

Tips for Writing a Scholarly Paper in APA Format

student number

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the course

Nursing 999

Nursing of Optimistic Instructors

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MEDICINE HAT COLLEGE

December 31, 2231

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The introduction is placed directly below the title of the paper with no other heading. That is, do not write “Introduction” before this section. The introduction should contain a thesis sentence, the purpose of the paper, and what is included in the paper. The essential elements of scholarly style and American Psychological Association (APA) format are introduced in this paper. This is a beginning guide; therefore, students should become familiar with the *APA Publication Manual* (2010) and how to use it. A manual on style is helpful for grammar, punctuation, word choice and sentence structure, although APA also provides direction on these topics. Note that all pages in the paper are identified by a running head, which should appear on the left side of the page and contain salient words from the title.

The Body of a Scholarly Paper

The body of a paper contains all the wonderful information a student has gathered or generated that supports/explains/expands the thesis statement. Student papers are most often of the literature review or case study type (See APA, 2010, pp. 10-11) for information about different types of papers/articles). The following paper includes information about writing style (person, tense, etc.) and writing format (headings, spacing, punctuation, references, and much more). A list of common elements and relevant page numbers from the APA Manual can be found in the Appendix. Some students/instructors find it helpful to put sticky tapes on the pages of the manual that they use most often. Paragraphs in the body of this paper are short and to the point, but in a scholarly paper paragraphs are usually longer (about ½ page) with topic sentences and several supporting statements. A paragraph that is a page or longer often needs organizing into several paragraphs (with one topic for each paragraph) or the information needs to be condensed (see APA, p. 68).

Writing Style

Writing style is about orderly presentation of ideas, smoothness, and economy of expression, clarity of ideas, word choice, spelling, and grammar. Following are a few elements that students often need to review. Again, a manual on writing style will help students to become a scholarly writer (Northey, 2002). Manuals on style can be found in the Medicine Hat College Library under LB 2369 call numbers.

Person. Most student papers are written in third person (the patient, the nurse, the student). Sometimes, in a reflection assignment for example, first person (I, my) is requested. This paper is written in third person, and illustrates an appropriate use of person in scholarly writing. Second person (you, your, etc.) is never appropriate unless it is a quote from a personal communication. *We* is usually restricted to authors and coauthors and should not be used to ambiguously indicate many people. However, ‘as students, we...’ is acceptable (APA, 2010, pp. 69-70). Writing the word *one*, often done in Britain, is discouraged in North America. Rather, use *they* or insert an occasional *I* and “use *one* sparingly” (Northey, 2002, p. 109).

Verbs. Papers should be written in the active voice, but passive voice may be used when there is a change in focus from an object to an action. Past tense (he showed) and present perfect tense (have shown) are used to denote past actions or conditions and are most appropriate for literature reviews. The present tense may be used to conclude, discuss (for e.g., the instructor’s comments indicate), and sometimes to reflect a clearer more vigorous writing style (Northey, 2002). The grammar check on most word processing programs will warn of inappropriate use of verbs.

Anthropomorphism. “Do not attribute human characteristics to animals or inanimate sources” (APA, 2010, p. 69). Many authors are guilty of this crime. As an example: “This

chapter will explain...?” Chapters are not alive and cannot explain anything. If it was more effectively written, the statement might read “The idiosyncrasies of instructors are explained in this chapter.”

Other things. There are some words that many students find problematic such as *would*. Would is a word that is used too often and in the wrong sense. APA (2010) cautions you to “Use *would* with care” (p. 78). Another problem arises with the use of *due to* and *as* when the word needed is *because*. Some words, such as *due to* and *as*, are good words for charting and nursing care plans, but not for scholarly papers. Going beyond this and writing *due to the fact* is definitely a sin (See APA, p. 67 about wordiness and redundancy). Contractions, such as *can't*, *won't*, and *isn't*, are not acceptable in a scholarly paper. Instead write out the words—*cannot*, *will not*, and *is not*. *Its*, *it is*, and *it's* are words that cause confusion. *It's* is the contraction for *it is*. Because a contraction cannot be used in a scholarly paper, it should not be a problem. *Its* is the possessive for an object or animal, but does not include an apostrophe “s” as does a word such as *nurse's*. The non-word *alot* crops up frequently in papers. *A lot* is two words. The APA manual recommends the *Merriam—Webster Collegiate Dictionary* for standard spelling. In Canada however, many prefer the correct *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*. It is important to pay attention to the red and green alerts from word processing computer programs—they will remarkably decrease frustration for both students and instructors.

An example of scholarly writing from Nelson and Gordon (2004) that incorporates many of the above elements appears below.

In fact, the very leadership and management model upon which the lady nurses, like Nightingale, based their effort to recreate nursing as a respectable career for gentlewomen was adapted from religious nurses. Nightingale borrowed from Sisters of Mercy (particularly Mother Mary Moore who had been a stalwart friend and mentor of

Nightingale in Crimea and for many years after) and Sister Mary Jones of St. John's House. (p. 255)

Format

Format is mostly about how a paper looks and how it is referenced. Following is a discussion of common elements. At first, it may seem like a lot of picky details, but before long it will become second nature to students and aids in the development of scholarly writing.

Title page. For student papers, the title page needs to contain more information than indicated in the section for publishing in the APA Manual. Besides the title, running head, institution, and so on, students need to include the name of the course, the name of the instructor, and the date. It is important that the format for a title page is consistent within a program.

Margins, justification, and hyphens. There should be a one-inch (2.54 cm.) margin at the top, bottom, and both sides of the paper. Most papers will be typed using left-side justification. The left margin should be flush-left and the right margin uneven. Do not hyphenate words at the end of a line; instead, carry on to the next line. If full-justification is required, words can be hyphenated at the end of a line.

Line spacing, typeface, and font. Papers should be double-spaced; this will be specified in an assignment criterion. Do not use triple or quadruple spacing unless setting off an equation or a table. Tables, equations, and long quotations may be single-spaced to improve readability. Quotations greater than 40 words are single-spaced and indented. Times New Roman typeface with a 12- point font size is required (APA, 2010, p. 228). Sometimes students will try to use a smaller font when there is a page restriction on an assignment or a larger font if their paper is not long enough. Instructors may have used this tactic themselves when they were students, and they did not get away with it either.

Spacing and punctuation. From the APA Publication Manual (2010), use one space between all punctuation. That means there is one space after a colon, semi-colon, and comma. New to the 2010 APA Manual is a return to two spaces at the end of a sentence (pp. 87–88). That means two spaces after a period, question mark, or exclamation point. In this paper a comma is used between elements when using and/or. Although it has been changed in other writing styles (e.g., Harvard), it is still recommended for APA style. Remember that for APA format, a quotation mark should appear outside final punctuation (.” and ?”). However, quotation marks should fall within colons and semi-colons.

Headings. Headings make papers easier to read, and they may help to delineate an outline for a paper. The correct level of headings is often difficult for a student to ascertain. In this paper three levels of headings have been used (Levels 1, 2, and 3). A short paper may need only one level (Level 1). For two levels, use Level 1 and 2. Do not let a heading stand alone at the bottom of a page. It should always have text beneath it. If necessary, move the heading to the next page and leave a line on the previous page. When using upper and lower case letters, ensure that all words of four letters or more, words at the beginning of a heading, and names are capitalized.

Quotations. In the APA manual are specific examples for how to set up quotations (see Appendix for specific page numbers). Note the examples in this paper. It would take too long to explain all of them here. Just remember to look up the format for quotations when unsure. Also, please note that a paper consisting of many direct quotations is difficult to read, borders on plagiarism, and will not sit well with an instructor. In fact, some papers that contain little beyond direct quotes are returned to students with an “F” grade. Paraphrase and summarize, demonstrating understanding of the material, and impress the instructor.

Referencing. There are two elements involved in referencing. The first involves citing authors in text. The second concerns the reference list. The reference list is similar to a bibliography except it only includes sources that have been cited in text.

When referencing in text note the author's last name and the year of publication. In this paper the APA manual has been cited without an author because there is no specific author. To cite a publication with an author, write, for example: Nightingale (1946) noted that air should be pure, but not chilled. For a work such as Nightingale's there was an original publish date and then a re-publish date, cite both dates in the reference list. Journal articles are cited the same way. As an example: Fletcher (2007) contends that every nurse has the ability and responsibility to promote a positive image of nursing. For on-line sources, cite the author or name of document and date in text. Only include the URL address in the reference list. For example, a document from the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) is referenced in text as: (CARNA, 2009). Depending on sentence structure and kinds of material, there are different ways to set up a citation. The manual has examples for all (see Appendix for specific page numbers).

The second element involves the reference list. The reference list appears after the last page of text and before appendixes. The manual includes direction on how to set up each reference depending on the type of material cited. There are many different kinds. A chapter in an edited book such as Allemang's (2000) is one example. Everybody, no matter how long they have used APA, has to look in the manual for direction on referencing. Some kinds, such as journal references, that are used often might be memorized. If the article has been assigned a digital object identifier (DOI), it should appear at the end of the citation. A DOI appears on the first page of most articles (See APA, 2010, pp. 198-202). Look up others such as monographs,

technical reports, pamphlets, and government documents (see Appendix for specific page numbers).

Appendixes. Appendixes (alternate spelling, appendices) contain information extra to the paper. In this paper the appendix contains page numbers for specific APA elements. If there are several appendixes in a paper, title them as Appendix A, Appendix B, and so forth. Refer to them as such in text, usually within parentheses (e.g., see Appendixes A and B). If there is only one appendix, type: see Appendix. Again, the appendixes appear after the reference list.

Conclusion

A conclusion summarizes a paper; it contains mainly content with some process. Do not introduce any new material in the conclusion. Sometimes authors use their abstract for the conclusion, and this is acceptable. This paper included tips for writing style and format with direction for further refinement. As well, useful hints were presented on how to impress an instructor—do not use a lot of direct quotations and do not deviate from the recommended font. APA format helps students to become more scholarly writers.

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Appendix

Often Used Pages

1. Headings	pp. 62-63, 101-102
2. Quotations	pp. 92-93, 171-173
3. Order of Pages	pp. 229-230
4. Margins	p. 229
5. Spacing and Punctuation	pp. 87-96, 229
6. Page Numbers/ Running Head	pp. 23, 229-230
7. Indentation	p. 229
8. Reference Citations in Text	pp. 169-179
9. Reference List	pp. 180-192
10. Abbreviations for states	p. 187
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15. Sample Paper	pp. 41-59