APA Made Easy:

A Student’s Guide to APA Formatting

Ashford Writing Center

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The Mechanics of APA Style

The American Psychological Association (APA) is one of the largest scientific and professional associations in the United States. APA style is a set of rules and guidelines provided by this association to ensure a professional standard of scholarly writing.

APA Style is the required citation style in all Ashford University courses.

As students and researchers, it is important that we give credit to those whose ideas have contributed to our own work. As academic writers, we draw from and build on the work of previous scholars and professionals. When we present our writing, we want to show our readers that we are knowledgeable about our topics and that we have become informed by seeking out works written by others who are experts on these topics. When we document our sources, we share with our readers the research we have done to develop the balanced and reasoned positions that we present in our writing. To demonstrate our credibility as writers and professionals, we use APA style—an agreed upon set of rules and guidelines—to lead our readers to the original source material that we have used in preparing our work. These rules and guidelines comprise the formal conventions for writing that are respected in our professional fields and help us to communicate professionally with colleagues and peers.

APA citation style focuses on both the author and the date the article or study was published. This focus on the date is important since things change rapidly in our fields of study.

In-Text Citations

In-text citations are also referred to as parenthetical citations. In-text citations are citations used within the body of the paper, whereas the term reference refers to the complete citation, which is typically listed on the references page.

Why use in-text citations? In-text citations are considered trails on a map to show sources you consulted and used in your journey during the research phase of the writing process.
Citations signal for the reader whose ideas belong to the writer and whose ideas belong to an outside source. For example, the in-text citation for a reading from Hibel, Farkas, and Morgan (2010) would be cited as follows:

"Certain groups of students are routinely found to be overrepresented (compared to their share in the school-aged population) in special education classrooms" (Hibel, Farkas, & Morgan, 2010, p. 313).

The same quotation could also be presented as follows:

According to Hibel, Farkas, and Morgan (2010), “Certain groups of students are routinely found to be overrepresented (compared to their share in the school-aged population) in special education classrooms” (p. 313).

**Citing Page or Paragraph Numbers**

The APA prefers that writers include page numbers in citations for direct quotes. If page numbers are not available or are inconsistent, cite paragraph numbers.

Citation for a text with page numbers: (Zirkel, 2011, p. 262).
Citation for a range of pages within a text:  (Zirkel, 2011, pp. 262–263).

Citation for a text without page numbers:  (Zirkel, 2011, para. 4).

Writing tip: Using a variety of citation techniques will enhance the flow and readability of your paper. For example:

“All teachers must create a learning environment that is emotionally and psychologically safe because English Language Learners are very sensitive to the classroom setting” (Allison & Rehm, 2011, p. 23).

Allison and Rehm (2011) noted, “Teachers must create a learning environment that is emotionally and psychologically safe because English Language Learners are very sensitive to the classroom setting” (p. 23).

Note: The author’s last name and date of publication always remain together. The paragraph or page number in parentheses indicates when you leave the ideas of an outside source and return to your own.

Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Summarizing

Quotation

A quotation is made by using the original wording from an outside source and incorporating those words into your own writing. The words from the outside source will be clearly marked as belonging to another and enclosed in quotation marks.

When quoting fewer than 40 words, place quotation marks around the entire passage, followed by the citation, such as:

“Technology can take on several roles in education, such as role of resources, role of delivery system, or productivity” (Lee et al., 2013, p. 134).

Block Quotation

Quotations that are more than 40 words in length should be indented a half inch (the same length as a paragraph’s indentation). Quotation marks are not placed around the cited material; rather, the indentation signifies that the material is a direct quote. Lastly, the period is placed at the end of the quoted material (not at the end of the citation) as shown here:
Signal Phrases

In order to give your reader a signal that you will be integrating information borrowed from another source, use a signal phrase. A signal phrase introduces the passage and tells something about the source and author. Think of this signal as a way to lead into the quote by preparing readers for what they're about to read. Here are some examples:

- Lee, Waxman, Wu, Wichko, and Lin (2013) explained the multi-layered dynamic of technology in education:

- Tess (2013) discussed social media trends…

- According to Johnson (2009), there are various studies dedicated to issues in education…

- Phillips and Lyons (2011) argued for the need for yearly peer reviews among faculty…

Without a signal phrase and clear citation, the reader might assume that your excellent ideas all came from an outside source.

Paraphrase

A paraphrase is taking the ideas of an outside source and putting those ideas into your own words. Paraphrases do not need quotation marks, but they do need to be cited similarly to a
direct quotation by placing the author's last name, year of publication, and paragraph or page number at the end of the paraphrased passage (strongly preferred by APA style guide).

The table below shows a side-by-side comparison of a quote, paraphrase, and summary using the same scholarly source:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Quotation</th>
<th>Paraphrase</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tess (2013) noted that “Researchers have been examining the role that social media plays in the higher education classroom. Some of the work has highlighted the affective outcomes of SNS integration. A few studies investigated learning outcomes and student achievement in relationship to the educational use of social media in college courses. While the majority of studies reported positive affordances, there was evidence of drawbacks as well” (p. A62).</td>
<td>Tess (2013) discussed the popularity of social media within higher education, noting that studies have investigated and reported both positive and drawbacks (p. A62).</td>
<td>Tess (2013) analyzed the usage and impact of social media in the college classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: When summarizing, you do not need to include the page or paragraph number—just the author's name and date of publication.

**Secondary Sources: Citing a Source Within a Source**

If you find a quote in a source (secondary source) that cites content or ideas presented in another source (primary source), consider locating the original source. The use of secondary sources in your paper should be kept to a minimum. For example, if you found a quote by Eijkman (2008) in Tess’s (2013) publication, but could not find Eijkman’s original piece, here is how you would cite Eijkman (2008) as a secondary source:


**Author Citations**

**One Author**
When citing a work written by a single author, refer to the last name, year of publication, and page number, and separate each element with a comma. For example:

“Textbooks are rapidly becoming a thing of the past” (Williams, 2012, p. 34).

Or

Williams (2012) noted, “Textbooks are rapidly becoming a thing of the past” (p.34).

As a reminder, if page numbers are not available, use paragraph numbers.

Two Authors

When providing a parenthetical citation for a work by two authors, use an ampersand (&) between the authors’ last names, followed by date of publication, and page number:

“Part of the reason that business educators may be hesitant to interject discussions of the public policies and how they came about into their lectures and class discussions is a long-standing hesitancy to bring politics into the classroom” (Cornwall & Dennis, 2012, p. 13).

As illustrated below, an ampersand would not be used in the signal phrase.

Cornwall and Dennis (2012) argued, “Part of the reason that business educators may be hesitant to interject discussions of the public policies and how they came about into their lectures and class discussions is a long-standing hesitancy to bring politics into the classroom” (p. 13).

Citing Three to Five Authors

When providing in-text citations for works by three to five authors, cite all authors in the first citation. However, in subsequent citations, simply cite the first author’s last name followed by the Latin abbreviation *et al* (not italicized and with a period after *al*), which means “and others.”


Subsequent citations in your paper:  (Hay et al., 2004)

Six or More Authors

When citing a source written by six or more authors, reference the first author’s last name, followed by *et al*. For example, an article written by Strongin, Cole, Bullock, Banthia, Craypo, Sivasubramanian, Samuels, Garcia, and Lafleur (2004) would be cited as follows:
First and subsequent citations as part of a signal phrase: Strongin et al. (2004)

First and subsequent parenthetical citations: (Strongin et al., 2004)

If you secure a source that does not have an author’s name or organization listed, determine the entity responsible for the content. Don’t guess! For example, if citing a definition from an electronic version of the dictionary, cite as follows: (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2013). The dictionary entry will be listed on the references page beginning with the term in the author position:


**Heading Levels**

Students sometimes confuse the terms *running head* with *heading level*. The running head, as previously discussed, is placed within the top margin of your paper. Heading levels, however, can be placed anywhere in your paper as a way to classify or organize your paper into sections. There are five levels: the first three levels are more commonly used in Ashford University assignments, whereas levels four and five may be used in longer papers (e.g., a master’s thesis). As a general rule, check with your instructor about formatting expectations.

Please note: Headings are not used for Introductions, and Conclusion heading formats depend entirely on your instructor or college preference.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heading Level</th>
<th>Template</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Centered, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading</td>
<td>Choosing the Right University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Flush Left, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading</td>
<td>Program Offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indented, boldface, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.</td>
<td>Reputation of programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.</em></td>
<td><em>Virtual programs.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period.</em></td>
<td><em>Hybrid courses.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables and Figures

When used correctly, tables and figures offer visual illustrations of your paper’s findings. Make sure to incorporate tables and figures into your paper if they were requested by your professor and if they support the main point(s) in your paper. If you determine that they serve as more of a supplement to your paper, insert these elements as appendices (see the next topic on organizing appendices).

Tables

Data presented in rows or columns is considered a *table*, and should be referred to as such. Refer to a table placed within your paper by number: (see Table 2). Include a general overview (not a specific, point-by-point analysis of the table) as illustrated below.

```
Table #
The Title of Table Is Italicized And Noted Above The Table

Row 1
Row 2
Row 3
Row 4
Row 5
Row 6

Column 2 Column 3
```


Note: The words *Adapted from* should be used only if you have modified the table in some way. If you are simply reproducing a table from another source, use the words *Reprinted from*.

Figure

Data provided as an illustration (e.g., a chart or photo) is referred to as a *figure*. Refer to a figure placed within your paper by number: (see Figure 1).
Appendices

Appendices are “inserts” with additional information that add to the paper without disrupting the “flow” of the paper; for example, tables, graphs, or other information that support or supplement your paper’s focus. Appendices are placed after the references page in order of mention within the paper. If the paper includes one appendix, label it Appendix (without italics), centered. Then, include the title of the appendix underneath, centered and boldfaced.

When including more than one appendix, organize each appendix after the references page in order mentioned in the paper: Appendix A, Appendix B, and so on. Under the title “Appendix,” center and bold the descriptive title for the material. The appendix is inserted after the references page. The above example illustrates Appendix E, assuming that the student included Appendix A, Appendix B, and so on.
Seriation (Using Lists in a Paper)

Seriated lists are often used in a paper for the purpose of organization and clarity. However, as a writing tip, avoid the overuse of seriated lists in a paper. Here are the three types of seriated lists:

**Numerical List**

Numerical lists are used to establish a process, a hierarchy, or a chronological order of events, as illustrated below.

Students were asked to complete the following steps:

1. Register online using their student identification number.
2. Log into the site with their new usernames and passwords.
3. Complete the survey.

Note: The seriated list should include a period when a complete sentence, or semicolon when considered part of the signal sentence above; if so, the last point on the list should include a period to conclude the list and the preceding sentence.

**Bulleted List**

Bulleted lists do not have a specific order, as illustrated below.

Dillon’s (2012) research concluded that successful leadership of virtual teams is achieved by:

- establishing positive immediacy behaviors when replying to emails from virtual colleagues;
- creating a listserv group to share relevant news; and
- hosting weekly meetings via Skype, Google Meet, or other web-friendly programs.

**A Seriated List Within a Paragraph**

Brief seriated lists may also be used within a paragraph organized by (a), (b), and so on, as illustrated below.

Dillon’s (2012) research concluded that successful leadership of virtual teams is achieved by: (a) establishing positive immediacy behaviors when replying to emails from virtual colleagues; (b)
creating a group listserve to share relevant news; and, (c) hosting weekly meetings via Skype, Google Meet, or other web-friendly programs.

Note: When using seriation within a paragraph, remember to separate elements with a semicolon (not a period).

**General Formatting Guidelines**

- The title, “References” should be centered (no bold).
- Double space the references page just like the rest of your paper.
- Do not use underlining, no bold.
- Italics should be used for journal, book, and film titles.
- Leave out professional credentials (i.e. EdD, PhD).
- Personal communications (i.e., emails, interviews) are not listed on the references page.
- The first line of each citation should be left aligned, but the subsequent lines in the citation are indented (choose “hanging indent” in paragraph formatting in Microsoft Word), as shown in this example:

To access an example of a completed References page, [click here](#). A partial example is available on the next page.
ESSAY TITLE

References


Peer-Reviewed Articles

What Are Peer-Reviewed Articles?

Peer-reviewed or scholarly articles are sources that have been evaluated by the author’s peers (members of the discipline) before being published. When doing research on a topic, writers should be able to trust these sources and the information given. Peer-reviewed publications are first closely scrutinized by other experts in the field, meaning that if a researcher publishes an article on Alzheimer's disease treatment in a journal, for example, other scholars would have reviewed the article closely before the article would be recommended for publication.

What Are Non Peer-Reviewed Publications?

Newspaper articles, wikis (such as Wikipedia), blogs, editorials, and trade magazine articles are not peer-reviewed or scholarly. We refer to these sources as "popular" sources. They may offer correct and useful information; however, writers in these genres are not required to cite their sources and are not held to the same standards of research as those who write for scholarly and/or peer-reviewed publications.

Whenever outside sources are borrowed and used in your paper, you must include in-text citations and a references page. The in-text citations should appear in the main body of your paper, and the references page is inserted at the end of your paper.

When asked to provide peer-reviewed sources in your assignment, begin your search using the Ashford Online Library. Depending on the database used, you will see that there is an option to limit your search to peer-reviewed articles and full-text offerings only. Limiting your search will provide you with only those articles that are peer-reviewed and fully available through our library (see below). Keep in mind that limiting your search to "full-text articles only" saves time by filtering out dozens of articles that may not be available via the Ashford University Library.

For example, if you wish to search for peer-reviewed, full-text articles via the EBSCOhost database, limit your search for both, as shown below:
Annotated Bibliography

An annotated bibliography is a list of works that you may use to research a topic. It is similar to a references page; however, the main difference is you will include a brief summary of each source beneath each citation entry, which means that you will summarize the source in your own words rather than directly quoting the source.

Depending on what your instructor asks of you, a summary may include just an overview of the source, and/or an evaluation of the source’s worth and reliability. Click here for a sample Annotated Bibliography.

Books: Hard Copy and Digital

Hard Copy


Sample Quote: Brown and Green (2011) noted: “…people represent information in their minds as single or aggregated sets of symbols” (p. 30).

Digital Copy: Vital Source


Sample Quote: “Your professional development as a teacher did not begin when you entered your teacher-preparation program” (Armstrong, Henson, & Savage, 2009, p. 30).

Constellation™ Textbook


Sample Quote: “In practice, research methods are determined by the questions researchers want to answer” (Lefrancois, 2012, p. 28).


In-Text Citation: “Quote” (Witt & Mossler, 2010, Section 0.0, “Section Title,” para. #).

Reprinted Material in an Anthology or Collection

When using an article or story from a collection of works (such as an anthology), look to see if the article is a reprint. This information is usually found in the table of contents, and/or at the beginning of the paper, article, or story. If the year is listed, cite both the original publication year and the year of the published collection within the citation, and in the in-text citation, as shown:
Template: Author, A. (Anthology Publication Date). Title of article, not capitalized. In A. Editor & B. Editor (Eds.), *The title of anthology* (pp. xx–xx). City, State Abbreviation: Publisher. (Original work published in YEAR).


Sample Quote: “I think that we’re all mentally ill: those of us outside the asylums only hide it a little better—and maybe not all that much better, after all” (King, 1982/2010, p. 402).

Online Sources

Online Scholarly Journal Article with DOI

DOI stands for *digital object identifier*, which is a unique alpha-numeric code (usually starting with the number 10 and containing a suffix and a prefix assigned to a published article). When a DOI is available, use this code instead of the URL. This information is important to consider as you cite sources retrieved from the Ashford University Library.

Template: Author, A. A. (Year of publication). Title of article. *Title of Periodical, Volume* (issue number if available), page range/number. doi: xx.xxxx/x.xxxx-xxxx.xxxxx.x


Sample Quote: “The power of the experience is suggested by frequent use of words connoting physical impact, and sometimes associated expressions of pain” (Sanderson et al., 2013, p. 627).

Online Scholarly Journal Article Without DOI


Sample Quote: “We need to frame the debate more about the positive things we do and why piracy really hurts [consumers], in addition to whatever damage it does to our industry, to independent
filmmakers maybe more so than even the studios, as rough as it is on them” (Eggerton, 2013, p. 8).

Online Newspapers or Magazines

When using an online article from the Internet that is accessible to the general public, include the direct URL.

Template: Author, A. (Year, Month and Day of publication). Title of internet article. Title of Newspaper or Magazine. Retrieved from URL


Sample Quote: Egan (2009) noted, “Health care workers have a new tool to ease needle anxiety in children: a talking robot” (para. 1).

Web Article, No Author

This section is important because you may be asked to research articles related to current events, using a general web search (non-library based). To understand how to cite articles without authors listed, consider both examples:

Citing an Entity or Organization

If an author is not listed, cite the organization or entity that authored the article. In some cases, the author and entity cannot be determined, therefore, place the organization or entity in the author position. For example, organizations can include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, etc.

Template: Entity or Organization. (Year of publication). Title of article. Retrieved from URL


Sample Quote: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013), “Women are dying from prescription painkiller overdoses at rates never seen before, according to a new CDC Vital Signs” (para. 1).

Citing All Other Online, Unauthored Articles
As noted, if the author and entity cannot be determined, place the title of the article in the author position.

**Template:** Title of article. (Year of publication). Retrieved from URL


**Sample Quote:** “Egypt named an interim prime minister on Tuesday and rich Gulf states poured in $8 billion in aid, as the biggest Arab nation sought ways out of a crisis a day after troops killed dozens of Islamists” (“Egypt gets new prime minister,” 2013, para. 1).

### Instructor Guidance in an Ashford Online Course

**Template:** Instructor, A. A. (Year of upload). Course ID: Week X Title of module. Retrieved from URL


**Sample Quote:** “NCLB sets forth a framework of accountability for all schools in four areas. Schools must meet the required accountability level in each of the four areas to ‘meet the criteria’ for the year” (Lienau, 2013, para. 22).

Note: Provide the general URL “myeclassonline.com” because AUO’s eCollege courses are password protected, and therefore not available to the general public.

### Reports

### Federal Government Agency

**Template:** Author, A. A., Author, B. B., & Author, C. C. (Year). Title of report (Report number, if applicable). Retrieved from [website information and URL or database].


**Sample Quote:** “The Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) in the Chicago-Gary-Kenosha area increased 0.5 percent in May, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported” (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2013, para. 1).
Blogs

Blogs are not considered scholarly sources, but on occasion, you may find a blog written by an expert who contributes to your research. If the author’s name is not listed (a practice common in blogs) include the screen name, as illustrated below:

**Template:** Blog Title (Year, Month and Day of publication). Title of article [Blog post]. Retrieved from URL


**Sample Quote:** “Better I should have talked about Experiential Learning, for that’s the informal learning with the most impact. People learn by doing” (Internet Time Blog, 2013, para. 4).
Audiovisual Materials

**Template:** Producer, A. (Producer). (Year). *Title of video* [Description]. Retrieved from [URL or database].

**Examples:**

Note: If students can readily access the material online, the URL would appear in the retrieval element of the reference. If they cannot readily access online, the database information would be stated in the retrieval element of the reference (e.g., Films On Demand).

If the video is embedded in the course and is retrieved from an outside resource that AU has an account for but students cannot directly access (e.g., Intelecom videos), include the name of the database or video library in the retrieval element and provide context for students on the line below the reference that states “This video is available [can be accessed] through your online course.”

Personal Communication

**Personal Communications: Interviews, Personal Correspondences, Emails**

Personal communications such as interviews, personal correspondences (phone call, meetings), and emails are considered non-published sources because the material cannot be retrieved; therefore, do not list personal communication on the references page. List the individual providing the quote (i.e., interviewee), the words *personal communication*, and the date the discussion took place, as shown here:

**Example:** (D. Williams, personal communication, August 1, 2012).

Please cite this document as follows: