that abbreviations should generally be avoided if the terms may be unfamiliar to readers (APA, 2010, p. 106, section 4.22). Furthermore, APA (2010) section 4.22 requires authors to avoid abbreviations that are used fewer than three times, and authors should consider avoiding abbreviations that occur more often than three times, too (Hales, Kipling, & Rector, 2017). If an abbreviation is deemed to be useful, it should be written out on the first use and introduced in parentheses; all further uses of that term in the manuscript should be written in abbreviation form only. As an exception, a few abbreviations are accepted as established word entries such as IQ and AIDS, and do not need to be introduced; to see if an abbreviation is an established term, authors can check *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary online* (APA, 2010, section 4.24).

### 10. Unmasked Manuscripts

When a journal requests a masked manuscript submission, this means that all identifying information such as author and school affiliation should be removed from the file. Doing so protects author confidentiality, which is why the *Psi Chi Journal* and many other journals require all submissions to

be submitted in this way. Identifying information should be carefully removed from the first page and also from all other pages throughout the manuscript (e.g., data was collected at CSU). Students often fail to fully mask their manuscripts, which causes their work to be returned to them to correct this before the peer-review process can begin. Authors should also review submission guidelines for any other specific instructions for the title page or elsewhere throughout the submission; journals do sometimes have specialized requirements outside of the *APA Publication Manual* in order to best fit each journal's unique needs.

## **Part 2: Common Writing Issues That Tutors Address**

### **Abigail A. Camden, APA Style Tutor**

Even if a paper has strong writing, errors in APA Style can detract not only from its clarity, but also its physical appearance and perceived quality. Therefore, tutoring students to craft psychology papers under the basic parameters of APA Style is a necessity. The following are 10 APA Style errors that I often see as an APA Style tutor:

#### **1. Paraphrased Material Must Be Cited**

The most critical APA error that I see in many student papers is not citing paraphrased material. Section 6.01 of the APA (2010) *Publication Manual* notes that this delves into the dangers of plagiarism: “Whether paraphrasing, quoting an author directly, or describing an idea that influenced your work, you must credit that source” (p. 170). Additionally, though page numbers or paragraph numbers are not required for paraphrased material, section 6.04 (p. 171) of the manual recommends providing them, particularly for material derived from text that is intricate or extensive.

#### **2. Formatting of Running Heads**

A running head should be a shortened version of a paper’s title, with the latter conveying essential information about the paper’s main topic (APA, 2010, section 2.01). As an APA Style tutor, common running head errors are: incorrect typeface or font size, repeating the words “Running head” on pages after the first, capitalizing “head” on the first page, using more than 50 characters, and not capitalizing the running head (i.e., correct: “Running head: YOUR TITLE HERE;” APA, 2010, section 8.03). Because of automatic formatting of headers in word-processing systems, authors must check the APA Style of their running heads (particularly the

typeface and font size). For an example of a correct running head, see the first two pages of the sample paper on p. 41 of the APA (2010) *Publication Manual*.

#### **3. Incorrect Headings and Levels of Heading**

Students often make errors when adding headings to their manuscripts (e.g., incorrect levels of heading, bolding headings that should not be). The basic headings within an APA Style manuscript are: Abstract, Method (singular!), Results, Discussion, and References, all of which are centered, and all of which are bolded except Abstract and References (APA, 2010). Authors should not include a heading for the introduction, unless requested by the journal (section 3.03). In tutoring, I find that students are often hesitant to add additional subheadings to their manuscripts; however, subheadings (particularly within the literature review) add “signposts,” clarity, and structure to writing. This said, APA’s levels of heading must be followed, including having at least two subsections with a given section in order for a subheading to be warranted (much like an outline; APA, 2010; see p. 62 for a useful table showing subheading formatting).

#### **4. Formatting of the Text**

Incorrect APA formatting of the text can reduce a manuscript’s readability and professionalism (APA, 2010, p. 228). When formatting a manuscript, it is recommended in section 8.03 that authors use serif fonts—with Times New Roman being the preferred font—except in tables and figures, in which sans-serif fonts are acceptable. Double spacing should also be used throughout, margins should be at least 1 in., and paragraphs should be indented at  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch (APA, 2010, section 8.03). Two spaces should be used following the period at the end of a sentence (APA, 2010, section 4.01). (Note: *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research* prefers one space when submitting for publication.) However, many students whom I tutor find it unnatural to use two spaces. As a remedy, after completing a manuscript, authors can use their word processor’s “find and replace function” (Ctrl + F) to search for one space (“.”) that should be replaced with two spaces (“.”). After using this technique, authors must edit the spaces after initials (e.g., in references and the byline) and in-text punctuation (such as e.g., i.e.,) to be one space (APA, 2010, section 4.01). For more comments on formatting, see “Preparing the Manuscript for Submission” in section 8.03 (pp. 228–230) of the *Publication Manual* (APA, 2010).

FALL 2017

PSI CHI  
JOURNAL OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH

## 5. Improper Use of “et al.”

Students are sometimes challenged by the proper use of “et al.” The general rules for the use of et al. within in-text citations are as follows: for in-text citations of three to five authors, writers should initially list the names of all authors, and subsequently use et al.; for six or more authors, et al. should be used immediately (APA, 2010, p. 175, 177; also see p. 177 for a comprehensive chart). However, when shortening a citation with the same first author and the same year, using et al. can result in separate works appearing identical. In this circumstance, one should list enough authors prior to et al. to differentiate them (APA, 2010, section 6.12). Authors should ensure that they do not use the full in-text citation (i.e., without et al.) more than once; this can be easily accomplished using Ctrl + F to search for an author’s last name throughout the document. In addition to its use in parenthetical citations, et al. should also be used within a sentence instead of “and colleagues” (APA, 2010, section 4.26).

## 6. Incorrect References

Rather than following samples provided in section 7.01 (APA, 2010), some authors are tempted to use online quick-fixes for creating references, or copy and paste references from PsycINFO or Google Scholar without checking the accuracy of the APA Style. This can result in incorrect references. Frequent errors I see in tutoring are using “retrieved from” dates when uncalled for (p. 192), and incorrectly capitalizing words in journal names (e.g., “of” or “and”; section 4.15). Examples of numerous types of references can be found in sections 7.01 through 7.11 of the *APA Publication Manual* (pp. 198–215). The APA Style Blog (APA, 2017; see <http://blog.apastyle.org/>) can serve as an additional resource for examples of references.

## 7. Italicize Most Statistical Coefficients

Another common APA error is not italicizing statistical coefficients when reporting results. In short, most statistical symbols used for reporting results of statistical analyses are italicized (e.g., *N*, *df*), whereas Greek letters (e.g.,  $\alpha$ ), subscripts, and superscripts are not (APA, 2010; see section 4.45 for an extensive chart). Relatedly, when mentioned within the sentence rather than within commas, statistical symbols should be written in nonitalicized words instead of symbols (i.e., “mean,” not *M*).

## 8. Effective Abstracts

Students often wrangle with crafting effective abstracts, with errors such as not including all aspects of the paper, writing too much or too little (i.e., it should be 150 to 250 words), or not including keywords. APA (2010) notes that the abstract can be viewed as the most important paragraph in the manuscript. It should include a terse overview of all aspects of the research including the purpose, methods, results (including significance levels, confidence intervals, or effect sizes), and the study’s applications and implications. As a tutor, one useful technique I use to help students create abstracts is the “structured abstract” (see the APA Style Blog; Stefanie, 2014) to ensure that all elements of the abstract are present. After writing a structured abstract, authors can then remove the headings if they are not required for the journal or professor to whom the paper is being submitted. Ultimately, abstracts are tools that provide readers a brief glimpse of one’s research. Thus, also using carefully chosen keywords at the end of an abstract can further enhance its effectiveness.

## 9. Common Errors With Parentheses

In APA Style, sets of parentheses should never be beside each other, but should instead be combined with a semicolon (e.g., parentheses offering an example and parentheses with an in-text citation; APA, 2010, section 4.09, p. 94). Students are also often challenged by multiple citations within one set of parentheses. In this instance, citations should be listed in alphabetical order, separated by semicolons (APA, 2010, section 6.16). Further, work by the same authors (in the same order) should be cited by listing the name(s) followed by the years of publication in ascending order, separated by commas. For more detail, see APA, 2010, section 6.16.

## 10. Word Choice and Flow of Writing

One challenge for all writers is increasing the clarity and effectiveness of their written communication. APA’s (2010) sections 3.07 through 3.11 offer guidance on writing style. Some common errors that I see in tutoring are imprecise use of words such as *since* (pp. 83–84) or *like* (p. 68), problems with word choice or colloquialisms (p. 68), and a lack of transition words (p. 65). Namely, APA (2010) notes that—to increase the clarity of scientific writing—*since* is best used as an indicator of time (i.e., rather than meaning because). Similarly, *like* should not be used to mean *such as* but rather for conveying analogies or similarities. Colloquialisms

and ambiguities should also be avoided (e.g., a lot; see section 3.09). To further increase flow and precision in writing, APA (2010) suggests the use of transition words to link thoughts and provide continuity. Online sources for transition words (e.g., Campbell, Buckhoff, & Dowell, 1997) that organize the words by type of transition (e.g., concession, similarity) can be useful in helping students learn to add transitions to their writing. For more direction on improving the clarity and precision of one's writing, see sections 3.07 through 3.11 (APA, 2010).

A major barrier to students mastering APA Style is not obtaining or using the APA (2010) *Publication Manual*. This is a loss to learning because the manual provides irreplaceable resources that explain all aspects of APA Style, in addition to providing useful content such as sample papers. However, if students or authors are not able obtain the manual, the APA Style Blog (<http://blog.apastyle.org/>) constitutes a comprehensive and reliable resource maintained by APA itself. The blog is wonderful—filled with examples of references, headings, phrasing (you name it!). Many of the exact resources from the APA manual are available on this website including various explanatory charts and sample papers.

### **Part 3: Writing Tips and Tricks to Help in a Research Methods Class Debi Brannan, Editor, and Amber Anthenion, Graduate Research Assistant**

When students enter a research methods class, often it is their first experience with attempting to read, write, and understand scientific language and materials. Mastering these skills is critical during an introductory research methods courses because, as students move to higher-level psychological courses, professors often assume that the students can communicate and think like a researcher/professional. We often see the following APA writing errors in our method courses. The following include tips for writing a better APA style paper.

#### **1. Use of “As Cited In . . .”**

Authors should cite material using “as cited in” only when they are unable to obtain the original articles (APA, 2010, section 6.17). This should be done sparingly. Authors should check whether their articles are available using Google Scholar or PsycINFO, and cite them directly. It is possible that once the authors read the article and full results they may interpret the study findings or contributions differently than other researchers. Note: If

authors use “as cited in,” only the material they read is listed in the reference section (APA, 2010, section 6.17). See page 178 for an example of how to cite secondary sources in text.

#### **2. Direct Quotations**

Authors should use direct quotations sparingly, and they should only use them when they are crucial to making their point (Cash, 2009). When authors use quotations, they must cite the source and list a page number or numbers (APA, 2010, section 6.03). Quotes with fewer than 40 words should appear in the text, but quotes that are 40 words or longer should be displayed in a freestanding block about a half inch from the left margin. The quote should be indented, double-spaced, and appear without quotation marks. Additionally, in-text citations for block quotations should be placed outside the period, as opposed to within the period typically used in writing.

#### **3. Use of Contractions**

Another common mistake is for authors to use contractions. In scientific writing, authors should spell words out completely (Lee, 2015).

#### **4. Semantics Matter**

When writing in APA format, authors should not write *proven*. Instead, they should use words such as *revealed*, *indicated*, or *suggested*. As much as researchers want to prove something to society, scientists can never say with 100% accuracy that they are correct because there will always be situations in psychological research that can change the outcome of the investigation (e.g., age, culture). Moreover, all psychological research requires replication. It is also important to remember that researchers never have complete control over all the confounding and extraneous variables threatening the validity of their study. One other common mistake is to discuss “the study” as if it were a person (APA, 2010, section 3.09). For example, “The study examined the influence of mood on music” should be changed to “The researchers examined the influence of mood on music.”

#### **5. Citing of Dissertations and Theses**

Authors should avoid citing dissertations or theses. If they are good enough for publication, they will have a corresponding article that can be cited. The reason to use published papers is because they go through a rigorous peer-review process that provides some assurance in the researcher’s findings.

FALL 2017

PSI CHI  
JOURNAL OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH

## 6. Citing Measures

If authors use a measure or measures, they need to be sure to cite them (APA, 2010, section 7.08). Researchers worked hard to create the measures; they deserve the credit. Moreover, others reading the paper may want to consider the measures used, and proper citations will allow them to find the measures. Authors should also give evidence for the reliability and validity for the measures to establish that they used strong measures (APA, 2010, section 2.06).

## 7. Paragraph Length

One sentence paragraphs come across as abrupt for readers, and paragraphs that are lengthy (i.e., longer than one double-spaced page) can lose the reader's attention (APA, 2010, section 3.08). The first sentence of each paragraph should give the reader a brief overview of the information that will be covered in that paragraph. The body of the paragraph will provide supporting evidence for that statement. And the last sentence of the paragraph should relate that information back to the hypothesis or set up the following paragraph.

## 8. Seriation Throughout the Paper

APA (2010) states that, to aid the reader, authors should use seriation. Authors should make sure that items within a series are "syntactically and conceptually parallel" in papers (APA, 2010, p. 63, section 3.04). One trick that many authors use is to alphabetize the items they are using in their papers and always present those items in that order. Remember that one or two sentences do not make up a paragraph.

**FIGURE 1**

- Authors should use numerals for numbers that represent "time, dates, ages, scores and points on a scale, exact sums of money, and numerals as numerals" (APA, 2010, p. 112, section 4.31). However, an exception involves authors using words for approximations of numbers of days, months, or years. For example, an author could write "I started college about three years ago."
- Authors should use numerals for numbers that are listed before a unit of measurement (APA, 2010, section 4.31). An example would be 7.3 inches.
- As mentioned earlier in this paper, authors should use numerals for statistics, but they also should use numbers for percentages, decimals, ratios, and percentiles/quartiles (APA, 2010, section 4.31).
- When authors are using the plurals of numbers they should add s or es alone, without an apostrophe (APA, 2010, section 4.38). A common mistake involves the use of decades and authors should write them like this: 1970s.
- Authors should use commas between groups of three or more digits (APA, 2010, section 4.37). An example would be 7,300.

Formatting Numbers in APA Style.

## 9. Use of Which and That

Many authors do not know when to use *which* and *that* correctly. Authors should use *which* for information that is parenthetical in nature, and they should set off the material with a comma (APA, 2010, section 3.22). For information that is essential to the meaning of the sentence, authors should use *that*. For example, "Floors that do not have carpet are cold to stand on" as compared to "I stood on the cold floor, which did not have carpet."

## 10. Use of Numbers

We often see authors use numbers incorrectly. The general rule is that authors should use numerals for all numbers 10 and above (APA, 2010, section 4.31). However, using numbers can be more complicated than that general rule. See Figure 1 for additional guidelines.

## Part 4: APA Style Rules Many Writers Do Not Know **Jennifer L. Hughes, Associate Editor**

I frequently see the following APA rules violated when I review papers for possible publication. When I talk with writers about these errors, they often tell me that they have never heard about these rules. The following list includes my top 10 errors that many writers do not know about. I also added an explanation for how to avoid committing each error. Readers can test themselves to see how many of these rules they know about.

### 1. Emphasizing Terms

APA (2010) advises authors to use quotation marks for words or phrases that are slang, ironic comments, or invented or coined expressions (section 4.07). Authors should do so the first time the phrase is used, but not after that. In contrast, authors should italicize technical or key terms for emphasis the first time they are used (section 4.07).

### 2. Presentation of Lists of a Series of Items

APA (2010) dictates how authors should present a series of items (section 3.04). The manual states that authors using a series within a sentence or paragraph should use letters, not numbers, in parentheses such as: (a) first, (b) second, and (c) third (section 3.04). They should not use: (1), (2), (3); 1, 2, 3; or a, b, c. They should use commas to separate three or more items that do not have internal commas. If there are three or more elements with internal commas, they should use semicolons.

If authors are using separate paragraphs in a series, they should identify those by using Arabic numerals followed by a period. These numerals should not be enclosed in or followed by parentheses. Finally, if authors are using separate sentences in a series, they also should use Arabic numerals and follow them with periods. The first word should be capitalized and the sentence should end with correct punctuation. However, it should be noted that the use of “numbered lists” may signal an unwanted ordinal position among the items. If authors do not wish this to happen, they can use bullets instead.

### **3. Spacing of Numbers in Text**

Authors should treat numbers as they would treat words (APA, 2010, see section 4.46). For example, spaces should go before and after numbers in the text, so that they are easier to read (e.g., not 1+2 but 1 + 2).

### **4. When to Use a Zero Before Decimals**

Authors typically do not know when to use a zero before decimal points. In section 4.35, APA (2010) states authors should “Use a zero before the decimal point with numbers that are less than 1 when the statistic can exceed 1” (p. 113). A common example of this is *Cohen’s d* and it would be listed as 0.60. APA (2010) also states that authors should not “... use a zero before a decimal fraction when the statistic cannot be greater than 1 (e.g., correlations, proportions, and levels of statistical significance)” (p. 113).

### **5. Punctuation and Quotation Marks**

Authors should close quotation marks after periods and commas (APA, 2010, section 4.08). For example, “... like this.” Other punctuation marks are placed within quotations only when they are part of the quoted material.

### **6. Using En Dashes Between Page Numbers in References**

Authors often use the terms hyphen and dash interchangeably (McAdoo, 2010). However, dashes are different from hyphens. APA (2010) specifies two types of dashes in section 4.13: em dashes (i.e., longer than a hyphen and used to set off an element) and en dashes (i.e., longer and thinner than a hyphen, but shorter than an em dash; they are used between items of equal weight in a compound adjective, page ranges, and other types of ranges). Most authors do not know to use an en dash between the page range for books and articles listed in their reference sections. McAdoo (2010) describes how

to create an en dash: “On a PC, hold the Control key and type the minus sign (specifically, the one on the numeric keypad to the right; this shortcut will not work with the one at the top of the keyboard)” and “On a Mac, hold the Option key and type the minus sign (specifically, the one on the top of the keyboard)” (para. 7). Here is an example hyphen (-), em dash (—), and en dash (–).

### **7. Periods Do Not Follow**

#### **DOIs or URLs in References**

Punctuation should not follow DOIs or URLs in references (Lee, 2011). The reason for this is that these work as live links that readers can use to access article information and the punctuation is not part of those links.

### **8. Article Titles That End With an Exclamation Point or Question Mark**

When writing references, for article titles that already contain punctuation such as an exclamation point or question mark, the author should keep the original punctuation and not add a period (Lee, 2011). The author should not have two punctuation marks after the title.

### **9. Listing Editors of Books in References**

Writers typically know how to list authors’ and editors’ last names and initials in references. An example would be: Hughes, J. L., & Camden, A. A. (APA, 2010, section 6.27). However, for editors, initials appear before surnames (e.g., J. L. Hughes & A. A. Camden). A common mistake is that writers put a comma between two editors’ names. There should not be comma between the two editors’ names, but a comma is used if the book has three or more editors. Note: As listed above, the initials of the authors and editors should have a space between them, and many writers violate this rule (APA 2010, section 4.01). A good guideline to use is that all elements of a reference should have one space between them (APA, 2010, section 6.25).

### **10. Listing Publishers in References**

Authors should list publishers in as brief a form as possible (APA, 2010, section 6.30). For example, authors should remove the following: *The*, *Publishers*, *Co.*, and *Inc.* However, the following should be kept: *Books* and *Press*.

In conclusion, we believe it is important for academics as writers, instructors, and reviewers to continue to learn about APA style. Students also need a solid foundation for APA style. This article

FALL 2017

PSI CHI  
JOURNAL OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH

presented common APA mistakes with the hope that both academics and students will learn from the errors.

## References

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychological Association. (2017). *APA style blog*. Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/>
- American Psychological Association, Divisions 16 and 44. (2015). *Key terms and concepts in understanding gender diversity and sexual orientation among students*. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/lgbt/key-terms.pdf>
- Campbell, G. M., Buckhoff, M., & Dowell, J. A. (1997). *Transition words*. Retrieved from <https://msu.edu/~jdowell/135/transw.html>
- Cash, T. F. (2009). Caveats in the proficient preparation of an APA-style research manuscript for publication. *Body Image*, 6, 1–6. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2008.10.003>
- Franz, T. M., & Spitzer, T. M. (2006). Different approaches to teaching the mechanics of American Psychological Association Style. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 6(2), 13–20. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ854923>
- Hales, A. H., Kipling, D. W., & Rector, J. (2017). Alienating the audience: How abbreviations hamper scientific communication. *Observer*, 2, 22–24. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/alienating-the-audience-how-abbreviations-hamper-scientific-communication>
- Hughes, J. L. (2017, March). Teaching APA style by making it into a game. In J. L. Hughes, *Keeping students' interest: Class activities for undergraduate psychology courses*. Panel presentation given at the annual meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, Atlanta, GA.
- Hughes, J. L., Camden A. A., & Yangchen, T. (2016). Rethinking and updating demographic questions: Guidance to improve descriptions of research samples. *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*, 21, 138–151. <https://doi.org/10.24839/2164-8204.JN21.3.138>
- Lee, C. (2011, July 14). Punctuating the reference list entry. *APA Style Blog*. Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2011/07/punctuating-the-reference-list-entry.html>
- Lee, C. (2015, December 10). Contractions in formal writing: What's allowed, what's not. *APA Style Blog*. Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2015/12/contractions-in-formal-writing-whats-allowed-whats-not.html>
- Mages, W. K., & Garson, D. S. (2010). Get the cite right: Design and evaluation of a high-quality online citation tutorial. *Library and Information Science Research*, 32, 138–146. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2009.10.004>
- Mandernach, B. J., Zafonte, M., & Taylor, C. (2016). Instructional strategies to improve college students' APA style writing. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 27, 407–412. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ1093747>
- McAloo, T. (2010, September 23). Computer editing tip: En dashes. *APA Style Blog*. Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/09/computer-editing-tip-en-dashes.html>
- McAloo, T. (2017, March 1). DOI display guidelines update (March 2017). *APA Style Blog*. Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/digital-object-identifier-doi/>
- McDonald, K. E. (2011). Teaching the 6th edition of APA style of writing in counselor education. *Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 3, 124–145. Retrieved from <http://repository.wcsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1031&context=jcps>
- Smith, G. E., & Eggleston, T. J. (2001). Comprehending APA style through manuscript analysis. *Teaching of Psychology*, 28, 108–110. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15328023TOP2802\\_08](http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/S15328023TOP2802_08)
- Stahl, J. M. (1987). Facilitating use of the APA Publication Manual in the scientific writing Course. In V. P. Makosky, L. G. Whittemore, & A. M. Rogers (Eds.), *Activities handbook for the teaching of psychology* (vol. 2, pp. 311–314). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Stefanie. (2014). *Gimme structure*. Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2014/04/gimme-structure.html>
- Westbrook, L., & Saperstein, A. (2015). New categories are not enough: Rethinking the measurement of sex and gender in social surveys. *Gender and Society*, 29, 534–560. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243215584758>

*Author Note.* Jennifer L. Hughes, Department of Psychology, Agnes Scott College and Associate Editor for the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*; Debi Brannan, Western Oregon University and Editor for the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*; Bradley Cannon, Psi Chi Central Office, Writer/Journal Managing Editor for the *Psi Chi Journal of Psychological Research*; Abigail A. Camden, Agnes Scott College and APA Style Tutor; Amber M. Anthenien, University of Houston and Graduate Research Assistant.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jennifer Hughes, Department of Psychology, 141 E. College Ave., Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA 30030. E-mail: [jhughes@agnesscott.edu](mailto:jhughes@agnesscott.edu)

# 3 REASONS TO JOIN PSYCAS



## 1 PSYCAS BENEFITS STUDENTS AND YOUR PROGRAMS.

Most psychology students apply to more than one program. For students, the Centralized Application Service (CAS™) for psychology programs streamlines the application process, taking away the need to repeat application steps for each program of interest. A CAS can also streamline admissions processes for your psychology program, reducing the manual administrative work for admissions teams and faculty and facilitating the sharing of best practices in recruitment and retention among programs.

## 2 PSYCAS PAINTS THE BIG PICTURE.

PSYCAS provides data and analytics for all participating programs, collecting accurate statistics about the entire profession, such as a complete count of the number of applicants to psychology programs, their background and who from the applicant pool is accepted and enrolled into programs.

## 3 APPLICANTS WANT A MORE EFFICIENT APPLICATION PROCESS.

Today's applicants are familiar with CAS technology, and having experienced when applying to undergraduate programs, expect it for their graduate applications too. Across other professions and disciplines, 90% of applicants express a preference for using a CAS when applying to graduate school, and prospective psychology graduate students say that having access to an efficient, streamlined, and less-stressful applicant process is worth the PSYCAS service fee.

**SIMPLIFIED. STREAMLINED. SMART.  
LEARN MORE ABOUT PSYCAS AT [PSYCAS.APA.ORG](http://PSYCAS.APA.ORG)**

FALL 2017

PSI CHI  
JOURNAL OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION



**PSYCAS**  
the centralized application service  
for psychology programs

LIAISON





THE COLLEGE OF  
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY  
AT ARGOSY UNIVERSITY

## PREPARE TO CHANGE LIVES.

At the College of Clinical Psychology at Argosy University, we know that discovering your life's purpose can make all the difference. Our supportive faculty is committed to helping you realize that purpose and succeed as a professional in one of the many areas of psychology research or clinical practice. Our Clinical Psychology programs offer a rigorous curriculum grounded in theory and research, while also fostering deep learning by incorporating experiential elements, classroom exercises, personal reflection and supervised field experiences.

And we're proud to say that the Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology (PsyD) program at each of our ten schools has received accreditation\* from the American Psychological Association (APA), certifying that they meet their rigorous standards.

Each of our ten locations offers a degree in:

### **DOCTOR OF PSYCHOLOGY (PSYD) IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY**

We are now accepting applications for Spring and Fall 2018.

Learn more at [clinical.argosy.edu/psichi](http://clinical.argosy.edu/psichi)



\*The Doctor of Psychology in Clinical Psychology Program at Argosy University, Atlanta, Chicago, Hawaii, Orange County, Phoenix, San Francisco Bay Area, Schaumburg, Tampa, Twin Cities and Northern Virginia is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of the American Psychological Association (APA). Questions related to the program's accredited status should be directed to the Commission on Accreditation: Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation, American Psychological Association, 750 1st Street, NE, Washington DC 20002 Phone: (202) 336-5979 / E-mail: [apaacred@apa.org](mailto:apaacred@apa.org) / Web: [www.apa.org/ed/accreditation](http://www.apa.org/ed/accreditation)

Argosy University is accredited by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (985 Atlantic Ave., Suite 100, Alameda, CA 94501, [wscuc.org](http://wscuc.org)). Programs, credential levels, technology, and scheduling options are subject to change. Not all online programs are available to residents of all U.S. states. Administrative office: Argosy University, 601 South Lewis Street, Orange, CA 92868 ©2017 Argosy University. All rights reserved. Our email address is [materialsreview@argosy.edu](mailto:materialsreview@argosy.edu)

See [auprograms.info](http://auprograms.info) for program duration, tuition, fees and other costs, median debt, salary data, alumni success, and other important information.

FALL 2017

**PSI CHI  
JOURNAL OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH**

## Publish Your Research in *Psi Chi Journal*

Undergraduate, graduate, and faculty submissions are welcome year round. Only the first author is required to be a Psi Chi member. All submissions are free. Reasons to submit include

- a unique, doctoral-level, peer-review process
- indexing in PsycINFO, EBSCO, and Crossref databases
- free access of all articles at psichi.org
- our efficient online submissions portal

View Submission Guidelines and submit your research at [www.psichi.org/?page=JN\\_Submissions](http://www.psichi.org/?page=JN_Submissions)

---

## Become a Journal Reviewer

Doctoral-level faculty in psychology and related fields who are passionate about educating others on conducting and reporting quality empirical research are invited to become reviewers for *Psi Chi Journal*. Our editorial team is uniquely dedicated to mentorship and promoting professional development of our authors—Please join us!

To become a reviewer, visit [www.psichi.org/page/JN\\_BecomeAResearcher](http://www.psichi.org/page/JN_BecomeAResearcher)

---

## Resources for Student Research

Looking for solid examples of student manuscripts and educational editorials about conducting psychological research? Download as many free articles to share in your classrooms as you would like.

Search past issues, or articles by subject area or author at [www.psichi.org/?journal\\_past](http://www.psichi.org/?journal_past)

---

## Add Our Journal to Your Library

Ask your librarian to store *Psi Chi Journal* issues in a database at your local institution. Librarians may also e-mail to request notifications when new issues are released.

Contact [PsiChiJournal@psichi.org](mailto:PsiChiJournal@psichi.org) for more information.



Register an account:  
<http://pcj.msubmit.net/cgi-bin/main.plex>

