

Conquering APA Style for the Seventh Edition: Advice From APA Style Experts

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ABSTRACT. In this updated article, APA Style experts give advice about conquering APA Style based on the seventh edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2020; cf. Hughes et al., 2017). Learning and teaching APA Style can be difficult because of the many rules (Hughes et al., 2017), and the seventh edition added additional rules and changed existing rules that writers are expected to follow. This article is meant to be a resource for those teaching and learning APA Style. The first part of the article covers these new rules. The second part details common writing issues that APA Style tutors often see. The third part gives writing tips and tricks to help in a research methods course. The next part contains APA Style rules that many writers do not know, and the final part has style rules often missing from empirical research submissions to academic journals.

Keywords: APA writing style, research design and methods, psychology papers

In this updated article, APA Style experts give advice about conquering APA Style based on the seventh edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2020). APA Style was created to provide guidelines for authors when preparing articles for publication, and also for students preparing papers for course assignments (APA, 2020). Uniformity helps readers to find important information (e.g., key points, findings, sources) quickly and to focus on the ideas in the articles instead of the formatting (APA, 2020).

Learning APA Style takes time and practice especially because of the intricate details of the writing style (APA, 2020; Hughes et al., 2017). Students more effectively learn APA Style if it is presented in many formats (Franz & Spritzer, 2006). Examples mentioned in Hughes et al. (2017) include “checklists (Franz & Spitzer, 2006), templates (Franz & Spitzer, 2006; Stahl, 1987), games (Hughes, 2017), sample articles riddled with APA mistakes (Smith & Eggleston, 2001), peer review of APA Style in papers (Mandernach et al., 2016), and online tutorials (Mages & Garson, 2010)” (p. 154). More recent examples include games (Clark & Murphy, 2021) and video tutorials (Obeid & Hill, 2018).

In addition, teaching the meaning behind the rules for APA Style can help those learning APA Style (Hughes et al., 2017; Mandernach et al., 2016).

This article is meant to be an additional resource for those teaching and learning APA Style. The first part of this article has new rules from the seventh edition of APA Style and the second part details common writing issues that APA Style tutors often see. The third part gives writing tips and tricks to help in a research methods course. The next part contains APA Style rules that many writers do not know, and the final part covers elements that are commonly missing from empirical research submissions to academic journals.

Part 1: New Rules From the Seventh Edition of APA Style

Kimberli R. H. Treadwell, Associate Editor

To space or double space, that is the question that I typically look up first each time the new APA Style book is published (and yes, I have been writing through a few editions of these). This may seem trivial, and one might wonder why the standards change across time. APA Style standards provide guidance to promote

SPRING 2023

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consistency across several fields of study in writing scientific reports. This increases accuracy and readability across the field. Our field evolves, and things have changed a bit since 1929 when psychologists, anthropologists, and business managers first collaborated to produce a 6-page paper with guidelines (Bentley et al., 1929) that evolved into the current publication manual (APA, 2020). The changes between the sixth edition guidelines published in 2009 and those of 2020 reflect expansion to more fields (e.g., behavioral sciences, medical fields, the humanities), expansion to instructors, students, and other consumers, changes in language use, expansion in research, and more. However, the spirit of the original authors remains the same—consistency and uniformity in the presentation of ideas.

Some of the updates to the *Publication Manual* (APA, 2020) are summarized below by chapter. The changes are varied and do not focus solely on mechanics of writing. A significant addition to the seventh edition is a focus on inclusive language and expression of ideas based on the APA's inclusive language guidelines (APA, 2021). Other notable changes are highlighted below.

1. Professional Writing

APA (2020) has expanded the scope of its audience with this newest edition, as well as research designs and data sharing. High school students and those new to APA Style find guidelines for class papers, annotated bibliographies, and reaction essays, as well as expansions addressing graduate school milestones for masters' theses and dissertations (APA, 2020, Section 1.10, p. 9–10). Adding to the information for quantitative research sections, there are now sections for qualitative research methods and mixed-method designs (APA, 2020, Sections 1.2–1.5, p. 5–8).

All professional writers will benefit from the expanded ethics in writing section with a convenient table (APA, 2020, Ethical Compliance Checklist, p. 26), summarizing key ethical issues from conception of a study, to ethics review, informed consent, maintaining data confidentiality, and key issues for publishing such as copyright and author agreements. As data sharing and open access to databases has increased in the scientific publishing world, new guidelines assist researchers in navigating these decisions.

2. Formatting a Scientific Paper

Changes for formatting a title page and the running head will be covered in detail in Parts 2 and 3 of this article. Levels of headings and font changes will also be covered in Parts 2 and 3 of this article. Other changes include expansions to the Author Note such as ORCID IDs, statements regarding any conflicts of interest, and

study registration information (APA, 2020, Section 2.3, p. 30–37). Clinical trials are typically registered with the National Institutes of Health. An increasing number of qualitative research studies are preregistering to distinguish between prediction and postdiction as a means to distinguish hypothesis generation and testing while improving the credibility of research. As this practice widens, publicly accessible platforms are becoming available, such as the Center for Open Science, and these steps are now captured on the title page. Finally, more font options and sizes are now acceptable (APA, 2020, Section 2.19, p. 44).

3. Standards in Reporting Research

In 2008, APA developed Journal Article Reporting Standards (JARS) for qualitative research that were adopted as an appendix to the sixth edition. The new seventh edition has a full chapter devoted to JARS based in part on two publications (Appelbaum et al., 2018; Levitt et al., 2018) with noted expansions (APA, 2020). First, qualitative research reporting reflects evolving standards and reflects expansions including dividing hypotheses and conclusions into the three sections of primary, secondary, and exploratory. New modules reflect standards for qualitative research and mixed-methods research, and meta-analyses and structural equation modeling standards are reported. These reporting standards are provided in detail at <https://apastyle.apa.org/jars/quantitative>.

4. Effective Writing

The aim of the fourth chapter is for broader attention to the style of writing to convey meaning and tone. For instance, the term “they” can now be used to refer to a singular person to provide more inclusive language use (APA, 2020, Section 4.16, p. 121). As well it is advised to desist from using “he or she” as generic third person pronouns. A new section outlines helpful wording to avoid anthropomorphism for inanimate sources or animals used in research (APA, 2020, Section 4.11, p. 118). And although not new, authors are encouraged to use active voice as much as possible (APA, 2020, Section 4.13, p. 119).

5. Bias-Free Language

A good practice when proofing a student or professional paper is to read through the manuscript for preconceptions about groups of people, just as would be done for the mechanics of spelling, grammar, and writing style. A comprehensive chapter guides use of language to be as free of implied or irrelevant evaluations of a group as possible. Practices include focusing on relevant characteristics of a person or group and,

SPRING 2023

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when differences that exist are noted, to acknowledge the meaning of the difference in the context of the target population (APA, 2020, Section 5.1, p. 132–133). To decrease biased language, specificity by topic is recommended, such as providing exact age ranges, naming specific conditions or disabilities, providing modifiers of gender, distinguishing nation or region of origin when identifying racial or ethnic groups, identifying specific ranges or socioeconomic status rather than general labels, and indicating the context of research when referring to people taking part in the study (e.g., participants vs. people; APA, 2020, Section 5.2, p. 133–135). These guidelines are in large part based on the newly published inclusive language guidelines (APA, 2021) that provide guidelines in language use and its continual evolution.

6. Nuts and Bolts of Writing

APA (2020, Section 6.1, p. 154) dictates using one space after a period, but one space is also needed after other punctuation such as colons, commas, and semicolons. Do note however that no space is added after the periods in abbreviations such as e.g., or around the colon for ratios such as 2:6. Expanded guidelines for abbreviations, lists, and using quotation marks for emphasis within the text are provided, and these were also mentioned earlier in this article.

7. Presenting Ideas in Tables and Figures

Authors may now embed tables and figures in the text, or present tables and figures following the reference list per previous guidelines (APA, 2020, Section 7.6, p. 198). Authors format the titles, notes, and numbers for tables and figures using the same format: title, the table or image, and notes (APA, 2020, Section 7.4, p. 197). Color may be used so long as it is accessible (APA, 2020, Section 7.26, p. 228). Over 40 examples of tables and figures in the new *Publication Manual* (APA, 2020, Sections 7.1–7.36, p. 199–250) help authors to visualize formatting styles.

8. New Guidelines for Citations and References

Changes to citations and references will be covered in more detail in Part 2 of this article, but additional changes to the references will be covered next. APA mentions that the use of “retrieved from” is no longer necessary to use before hyperlinks (see Section 9.35, p. 299–300) unless the source is likely to frequently change and is unarchived (e.g., a website homepage; APA, 2020, Section 9.16, p. 290). For eBooks the platform or device is no longer needed, although the publisher is required (APA, 2020, Section 8.28, p. 274; Section 10.2, p. 322). When citing podcasts or television series, contributing author references are provided, such as the host or director (APA, 2020, Section 8.7, p. 259). Dozens of new reference examples have been

added, highlighting newer online sources that might be cited such as TED talks, podcast episodes, YouTube videos, and social media sources (APA, 2020, Section 10.15, p. 348–352). Guidelines for referencing hashtags and emojis are also addressed. Another new change to the reference list involves using the names of authors for the first 20 authors, rather than the first seven, prior to using ellipsis for the remaining authors (APA, 2020, Section 9.8, p. 286). In addition, authors are asked to include the issue number following the volume number for all journal citations (APA, 2020, Section 9.25, p. 294). Part 4 of this article includes information about the publisher’s location no longer being listed for books and similar materials. Finally, over 100 examples demonstrate these guidelines in Chapters 8 and 9 (APA, 2020).

9. The How-to’s for Publishing Your Research

Wondering how to adapt a thesis or dissertation into a journal article? New help has arrived in this edition for students and early career researchers. Condensing a longer education milestone for publication is outlined, as well as guidance for selecting journals, prioritizing helpful journals, and avoiding predatory journals, as well as detailed advice and figures to guide authors through the publication process (APA, 2020, Sections 12.1–12.8, p. 372–381). A new section also assists researchers in promoting their work postpublication, such as sharing a summary of the article and the DOI on professional social media networks (APA, 2020, Section 12.24, p. 395).

10. Finally, You Can Be Part of the Process!

APA Style welcomes comments and feedback that could impact the next edition. Let the APA Style Committee know about how you are using the APA Style Guidelines and additional suggestions at Contact APA Style. Many online resources are available to assist learning APA format. Tutorials and webinars are available at https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/tutorials-webinars?_ga=2.149162422.1803984740.1665692971-696592103.1665313413. Handouts and guides can also be found at <https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids/handouts-guides>.

Part 2: Common Writing Issues That Tutors Address

Abigail A. Camden, Former APA Style Tutor

The following section reviews APA Style errors commonly seen by APA Style tutors and teaching assistants. Hughes et al. (2017) outlined 10 problems commonly seen in these settings. These have been updated in response to the seventh edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2020) when relevant.

SPRING 2023

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1. Missing Citations of Paraphrased Material

One common error seen in student writing is insufficient citations for paraphrased material (APA, 2020, Section 8.23–8.27, pp. 269–270). Any text that is paraphrased from a reference must be cited with an in-text citation, either parenthetically or in the narrative, even if no direct quotation is utilized. In cases where writers provide multiple sentences on one paraphrased source, it is not necessary to repeat the in-text citation if it is clear that the same source is being referred to, unless the paraphrase continues in a new paragraph. Although page numbers are not necessary for paraphrased material, authors may choose to include them if the reference is a long work, such as a book. If a direct quotation is used, the page number(s) should be included in the in-text citation (e.g., “Last Name et al., Date, p. Number”). Information about long quotes with 40 or more words will be presented in Part 3.

2. Incorrect Use of “et al.” and In-Text Citations

In the seventh edition, there is a shift in the use of “et al.” in in-text citations (APA, 2020, Sections 8.10–8.22, pp. 261–269). When citing a paper with three or more authors, all in-text citations for that reference should include the first author followed by “et al.” (e.g., Last Name et al., Year).” (For two authors, list both authors each time.) In contrast to the sixth edition (2010), authors should no longer list all authors for citations with three to five authors in the first reference to that paper. The only exception to this is if it creates ambiguity between two or more references that would shorten into the same shortened form. In this case, the writer should list authors until there is a distinguishing name, then follow with et al. (APA, 2020, Section 8.18). Other common errors that arise with use of et al. and in-text citations are (a) the placement of the period (i.e., after “al.” not “et”), (b) use of commas (i.e., only between “al.” and the date), (c) placement of the period at the end of the sentence (i.e., after the ending parenthetical of the in-text citation), and (d) order of in-text citations. Regarding the latter, citations should be listed in alphabetical order with a semicolon between citations (e.g., “Last Name et al., Year; Last Name et al., Year; Last Name et al., Year”). Additionally, in contrast to some other citation styles such as Chicago, “ibid” should not be used to convey that a citation has already been mentioned. Rather, provide the full in-text citation each time. Finally, et al. may be used both in parenthetical citations and in narrative citations.

3. Common Errors With Parentheses

Parentheses are commonly used in APA Style (APA, 2020, Sections 6.8–6.9, pp. 159–160). Some common errors seen with parentheses are using two parentheticals beside each other rather than combining them with a semicolon.

Another common error is improper usage of “i.e.” (that is) or “e.g.” (for example) in parentheses, which should be followed by a comma (i.e., like this). Next, periods should be placed outside of the parenthetical, unless an entire sentence is contained in the parenthetical, in which the period would be placed inside. Last, rather than using a parenthetical within a parenthetical, brackets should be used inside instead.

4. Incorrect References

In the seventh edition of APA Style (2020), there are minimal changes to reference format, with the exception of book references, from which place of publisher is no longer included. The references section is one place of the manuscript where errors in APA Style are often found. See Table 1 for examples of commonly used references; also see APA (2020, Section 9, p. 281, and Section 10, p. 311) for more information on reference lists and reference examples. For example, in a journal article reference, writers should: (a) place the title of the article in sentence case, (b) place the name of the journal in title case and italicize it, (c) italicize the volume number but not the issue number, (d) use an en dash (i.e., rather than a hyphen) between page numbers (see Part 4 of this article for more information about en dashes), and (e) use a hyperlinked digital object identifier (DOI) at the end when possible. References derived from sources such as Google Scholar often do not include the DOI. The DOI can usually be found in the article or the article webpage on the journal website. If a DOI is not available, the URL may be utilized instead. APA now requires DOIs or URLs to be included as hyperlinks that directly link to the resource to simplify retrieval (APA, 2020, section 9.27). When formatting the references section, references should be presented in

TABLE 1	
Examples of Common References	
Journal Article	Last Name, A. B., Last Name, C. D., & Last Name, E. F. (Year). Title of article goes here. <i>Name of Journal Goes Here</i> , <i>1</i> (2), 345–678. https://URL of DOI here, with no period at the end *
	*The reason that there is not a period at the end of the URL is because a period could interfere with the functionality of the link (see Section 9.35, pp. 299–300)
Book Without Editors	Last Name, A. B. (Year). <i>Title of book goes here</i> (Edition number here if relevant). Publisher Name Here. https://URL of DOI if relevant here, with no period at the end
Chapter in an Edited Book	Last Name, A. B., Last Name, C. D., & Last Name, E. F. (Year). Title of chapter goes here. In G. H. Last Name & I. J. Last Name (Eds.), <i>Title of book goes here</i> (Edition number here if relevant, pp. Page Number–Page Number). Publisher Name Here. https://URL of DOI if relevant here, with no period at the end
<i>Note.</i> See APA (2020) for additional examples and guidance regarding references.	

alphabetical order, with each reference presented with a hanging indent on the second line. If an author is cited multiple times, place the references with that first author in alphabetical order according to the second author; if that author is the single author on multiple references, order the reference in ascending date. Finally, if writers utilize references produced from sources such as Google Scholar, they should be cautious to check the APA Style. If authors do not have a copy of the APA manual, the APA Style website (<https://apastyle.apa.org/>) is a reputable source to refer to for the formatting of references (as well as other APA Style questions, of course!).

5. Formatting of Text

As mentioned in Part 1 of this article, one notable change in the formatting of text from the sixth edition to the seventh edition is the number of spaces following a sentence (APA, 2020, Section 6.1, p. 153). Writers should only use one space after a sentence rather than two. If authors are struggling to adjust to this change, they can utilize the “find and replace feature” of their word processing software to search for two spaces in their document (i.e., search for “ ” and replace with “ ”). Another common error seen regarding formatting of text is the spacing between lines, which should consistently be double spaced throughout the document (APA, 2020, Section 2.21, p. 45). Writers will want to check that the word processor software has not added additional spaces before or after paragraphs. This can be found by highlighting the entire document and then going to “line spacing options” under the “line and paragraph spacing” icon on the ribbon. Authors should then make sure that line spacing is set to “double” rather than “multiple” or “single” and that space before and after paragraphs is set to “0 pt.”

6. Italicize Most Statistical Coefficients

Another error commonly found in articles, particularly within the results section is failing to italicize statistical coefficients (APA, 2020, Section 6.44, pp. 182–187). Almost all statistical coefficients should be italicized (e.g., *p*, *t*, *N*, *n*, *M*, *SD*). One exception to this rule, however, is Greek statistical coefficients (e.g., χ^2 , partial η^2) and subscripts or superscripts. When italicizing, be cautious not to italicize anything that may follow the coefficient, such as an equal sign.

7. Levels of Heading

As a tutor, I would often find that students underutilized subheadings in their writing. However, using subheadings within sections of the paper, such as the literature review, can add clarity and structure to writing, serving as signposts to guide the reader (Hughes et al., 2017).

With the seventh edition of the *APA Publication Manual*, levels of heading were updated (APA, 2020, Section 2.27, p. 47–49). The main change in the seventh edition is that there is an additional level of heading required before using headings that end in a period (i.e., now begins at the fourth level of heading), and that some section headings are now bolded (i.e., the title of the paper, “Abstract,” “References,” “Table,” and “Figure”). For a helpful table outline of paper headings, see the *Publication Manual* (APA, 2020, pp. 48–49). For example, writers may wish to use subheadings in a literature review. In this case, after the title page, authors should begin the literature review with the title of their paper, bolded and centered (i.e., the first level of heading). Levels of heading in the literature review should then begin with the second level of headings (i.e., flush left, bold, title case). Then, similar to an outline, the third heading (i.e., flush left, bold italic, title case) can be utilized under any second level heading that requires two or more subsections. Further levels of subheadings may be utilized in a similar fashion if warranted (e.g., fourth level: indented, bold, title case, ending with a period).

8. Running Heads

There is one main change to running heads for professional title pages in the seventh edition of APA (2020, Section 2.8, p. 37). In contrast to the sixth edition of APA (2010), authors no longer need to include the label “Running head” before the running head on the first page of the manuscript. Rather, the running head should be the same on each page. It should be formatted in all caps, flush left, while the page number should be flush right at the 1-inch left margin and half of an inch down from the top of the page within the header. The content of the running head should be no more than 50 characters and should serve as a summary of the title of the paper. One common mistake seen in manuscripts is for the running head and page number to be a different font and font size than the body of the manuscript. Authors should ensure that this font style is consistent with the rest of their manuscript.

9. Effective Abstracts

As noted by Hughes et al. (2017) and APA (2010, 2020), the abstract is one of the most important paragraphs in the manuscript, given that readers often decide on the utility of a paper based on this summary (Section 3.3, pp. 73–75). Given this, the abstract should be dense with information and cover the most important parts of the research paper, including the aim of the study, the sample utilized, important aspects of the methodology, key results accompanied by significance levels, confidence intervals, and effect size when space allows, and conclusions (e.g., implications).

Hughes et al. (2017) provided a helpful strategy for writing concise abstracts with all important information covered. To use this strategy, writers can create a structured abstract that includes headings for each important domain (e.g., objective, method, results, conclusions). The headings will prompt writers to include all important domains of the paper, and writers can aim to use one to two sentences per heading to keep the abstract concise. These headings can then be removed if needed. Finally, authors should also include carefully chosen key words at the end of the abstract that will aid readers in finding their article (APA, 2020, Section 2.10, p. 38–39).

10. Word Choice and Flow of Writing

As noted by Hughes et al. (2017), effective communication in writing is a challenge for all writers. The following section includes common problems outlined by Hughes et al. (2017) in addition to other considerations. Common writing problems seen by tutors include: (a) lack of transition words (APA, 2020, Section 4.2, p. 112), (b) not utilizing parallel construction (Section 4.24, p. 124–125), (c) not using an Oxford comma (Section 6.3, p. 155), (d) use of colloquialisms (e.g., “a lot,” “actually;” Section 4.8, p. 116), (d) improper use of words such as “since” or “like” (e.g., Section 4.22, p. 123) and (e) overuse of jargon (Section 4.9, p. 116). For example, to aid in the flow and readability of writing, writers should utilize transitional words or phrases (e.g., “for example,” “likewise,” “although”) and should use parallel structure of elements (e.g., in compound sentences, lists). Additionally, when listing elements, authors should utilize an Oxford comma before the resultant “and” (e.g., incorrect: “depression, anxiety and mania” correct: “depression, anxiety, and mania;”). To improve the comprehension of their writing, authors should avoid colloquialisms (i.e., informal words or expressions) and jargon (i.e., technical terms that are difficult to understand for nonspecialists). If jargon is used, terms should always be defined the first time that they are present. Finally, to improve one’s writing, authors should consider seeking out feedback from others, such as that from campus writing centers, advisors, and professors. For additional information on improving writing style, see Section 4 of the APA Style Manual (2020, pp. 111–127).

Part 3: Writing Tips and Tricks to Help in a Research Methods Course

Joel G. Thomas and Bonnie M. Perdue,
Research Design and Methods Professors

Research design and methods courses play a special role in student development. In addition to providing a space in which students can explore the research process by learning about different methods of investigation, these courses

often offer students their first experience engaging directly with articles as well as reading and writing using scientific language. The skills they learn in these courses are essential to upper level course success because professors often expect that students at that stage can communicate like a researcher or professional. We commonly see the following APA writing errors in our research design and methods courses. The tips that follow address how papers can be written more effectively in APA format and are updates to the tips discussed in reference to the prior edition of the manual (APA, 2010, Hughes et al., 2017).

1. Use of “As cited in...”

Primary sources are ones that report original content, whereas secondary sources report content that is cited in another source. According to APA (2020), whenever possible, authors should try to find the primary source and use this for in-text citations and references. This includes citing original research directly rather than citing a professor’s lectures or textbook that cites a primary source. In cases in which the primary source is out of print or in a language the author does not understand, the secondary source can be cited using the following format: (Rabbitt, 1982, as cited in Lyon et al., 2014, APA, 2020, Section 8.6, p. 258). Note: If only the secondary source (i.e., Lyon et al., 2014) was read then it should be the only one listed in the reference section and not the primary source.

2. Direct Quotations

Direct quotations should be used sparingly in scientific writing. Typically, a quotation should only be used when the wording used in the quote is essential to the context in which the quote is discussed (e.g., when reproducing an exact definition, when an author has said something memorably or succinctly, or when an author wants to respond to the exact wording in the quote; APA, 2020, Section 6.22, p. 170). As mentioned in part 2, if the quote is less than 40 words, it can be included in the text with quotation marks around the quote followed by the parenthetical citation and page number(s). However, if the quote is 40 words or more, it should be presented in block form: indented 0.5 in. from both margins with no quotes, introduced with a colon from the preceding sentence, and should end with the punctuation for the quote followed by the parenthetical citation. If the author and year appeared in the sentence introducing the quote, only the page number(s) should appear in the parenthetical citation (APA, 2020, Sections 8.25–8.36, pp. 270–278).

3. Use of Contractions

As scholarly writing is typically technical and formal in nature, contractions should generally be avoided (APA,

SPRING 2023

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2020, Section 4.8, p. 116). Exceptions include when reproducing a quote with a contraction, when using an idiom that contains a contraction, or when intentionally making an informal remark (Lee, 2022).

4. Semantics

Science is an open-ended activity that involves steps such as verification of hypotheses, refutation, reconceptualization, and replication (Cutler et al., 2020). Authors should acknowledge this tentative context by using words such as “suggests,” “indicates,” or “demonstrates,” when introducing findings from the empirical literature. Definitive vocabulary such as “proves” should be avoided as this overstates the validity and reliability of findings in psychological science. For additional information on improving clarity in writing style, see Sections 4.7–4.11 of the *APA Publication Manual* (2020, pp. 115–117).

5. Student Paper Versus Professional Paper

The seventh edition offers several clear distinctions between student papers and professional papers. These differences, and how to look for and identify the correct information, may need to be reiterated to students. One noteworthy difference is that student papers no longer require an abstract (APA, 2020, Section 2.2, p. 30). Professional papers continue to typically include an abstract page, author note, and running head.

6. Student Title Page

There are several items to note regarding title pages for student papers. A standard title page for a student paper will not include a running head, although it should contain the page number (APA, 2020, Section 2.3, p. 30). In addition to the title, student name, and affiliation, students should also include the course number and name, the instructor’s name, and the due date of the assignment on the title page (APA, 2020, Section 2.3, p. 30). We have found that students often leave off the blank line between the title and their name.

7. Page Numbers

As technology progresses, citation style will adapt to change. One example of this to emphasize to students in a research methods course relates to elements of a reference entry. As online publications become more common, page numbers are not always an available element to include in a reference entry. If an article comes from an online journal that does not have page numbers but has an article number, one should instead write “Article” followed by the article number (APA, 2020, Section 9.27, p. 294). An example is *PLOS ONE*, 17(8), Article e0270739.

8. Paragraph and Subsection Length

Hughes et al. (2017) described how paragraph length in student papers is sometimes too short and emphasized the need for an introductory sentence, body of paragraph, then concluding or transitional sentence in all paragraphs. A related trend is that students will sometimes create too many subsections within a paper. The number of distinctive sections in a paper should guide the number of headings, which averages three levels (APA, 2020, Section 2.27, pp. 47–48). A very brief introduction does not necessarily need many subheadings, but students in a methods course who are beginning to write in APA format will sometimes tend toward using a lot of unnecessary subsections.

9. Spacing in References

The spacing between elements in a reference list can sometimes be confusing with students initially including double spaces, or sometimes no spaces at all. An easy-to-follow rule is that there should be one space between the different elements of a reference entry, including the first and middle initial of authors (APA, 2020, Section 9.8, p. 286).

10. Numbers in APA

Students often report numbers incorrectly (Hughes et al., 2017). The standard rule is to use words for numbers below 10 (e.g., one, two, three) and use numerals to express numbers 10 and above (e.g., 10, 11, 12). However, there are exceptions to this rule (see APA, 2020, Section 6.32–6.39, pp. 178–181), so writers will want to reference the *Publication Manual*.

Part 4: APA Style Rules Many Writers Do Not Know

Jennifer L. Hughes, Associate Editor

In the original article, I selected the following 10 errors that are not often known by writers, which I found to be frequently committed in research papers (Hughes et al., 2017). The errors listed in the original paper have been updated to be in alignment with the new edition of the *Publication Manual* released in 2020. Information about the rules and how to avoid violating these rules is included.

1. Emphasizing Terms

On the first use of words or phrases, authors should use quotation marks for slang, ironic comments, or invented or coined expressions (APA, 2020, see Section 6.7, pp. 157–159). Although past versions of APA (2010) allowed authors to italicize terms for emphasis, APA (2020, see Section 6.22, pp. 170–171) suggests avoiding italics for emphasis. They suggest rewriting sentences in order to provide emphasis. This could include placing important

words or phrases at the beginning or end of a sentence. Exceptions include using italics if the material might be misread, emphasis lost, or the first time defining or introducing a key term or phrase (i.e., given with a definition; see Section 6.7, pp. 157–159).

2. Presentation of Lists of a Series of Items

APA (2020) gives directions about how authors should list a series of items (see Section 6.49, p. 189). If authors are using a series that is within a sentence or paragraph, they should use letters instead of numbers. For example, (a) first, (b) second, and (c) third. If authors want to display sentences or paragraphs in a series (i.e., itemized conclusion or steps in a procedure) they should use numbered lists by using Arabic numerals followed by a period (see section 6.51, pp. 189–190). The first word should be capitalized. APA cautions that using numbered lists can indicate ordinal position among the items and if authors do not want this to happen, they should use bulleted lists instead.

3. Spacing of Numbers in Text

When using numbers, authors should treat them like words (APA, 2020, see Section 6.45, pp. 187–188). The numbers should have spaces before and after them, which makes them easier to read (e.g., not 3+7, but 3 + 7). However, if a minus sign is used to indicate a negative value, a space is used before the minus sign, but not after it.

4. When to Use a Zero Before Decimals

APA (2020) suggests to “use a zero before the decimal point in numbers that are less than 1 when the statistic can exceed 1” (p. 180, see Section 6.36). Hughes et al. (2017) gave the example of Cohen’s *d* being reported as 0.70 because it can exceed 1. Authors should not use a zero before a decimal when the statistic being used cannot exceed 1 such as correlations and levels of statistical significance (APA, 2020).

5. Punctuation and Quotation Marks

Authors should put periods and commas inside of quotation marks (APA, 2020, see Section 6.7, pp. 157–159). For example, “. . . like this.” Other punctuation marks such as colons, semicolons, and ellipses are placed outside of the quotation marks.

6. Using En Dashes Between Page Numbers in References

Both academics and students often say they have never heard of an en dash (Hughes et al., 2017). APA (2020) uses two types of dashes, which include the em dash and the en dash (see Section 6.6, p. 157). The em dash is longer than a hyphen and is used to set off an element. The en

dash is shorter than an em dash but is longer and thinner than a hyphen. It is used between page or date ranges. The following includes examples of them: hyphen (-), em dash (—), and en dash (–). Once authors find out about the en dash, they often do not know how to create one because there is not a key on keyboards for them. These directions can help. Those using a Mac who want to add an en dash should hold down the *option* key while pressing the *minus* key at the top of the keyboard (McAdoo, 2010). Those using a PC should hold the *control* key and type the *minus* key at the top of the keyboard (McAdoo, 2010).

7. Personal Communications Need to Be Cited in the Text, but Not the References

Information that cannot be recovered by readers is cited as personal communications. However, it should be noted that if the original source of information can be found, then it should be cited instead. Personal communications “include emails, text messages, online chats or direct messages, personal interviews, telephone conversations, live speeches, unrecorded classroom lectures, memos, letters, messages from nonarchived discussion groups or online bulletin boards, and so on” (APA, 2020, Section 8.9, p. 260). This information is cited in the text as (J. L. Hughes, personal communication, March 6, 2023) or J. L. Hughes (personal communication, March 6, 2023) and is not included in the reference section (APA, 2020, Section 8.9, p. 260).

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

When giving a title in the references and it already contains punctuation like an exclamation point or question mark, the authors should keep that punctuation and not add a period because two punctuation marks after the title are not needed (APA, 2020, see Section 9.19, pp. 291–292).

9. Listing Editors of Books in References

When writing references for books, editors’ initials go before their surnames (e.g., J. L. Hughes & A. A. Camden), which is the opposite of how authors are listed (APA, 2020, see Section 9.28, p. 295). This was shown in Part 2 of this article. However, most writers do not know that a comma is not used between two editors’ names (APA, 2020, see Section 10.3.38, p. 326), but it is used if there are three or more editors (APA, 2020, see Section 10.3.40, p. 326) or two or more authors (APA, 2020, see Section 10.3.43, p. 327).

10. Pronouns for People and Animals – “Who” vs. “That”

Authors should use “who” for people and “that” for nonhuman animals (i.e., rats) and for inanimate objects

SPRING 2023

PSI CHI
JOURNAL OF
PSYCHOLOGICAL
RESEARCH

(APA, 2020, see Section 4.19, p. 121). For example, “the professors that taught the psychology courses” would be incorrect. “The professors who taught the psychology courses” would be correct. APA (2020, Section 4.19, p. 121–122) also advises to use neuter pronouns when referring to animals such as “the dog” but they note that if the dog has a name and the sex is known, gendered pronouns are acceptable.

Part 5: Elements Commonly Missing From Empirical Research Submissions

Bradley Cannon, Managing Editor

In the original article (Hughes et al., 2017), I discussed 10 APA Style mistakes that authors frequently make when submitting to *Psi Chi Journal*. At that time, I had reviewed over 700 of these manuscripts, and that number is now closer to 1,300. Despite the many changes introduced in the new seventh edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA, 2020), I find that most of those original tips hold up well, so this time around I focus on 10 errors that are all-too-common and also highly likely to impact editors, peer reviewers, and—if unaddressed during the review process—future readers’ views of a published article. Specifically, I wish to address important details that are frequently missing entirely from empirical manuscripts.

When information is not just insufficient but absent, editors and reviewers must request that these details be added during the next round of revisions. As a result, the reviewers cannot give accurate feedback on this unseen content until the submission returns for revision, which greatly increases the likelihood that the authors will then have to endure an additional round of revisions after that. This may even be a best-case scenario, as opposed to the worst-case, in which the editor or reviewer may reject the manuscript entirely under the belief that the missing information (e.g., an effect size, participant demographics) was intentionally omitted in order to hide some sort of fatal flaw. So, what are those missing elements? Let us begin!

1. Missing Hypotheses

Hypotheses are the proposed suppositions made before a new study is conducted, generally based on prior research. Hypotheses are likely one of the first lessons taught to students about conducting science; however, hypotheses are sometimes forgotten months or even years later when a completed study is finally submitted for publication. APA (2020) Table 3.1 (JARS-Quant, p. 78) outlines that authors should state specific hypotheses, aims, and objectives, any theories they are based on, and other planned analyses in their manuscript. Further, APA (2020, Section 3.6, p. 86) also refers to exploratory hypotheses, which are

suggested by authors based on data collected for the present study rather than being based on previously reported studies. If a study contained exploratory hypotheses or even had no specific hypotheses due to its exploratory nature, the authors should explain this in the manuscript body. Hypotheses are typically placed near the end of a manuscript’s Introduction section, as shown in the APA (2020) Sample Paper (pp. 52–53). They may be formatted in paragraph format or as a numbered list (APA, 2020, Section 6.51, pp. 189–190).

2. Unreported Participant Demographics

Authors often fail to report some or all relevant demographic information for participants. Not only does this cause challenges for reviewers when analyzing a paper’s methodology and interpretation of the results, it can also create questions later with regard to replications and who the results would most likely apply to. At minimum, authors should include age, gender identity and/or sex assigned at birth, ethnicity and race, and socioeconomic status and social class (Appelbaum et al., 2018), and they should also include any additional demographics relevant to the context of their study. Phrasing demographics questions can be tricky, so a recent *Psi Chi Journal* editorial (Hughes et al., 2022) provides 38 examples of how to write various questions. Researchers are also encouraged to review the *Publication Manual* (APA, 2020, Section 5: Bias-Free Language Guidelines). In the unfortunate event that the authors failed to collect demographics, explain this in the manuscript’s Limitations section (APA, 2020, Section 3.8, pp. 89–90). On a related note, most participants in psychology-related journals are WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic), which can unfortunately affect the generalizability of study results (Brass & Charlton, 2022). Authors of all *Psi Chi Journal* articles are now encouraged to briefly address in their Limitations section how their participant characteristics might limit the extent to which the results can be generalized, and they should identify populations and subpopulations to whom generalizations might be unwarranted. For an excellent example of this, we often cite Goldie and O’Connor (2021).

3. Failure to Introduce Abbreviations

It is important to remember that not all readers and reviewers will be well-versed in an article’s niche subject area and its unique jargon. APA (2020, Section 6.24, p. 172) advises authors to introduce each abbreviation the first time that it is used and then consistently use the abbreviation only throughout the remainder of the manuscript. The abbreviations should only be reintroduced in each table or figure where they may appear, generally in the table or figure’s *Notes* section (APA, 2020, Section

SPRING 2023

PSI CHI
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PSYCHOLOGICAL
RESEARCH

7.15, p. 205). A few exceptions should be mentioned. First, statistics (e.g., M , p) and abbreviations listed as terms in a dictionary (e.g., AIDS, LGBTQ) need not be introduced. Second, authors are encouraged to avoid overusing abbreviations because this can also be confusing for readers. To reduce the number of abbreviated terms, avoid abbreviating short terms (e.g., L for large) and never abbreviate a term that appears fewer than three times in a manuscript (APA, 2020, Section 6.24, p. 172).

4. Missing IRB Approval

Institutional review boards (IRBs) protect and manage risk to human participants; receiving their approval or exemption before any data collection begins is essential. The latest edition of the *Publication Manual* requires authors to “describe institutional review board agreements, ethical standards met, and safety monitoring” (APA, 2020, Table 3.1, p. 77–81). This information should be included in the Method section along with other sampling procedures such as any payments made to participants. Although a journal’s editors and peer-reviewers will know IRB approval was required prior to submission, future readers may not be aware of a journal’s specific policies, making inclusion of this step highly important.

5. Absent Effect Sizes and Reliability Coefficients

Among the research reporting practices that have become increasingly prevalent are the inclusion of effect sizes and reliability coefficients. In general, all F and p statistics should be paired with an effect size (e.g., d ; APA, 2020, Section 3.7, p. 89). *Psi Chi Journal* even requires this for nonsignificant p results. Whenever possible, a reliability coefficient (e.g., α) should also accompany the description of any multi-item measures used (APA, 2020, Table 3.1, p. 79). Before submission, authors should always access a journal’s submission guidelines and even browse a few recently published articles to identify whether any details such as these should be added to their manuscript.

6. Omitted Limitations Section

Readers unfamiliar with empirical research may be unaware that limitations are highly common across all published studies. Despite this, editors and peer reviewers will be expecting these details, and omission of such information may even cause them to view an article with a more skeptical eye. APA (2020) does not explicitly require a distinct section header for Limitations, but authors are welcome to include this. At minimum, authors should set aside a couple paragraphs in their Discussion section to identify any limitations. As examples, failure to collect adequate participant demographics information should be discussed as

well as participant constraints of generality (previously discussed in the second item of this list). Further, APA (2020, Section 3.9, p. 90) advises authors to include sources of potential bias, imprecision of measures, and more. On the other extreme of failing to include limitations, authors occasionally conclude their papers with a discussion of their limitations, but what a sour note to end on! When this happens, I often encourage authors to consider adding a brief conclusion paragraph to remind readers (a) what the study accomplished, (b) where future research should look next, and (c) why the present research is important.

7. No Permission to Reprint

A more unsettling title for this seventh section of the list would be “Plagiarism.” Although possibly well-meaning, authors sometimes fail to consider whether they own the copyright of all the materials they are seeking to publish. For example, they will occasionally include an appendix detailing all the questions of a previously published scale; photographs that participants viewed, which were acquired without permission from the internet; or in-text information lacking appropriate citations and references. It is the authors’ responsibility to obtain appropriate permission from such sources. See APA 12.17 (pp. 387–389) and 12.18 (pp. 389–390) for details on obtaining permission from the copyright owner. When authors wish to include information for which permission would be required, they should seek out permission as early as possible, because this can sometimes be a lengthy process depending on the copyright owner’s procedures, and of course, fees may be involved. It is also important to keep in mind that publishers (e.g., Wiley, SAGE) have their own unique rules regarding permissions to reprint. Although these guidelines must fall within the restrictions of U.S. copyright law, they may be slightly more or less strict than, for example, the APA’s permissions to reprint. For instance, a figure in one publication may be fully open access, whereas a similar figure elsewhere may require permission to reuse some or any of its contents. As a general rule, cite original sources for all content and materials used and also determine whether official permission is needed. Determining whether permission is needed is not always easy. Although some individuals will say that permission should be obtained any time 10% or more of an article is reproduced, the law does not identify any specific percentage of copied work that automatically requires permission (Misthal, 2017). APA (2020, Section 8.34, p. 277) says that permission may be needed for “lengthy quotations” (usually more than 800 words). Regardless, it stands to reason that the more content that is reused, the more likely it is to fall outside of fair use (i.e., permission would be needed). Further, even a

very short amount of an existing article can be considered beyond fair use if it reuses “the heart of the work” from the existing article, particularly if used for commercial purposes (Columbia University Libraries, n.d.). Shorter and more creative works often also have stricter copyright rules (Copyright Alliance, n.d.). Therefore, permission is likely needed when using any content from (a) an existing table or figure (which is often considered a standalone piece separate from its related article; APA, 2020, Section 12.15, p. 385); (b) a scale, vignette, questionnaire, or data (APA, 2020, Section 12.15, p. 385); (c) a song or poem (APA, 2020, Section 8.34, p. 277); or (d) artwork or photography, including photographs taken by the authors of identifiable people (APA, 2020, Section 12.17, p. 387–389). Please note that this is not legal advice, nor is it comprehensive.

8. Citations Missing in the References Section

This reviewer’s general experience is that authors have improved at writing references during the past five or so years, partly due to increased accessibility of online example documents (e.g., APA, 2020, Sample Professional Paper, pp. 50–60; also available at <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/paper-format/sample-papers>) and free online reference generator tools (e.g., APA Style Central, Scribbr, MyBib). Still, one problem that continues to occur are some citations missing entirely from the references section (and likewise, some references that are not cited in the manuscript body). Because most articles contain numerous pages of references, it is easy to imagine how this could happen. However, this can again result in accidental plagiarism (APA, 2020, Section 8.2, pp. 254–256). To ensure that all citations and references match up, best practice is to use Microsoft Word’s “Find” feature to search for the first author’s last name of each individual citation in the manuscript body and then do the same for each reference in the References list. In discussing the relationship between references and in-text citations, APA (2020, Section 8.4, p. 257) notes a few exceptions such as personal communications and general mentions of whole websites or periodicals, which do not require corresponding references. However, in general, all citations and references should match up. Importantly, last names and dates should use consistent spelling too!

9. No Statistics in the Abstract

According to APA (2020), abstracts should include “the basic findings, including effect sizes and confidence intervals and/or statistical significant levels” (Section 3.3, pp. 73–75). Many journals do not require this information; however, it can be extremely helpful for readers and even editors when they are deciding whether to dig

deeper into the full text of an article. Academic rigor is not consistent across all publications and authors’ works, so including this information will help readers “get a feel” for an article’s credibility. At a minimum, authors should include the sample size (e.g., $N = 52$) and statistics for a few of the primary findings (e.g., $F[3, 44] = 12.79, p < .001, \eta^2 = .47$). *Psi Chi Journal* requires this information for quantitative studies; when conducting preliminary APA Style reviews, I request for the authors to add statistics to their abstracts for more than three quarters of papers submitted to our journal.

10. Unmasked Information

The final item in this list addresses articles that are improperly masked—a reverse item of sorts for this current list. When a document is masked, it means that the authors’ names and affiliations should be missing from the file to protect the authors’ identities during the review process. And yet all too often, authors fail to do this. Of the past 10 papers I reviewed, eight were not properly masked. Authors should remove their names and affiliations from the manuscript text. This is done correctly most of the time; however, it is only the first step. Hyperlinks generated through an author’s school may include the school’s name in the link, so authors should also be on the lookout for this. For example: <https://doi-org.lib.pepperdine.edu/10.1037/h0025583> should be changed to <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0025583>. (Also of note: only readers with access to Pepperdine’s database subscriptions would be able to view the article at that first link, so it is advisable to replace the first link, even for papers intentionally left unmasked). Any school names in the DOI hyperlinks should be removed; in niche areas of research, this embedded affiliation can easily give away the authors’ identities to an astute reviewer. Further, authors should select the File tab in the upper left of Microsoft Word. On the right side of the page that will appear, “Author” and “Last Modified by” fields commonly feature the authors’ identities. If an author can see their name here, then any future reviewers can too. To remove this information, select “Inspect Document” on this same page and then choose to “Remove All” documents and personal properties from the file (due to numerous versions of Word, authors may have to search online for different instructions to remove this information).

Conclusion

In this article, we have highlighted key rules of APA Style as well as changes in the seventh edition of the *Publication Manual* (2020). We hope that this article can be a resource for both those learning APA Style and those teaching it. We encourage writers to continuously learn about and practice using APA Style (Hughes et al., 2017).

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SPRING 2023

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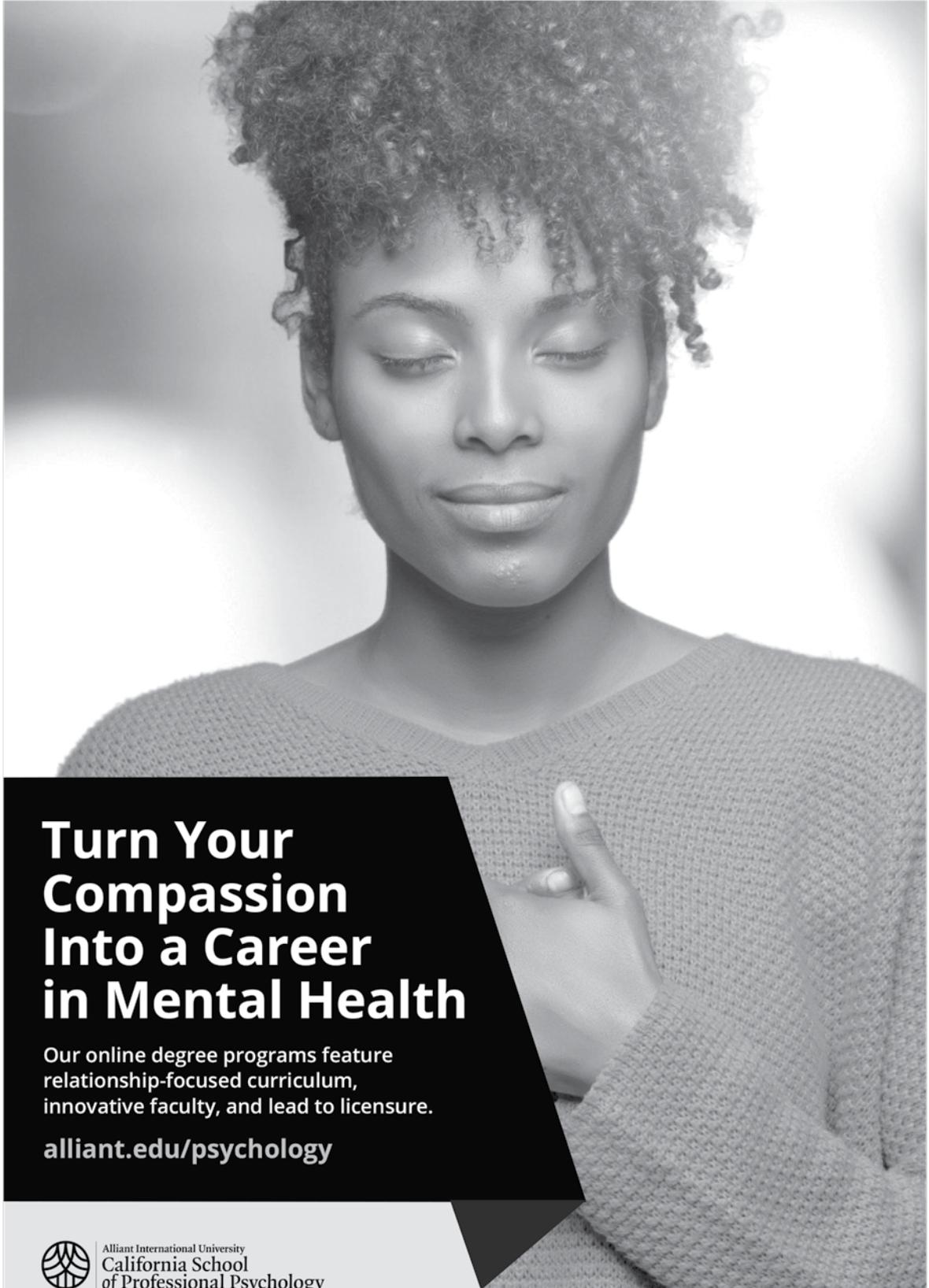
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We sincerely appreciate the hard work on the part of the following individuals who each completed at least one review in 2022. Without the assistance of such dedicated professionals, *Psi Chi Journal* would not be able to function.—Steve Rouse (Editor)

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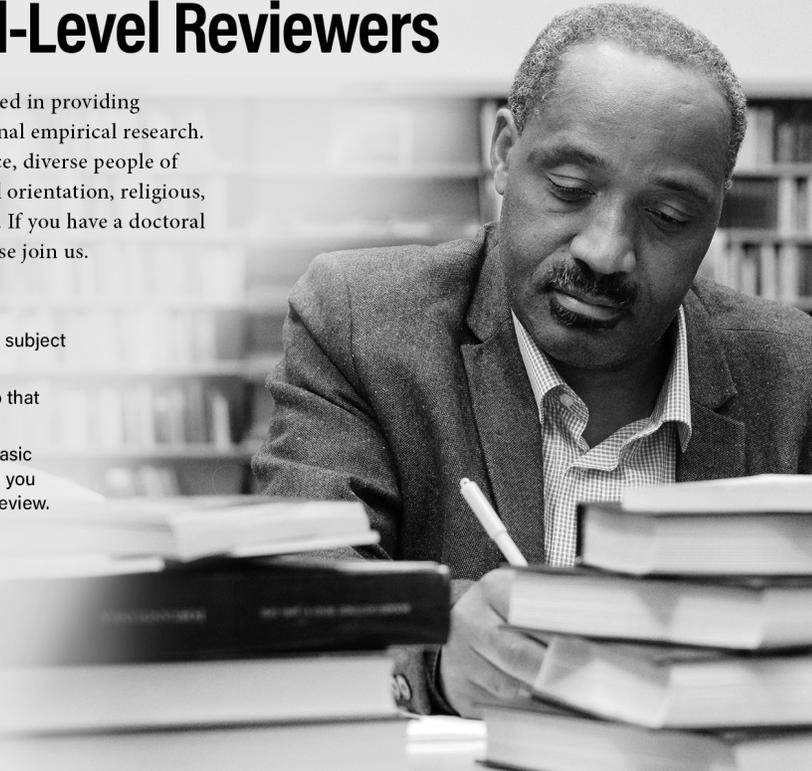
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