GENERAL

american psychological association 2009 publication manual 6th edition

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Introduction

When scholars, students, and researchers set out to publish a paper in psychology, education, or related fields, they often face a daunting challenge: formatting the manuscript according to the **American Psychological Association (APA) style**. The 6th edition of the APA Publication Manual, released in 2009, remains the gold standard for many academic journals and institutions worldwide. This guide offers a comprehensive, step by step walkthrough of the manual's core requirements, practical tips for efficient writing, and insights into how the 6th edition compares to its successor, the 7th edition.

Whether you're preparing a thesis, a journal article, or a grant proposal, understanding the intricacies of APA 6th edition will help you avoid common pitfalls, reduce revision cycles, and ensure your work meets the rigorous standards of scholarly publishing.

1. Overview of APA 6th Edition

1.1 Historical Context

The APA Publication Manual has evolved over decades to address the changing landscape of research communication. The 6th edition, published in 2009, was a response to the increasing use of electronic sources, the need for clearer guidelines on bias free language, and the growing diversity of publication formats.

1.2 Purpose and Significance

At its core, APA 6th edition serves three primary purposes:

- Consistency: It provides a uniform framework that enables readers to quickly locate key information across different works.
- Credibility: Proper citation and formatting demonstrate scholarly rigor and respect for intellectual property.
- Clarity: Structured headings, clear references, and standardized formatting reduce ambiguity and enhance readability.

2. Key Features of APA 6th Edition

2.1 Formatting Guidelines

Proper formatting is the backbone of APA style. The manual specifies:

- Margins: 1 inch on all sides.
- Font: Times New Roman, 12 point (though other fonts such as Calibri or Arial are acceptable if the journal permits).
- Spacing: Double spaced text, including the title page, abstract, main body, references, and footnotes.
- Indentation: 0.5 inch hanging indent for reference list entries.

2.2 Title Page, Abstract, and Headings

Each manuscript begins with a **title page** that contains the title, author(s), institutional affiliation, and running head.

The **abstract**follows, summarizing the study's purpose, methods, results, and conclusions in 150 250 words. Headings are organized into five levels, each with distinct formatting rules to guide readers through the structure of the paper.

2.3 In Text Citations and Reference List

APA 6th edition requires parenthetical citations that include the author's surname and publication year. For works with three or more authors, the first citation lists all surnames, followed by "et al." in subsequent citations. The reference list is alphabetized, double spaced, and formatted according to the source type (journal article, book, website, etc.).

2.4 Tables, Figures, and Appendices

Tables and figures receive unique captions and are numbered consecutively. They should appear after the reference list unless the journal specifies otherwise. Appendices contain supplementary material that is essential but too detailed for the main text.

2.5 Bias Free Language

The 6th edition introduced guidelines for inclusive, respectful language. This includes avoiding terms that may be considered pejorative or outdated, using singular "they" for gender neutrality, and ensuring that descriptors do not perpetuate stereotypes.

3. Step by Step Guide to Formatting a Manuscript

3.1 Manuscript Structure

1. Title Page – Title, author(s), affiliation, and running head.
2. Abstract – Concise summary.
3. Keywords – Optional, usually 3 5 terms.
4. Introduction – Context, literature review, research question.
5. Method – Participants, procedures, materials.
6. Results – Findings, statistical analyses.
7. Discussion – Interpretation, implications, limitations.
8. References – Complete list.
9. Appendices – Supplemental content.

3.2 Title Page Details

Include the following elements:

- Running head: a shortened version of the title, no more than 50 characters, left justified.
- Page number: top right corner.
- Title: centered, bold, and capitalized.
- Author name(s): centered, double spaced.
- Institutional affiliation: centered.
- Contact information (optional).

3.3 Abstract Formatting

The abstract should be a single paragraph, double spaced, with no indentation. Use the word "Abstract" centered in bold at the top. Follow the abstract with keywords, each separated by commas, indented to align with the left margin.

3.4 Headings Hierarchy

APA 6th edition uses five heading levels. For example:

- Level 1: Centered, Bold, Title Case
- Level 2: Left aligned, Bold, Title Case
- Level 3: Indented, Bold, Sentence case, ending with a period.
- Level 4: Indented, Bold, Italic, Sentence case, ending with a period.
- Level 5: Indented, Italic, Sentence case, ending with a period.

3.5 Paragraph and Spacing Rules

All paragraphs, including the abstract and references, are double spaced. The first line of every paragraph (except the abstract) is indented 0.5 inches. No extra line breaks are allowed between paragraphs.

3.6 In Text Citations: Parenthetical & Narrative

Parenthetical: (Smith, 2015). Narrative: Smith (2015) found… If quoting directly, include page number: (Smith, 2015, p. 23).

3.7 Reference List Formatting

Key elements:

- Alphabetized by author's surname.
- Hanging indent of 0.5 inches.
- Double spaced.
- Use italics for book and journal titles.
- Include DOI or URL when available.

4. Common Challenges and How to Resolve Them

4.1 Handling Multiple Authors

For works with up to 20 authors, list all surnames in the first citation. In subsequent citations, use the first author's surname followed by "et al." (e.g., Smith, Johnson, & Lee, 2010; Smith et al., 2010).

4.2 Electronic Sources

APA 6th edition requires URLs for online materials. If a DOI is available, use it; otherwise, provide the direct URL. Avoid "Retrieved from" unless the content is likely to change over time.

4.3 Non English Sources

Translate the title into English in brackets after the original title. Provide the original title, publication year, and location. For example: *Le comportement des enfants [Child Behavior] (2012).*

4.4 APA Style for Different Document Types

Manuscripts, theses, dissertations, and conference papers each have specific formatting nuances. Always consult the journal's or institution's guidelines for any deviations from the standard APA 6th edition rules.

5. Practical Tips for Efficient APA 6th Edition Writing

5.1 Use Reference Managers

Tools like EndNote, Zotero, and Mendeley automatically format citations and references. Import the APA 6th edition style file into your word processor to streamline the process.

5.2 Leverage Templates

Many universities provide APA 6th edition templates in Microsoft Word or LaTeX. These templates pre format margins, headings, and reference styles, allowing you to focus on content.

5.3 Proofreading Checklist

1. Check title page layout and running head.
2. Verify abstract length (150 250 words).
3. Ensure heading levels are consistent.
4. Confirm all in text citations have corresponding reference list entries.
5. Check reference formatting (italics, punctuation, hanging indent).
6. Review bias free language usage.
7. Validate URLs and DOIs.
8. Run a spell check and grammar review.

6. Transition to APA 7th Edition

6.1 Major Updates

While the 6th edition remains widely used, the 7th edition (2020) introduced changes such as:

- Use of singular “they” as default pronoun.
- Updated guidelines for citing social media and other digital media.
- Simplified reference list format (e.g., no “Retrieved from” for stable URLs).
- New guidelines for fonts and line spacing.

6.2 When to Stick with 6th Edition

Many journals, especially those in psychology, still require APA 6th edition. If your target publication mandates the 6th edition, adhere strictly to its rules. However, staying informed about the 7th edition will prepare you for future submissions.

Conclusion

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