

## 6.1: Formatting a Research Paper

### Learning Objectives

- Identify the major components of a research paper written using American Psychological Association (APA) style.
- Apply general APA style and formatting conventions in a research paper.

In this chapter, you will learn how to use APA style, the documentation and formatting style followed by the American Psychological Association, as well as MLA style, from the Modern Language Association. There are a few major formatting styles used in academic texts, including AMA, Chicago, and Turabian:

- AMA (American Medical Association) for medicine, health, and biological sciences
- APA (American Psychological Association) for education, psychology, and the social sciences
- Chicago—a common style used in everyday publications like magazines, newspapers, and books
- MLA (Modern Language Association) for English, literature, arts, and humanities
- Turabian—another common style designed for its universal application across all subjects and disciplines

While all the formatting and citation styles have their own use and applications, in this chapter we focus our attention on the two styles you are most likely to use in your academic studies: APA and MLA.

If you find that the rules of proper source documentation are difficult to keep straight, you are not alone. Writing a good research paper is, in and of itself, a major intellectual challenge. Having to follow detailed citation and formatting guidelines as well may seem like just one more task to add to an already-too-long list of requirements.

Following these guidelines, however, serves several important purposes. First, it signals to your readers that your paper should be taken seriously as a student's contribution to a given academic or professional field; it is the literary equivalent of wearing a tailored suit to a job interview. Second, it shows that you respect other people's work enough to give them proper credit for it. Finally, it helps your reader find additional materials if he or she wishes to learn more about your topic.

Furthermore, producing a letter-perfect APA-style paper need not be burdensome. Yes, it requires careful attention to detail. However, you can simplify the process if you keep these broad guidelines in mind:

- **Work ahead whenever you can.** Chapter 11 includes tips for keeping track of your sources early in the research process, which will save time later on.
- **Get it right the first time.** Apply APA guidelines as you write, so you will not have much to correct during the editing stage. Again, putting in a little extra time early on can save time later.
- **Use the resources available to you.** In addition to the guidelines provided in this chapter, you may wish to consult the APA website at <http://www.apa.org> or the Purdue University Online Writing lab at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>, which regularly updates its online style guidelines.

### General Formatting Guidelines

This chapter provides detailed guidelines for using the citation and formatting conventions developed by the American Psychological Association, or APA. Writers in disciplines as diverse as astrophysics, biology, psychology, and education follow APA style. The major components of a paper written in APA style are listed in the following box.

These are the major components of an APA-style paper:

1. Title page
2. Abstract
3. Body, which includes the following:
  - Headings and, if necessary, subheadings to organize the content
  - In-text citations of research sources
4. References page

All these components must be saved in one document, not as separate documents.

## Title Page

The title page of your paper includes the following information:

- Title of the paper
- Author's name
- Name of the institution with which the author is affiliated
- Header at the top of the page with the paper title (in capital letters) and the page number (If the title is lengthy, you may use a shortened form of it in the header.)

List the first three elements in the order given in the previous list, centered about one third of the way down from the top of the page. Use the headers and footers tool of your word-processing program to add the header, with the title text at the left and the page number in the upper-right corner. Your title page should look like the following example.



## Abstract

The next page of your paper provides an abstract, or brief summary of your findings. An abstract does not need to be provided in every paper, but an abstract should be used in papers that include a hypothesis. A good abstract is concise—about one hundred to one hundred fifty words—and is written in an objective, impersonal style. Your writing voice will not be as apparent here as in the body of your paper. When writing the abstract, take a just-the-facts approach, and summarize your research question and your findings in a few sentences.

In Chapter 12, you read a paper written by a student named Jorge, who researched the effectiveness of low-carbohydrate diets. Read Jorge's abstract. Note how it sums up the major ideas in his paper without going into excessive detail.

**Abstract**

Low-carbohydrate diets have become increasingly popular. Supporters claim they are notably more effective than other diets for weight loss and provide other health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels; however, some doctors believe these diets carry potential long-term health risks. A review of the available research literature indicates that low-carbohydrate diets are highly effective for short-term weight loss but that their long-term effectiveness is not significantly greater than other common diet plans. Their long-term effects on cholesterol levels and blood pressure are unknown; research literature suggests some potential for negative health outcomes associated with increased consumption of saturated fat. This conclusion points to the importance of following a balanced, moderate diet appropriate for the individual, as well as the need for further research.

**? Exercise 6.1.1**

Write an abstract summarizing your paper. Briefly introduce the topic, state your findings, and sum up what conclusions you can draw from your research. Use the word count feature of your word-processing program to make sure your abstract does not exceed one hundred fifty words.

**📌 Tip**

Depending on your field of study, you may sometimes write research papers that present extensive primary research, such as your own experiment or survey. In your abstract, summarize your research question and your findings, and briefly indicate how your study relates to prior research in the field.

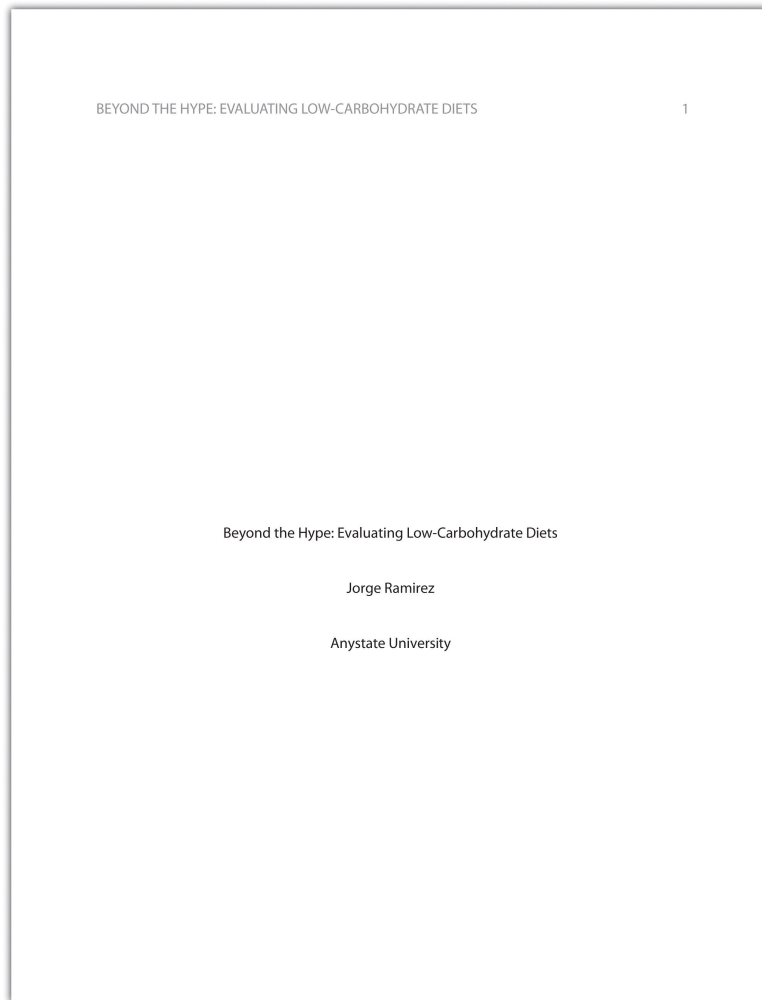
**Margins, Pagination, and Headings**

APA style requirements also address specific formatting concerns, such as margins, pagination, and heading styles, within the body of the paper. Review the following APA guidelines.

Use these general guidelines to format the paper:

1. Set the top, bottom, and side margins of your paper at 1 inch.
2. Use double-spaced text throughout your paper.
3. Use a standard font, such as Times New Roman or Arial, in a legible size (10- to 12-point).
4. Use continuous pagination throughout the paper, including the title page and the references section. Page numbers appear flush right within your header.

5. Section headings and subsection headings within the body of your paper use different types of formatting depending on the level of information you are presenting. Additional details from Jorge's paper are provided.



**Abstract**

Low-carbohydrate diets have become increasingly popular. Supporters claim they are notably more effective than other diets for weight loss and provide other health benefits such as lower blood pressure and improved cholesterol levels; however, some doctors believe these diets carry potential long-term health risks. A review of the available research literature indicates that low-carbohydrate diets are highly effective for short-term weight loss but that their long-term effectiveness is not significantly greater than other common diet plans. Their long-term effects on cholesterol levels and blood pressure are unknown; research literature suggests some potential for negative health outcomes associated with increased consumption of saturated fat. This conclusion points to the importance of following a balanced, moderate diet appropriate for the individual, as well as the need for further research.

**? Exercise 6.1.2**

Begin formatting the final draft of your paper according to APA guidelines. You may work with an existing document or set up a new document if you choose. Include the following:

- Your title page
- The abstract you created in Exercise 1
- Correct headers and page numbers for your title page and abstract

## Headings

APA style uses section headings to organize information, making it easy for the reader to follow the writer's train of thought and to know immediately what major topics are covered. Depending on the length and complexity of the paper, its major sections may also be divided into subsections, sub-subsections, and so on. These smaller sections, in turn, use different heading styles to indicate different levels of information. In essence, you are using headings to create a hierarchy of information.

The following heading styles used in APA formatting are listed in order of greatest to least importance:

1. Section headings use centered, boldface type. Headings use title case, with important words in the heading capitalized.
2. Subsection headings use left-aligned, boldface type. Headings use title case.
3. The third level uses left-aligned, indented, boldface type. Headings use a capital letter only for the first word, and they end in a period.
4. The fourth level follows the same style used for the previous level, but the headings are boldfaced and italicized.
5. The fifth level follows the same style used for the previous level, but the headings are italicized and **not** boldfaced.

Visually, the hierarchy of information is organized as indicated in Table 13.1 “Section Headings”.

Table 13.1 - Section Headings

Level of Information	Text Example
Level 1	<b>Heart Disease</b>
Level 2	<b>Lifestyle Factors That Reduce Heart Disease Risk</b>
Level 3	<b>Exercising regularly.</b>
Level 4	<i>Aerobic exercise.</i>
Level 5	<i>Country line dancing.</i>

A college research paper may not use all the heading levels shown in Table 13.1 “Section Headings”, but you are likely to encounter them in academic journal articles that use APA style. For a brief paper, you may find that level 1 headings suffice. Longer or more complex papers may need level 2 headings or other lower-level headings to organize information clearly. Use your outline to craft your major section headings and determine whether any subtopics are substantial enough to require additional levels of headings.

### ? Exercise 6.1.3

Working with the document you developed in Note 13.11 “Exercise 2”, begin setting up the heading structure of the final draft of your research paper according to APA guidelines. Include your title and at least two to three major section headings, and follow the formatting guidelines provided above. If your major sections should be broken into subsections, add those headings as well. Use your outline to help you.

Because Jorge used only level 1 headings, his Exercise 3 would look like the following:

Level of Information	Text Example
Level 1	<b>Purported Benefits of Low-Carbohydrate Diets</b>
Level 1	<b>Research on Low-Carbohydrate Diets and Weight Loss</b>
Level 1	<b>Other Long-Term Health Outcomes</b>
Level 1	<b>Conclusion</b>

## Citation Guidelines

### In-Text Citations

Throughout the body of your paper, include a citation whenever you quote or paraphrase material from your research sources. As you learned in Chapter 11, the purpose of citations is twofold: to give credit to others for their ideas and to allow your reader to follow up and learn more about the topic if desired. Your in-text citations provide basic information about your source; each source you cite will have a longer entry in the references section that provides more detailed information.

In-text citations must provide the name of the author or authors and the year the source was published. (When a given source does not list an individual author, you may provide the source title or the name of the organization that published the material instead.) When directly quoting a source, it is also required that you include the page number where the quote appears in your citation.

This information may be included within the sentence or in a parenthetical reference at the end of the sentence, as in these examples.

Epstein (2010) points out that “junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive” (p. 137).

Here, the writer names the source author when introducing the quote and provides the publication date in parentheses after the author’s name. The page number appears in parentheses **after** the closing quotation marks and **before** the period that ends the

sentence.

Addiction researchers caution that “junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive” (Epstein, 2010, p. 137).

Here, the writer provides a parenthetical citation at the end of the sentence that includes the author’s name, the year of publication, and the page number separated by commas. Again, the parenthetical citation is placed **after** the closing quotation marks and **before** the period at the end of the sentence.

As noted in the book *Junk Food, Junk Science* (Epstein, 2010, p. 137), “junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive.”

Here, the writer chose to mention the source title in the sentence (an optional piece of information to include) and followed the title with a parenthetical citation. Note that the parenthetical citation is placed **before** the comma that signals the end of the introductory phrase.

David Epstein’s book *Junk Food, Junk Science* (2010) pointed out that “junk food cannot be considered addictive in the same way that we think of psychoactive drugs as addictive” (p. 137).

Another variation is to introduce the author and the source title in your sentence and include the publication date and page number in parentheses within the sentence or at the end of the sentence. As long as you have included the essential information, you can choose the option that works best for that particular sentence and source.

Citing a book with a single author is usually a straightforward task. Of course, your research may require that you cite many other types of sources, such as books or articles with more than one author or sources with no individual author listed. You may also need to cite sources available in both print and online and nonprint sources, such as websites and personal interviews. Section 13.2 and Section 13.3 provide extensive guidelines for citing a variety of source types.

#### ✓ writing at work

APA is just one of several different styles with its own guidelines for documentation, formatting, and language usage. Depending on your field of interest, you may be exposed to additional styles, such as the following:

- **MLA style.** Determined by the Modern Languages Association and used for papers in literature, languages, and other disciplines in the humanities.
- **Chicago style.** Outlined in the *Chicago Manual of Style* and sometimes used for papers in the humanities and the sciences; many professional organizations use this style for publications as well.
- **Associated Press (AP) style.** Used by professional journalists.

## References List

The brief citations included in the body of your paper correspond to the more detailed citations provided at the end of the paper in the references section. In-text citations provide basic information—the author’s name, the publication date, and the page number if necessary—while the references section provides more extensive bibliographical information. Again, this information allows your reader to follow up on the sources you cited and do additional reading about the topic if desired.

The specific format of entries in the list of references varies slightly for different source types, but the entries generally include the following information:

- The name(s) of the author(s) or institution that wrote the source
- The year of publication and, where applicable, the exact date of publication
- The full title of the source
- For books, the city of publication
- For articles or essays, the name of the periodical or book in which the article or essay appears
- For magazine and journal articles, the volume number, issue number, and pages where the article appears
- For sources on the web, the URL where the source is located

The references page is double spaced and lists entries in alphabetical order by the author’s last name. If an entry continues for more than one line, the second line and each subsequent line are indented five spaces. Review the following example. (Section 13.3 provides extensive guidelines for formatting reference entries for different types of sources.)

- the way. In The Nutrition Source. Retrieved from <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/carbohydrates-full-story/index.html#good-carbs-not-no-carbs>
- HealthDay. (2010). *Low-fat diets beat low-carb regimen long term*. [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_95861.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_95861.html)
- Hirsch, J. (2004). The low-carb evolution: Be reactive with low-carb products but proactive with nutrition. *Nutraceuticals World*. Retrved from <http://www.nutraceuticalsworld.com/contents/view/13321>
- Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER). (2010). Weight-loss options: 6 common diet plans. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/print/weight-loss/NU00616/METHOD=print>
- McMillan-Price, J., Petocz, P., Atkinson, F., O'Neill, K., Samman, S., Steinbeck, K...Brand-Miller, J. (2006, July). Comparison of 4 diets of varying glycemic load on weight loss and cardiovascular risk reduction in overweight and obese young adults: A randomized controlled trial. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 166(14), 1466–1475. Retrieved from <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/166/14/1466>
- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. (2010). What I need to know about eating and diabetes. In *National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse*. Retrieved from [http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/eating\\_ez/index.htm](http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/eating_ez/index.htm)
- Reuters Health. (2010). *Low-carb diet can increase bad cholesterol levels*. Retrieved from [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_95708.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_95708.html)
- Seppa, N. (2008). Go against the grains, diet study suggests: Low-carb beats low-fat in weight loss, cholesterol. *Science News*, 174(4), 25. <http://www.sciencenews.org/view/issue/id/34757>

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. (2010). What I need to know about eating and diabetes. In *National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse*. Retrieved from [http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/eating\\_ez/index.htm](http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/eating_ez/index.htm)

Reuters Health. (2010). *Low-carb diet can increase bad cholesterol levels*. Retrieved from [http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory\\_95708.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/news/fullstory_95708.html)

Seppa, N. (2008). Go against the grains, diet study suggests: Low-carb beats low-fat in weight loss, cholesterol. *Science News*. 174(4), 25. <http://www.sciencenews.org/view/issue/id/34757>

 Tip

In APA style, book and article titles are formatted in sentence case, not title case. Sentence case means that only the first word is capitalized, along with any proper nouns.

### Key Takeaways

- Following proper citation and formatting guidelines helps writers ensure that their work will be taken seriously, give proper credit to other authors for their work, and provide valuable information to readers.
- Working ahead and taking care to cite sources correctly the first time are ways writers can save time during the editing stage of writing a research paper.
- APA papers usually include an abstract that concisely summarizes the paper.
- APA papers use a specific headings structure to provide a clear hierarchy of information.
- In APA papers, in-text citations usually include the name(s) of the author(s) and the year of publication.
- In-text citations correspond to entries in the references section, which provide detailed bibliographical information about a source.

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