Sample APA Paper for Students Interested in Learning APA Style 6th Edition

Jeffrey H. Kahn

Illinois State University

Author Note

Jeffrey H. Kahn, Department of Psychology, Illinois State University.

Correspondence concerning this sample paper should be addressed to Jeffrey H. Kahn, Department of Psychology, Illinois State University, Campus Box 4620, Normal, Illinois 61790-4620. E-mail: jhkahn@ilstu.edu.

Abstract

The abstract should be a single paragraph in block format (without paragraph indentation), and the appropriate length depends on the journal to which you are submitting, but they are typically between 150 and 200 words. (Students should consult their instructor for the recommended length of the abstract.) Section 2.04 of the APA manual (American Psychological Association [APA], 2010) has additional information about the abstract. The abstract is important because many journal readers first read the abstract to determine if the entire article is worth reading. The abstract should describe all four parts of an empirical paper (i.e., Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion). Consider writing one or two sentences summarizing each part of a paper, and you'll have a nice abstract.

Sample APA Paper for Students Interested in Learning APA Style

Before getting started you will notice some things about this paper. First, everything is double-spaced. Second, margins are 1-inch wide on all sides. Third, there are several headings used throughout to separate different parts of the paper; some of the headings are in bold. Fourth, there is exactly one space after each punctuation mark (except for periods at the end of a sentence, after which there are two spaces). Fifth, the upper left of each page has a running head in all capital letters, and the upper right has the page number. Try to pay attention to all of these details as you look through this paper.

Now that those details are out of the way, you should know that this first part of the paper is called the "Introduction" section, yet it does not have a heading that actually says "Introduction." Instead, the title of the paper is typed at the top of the first page (be sure to center the title, but do not put it in bold). In this section you would often start with a topic paragraph that introduces the problem under study. The importance of the topic should be pretty clear from the first paragraph or two of the Introduction. Section 2.05 of the APA manual (APA, 2010) will help give you some ideas about how to write this.

The bulk of the Introduction section is background literature on the topic. Here a literature review is often very helpful to provide a theoretical or empirical basis for the research. Try to provide the reader with enough information on the topic to be able to conclude that the research is important and that the hypotheses are reasonable. Any prior work on the topic would be useful to include here, although prior work that is most directly related to the hypotheses would be of greatest value.

Remember to cite your sources often in the Introduction and throughout the manuscript. Articles and books are cited the same way in the text, yet they appear different on the References page. For example, an article by Cronbach and Meehl (1955) and a book by Bandura (1986) are written with the authors' names and the year of the publication in parentheses. However, if you look on the References page they look a little different. Remember that APA style does not use footnotes or anything like that for citations. Two other things about citations are important. When a citation is written inside parentheses (e.g., Cronbach & Meehl, 1959), an ampersand is used between authors' names instead of the word "and." Second, when citing an author's work using quotations, be sure to include a page number. For example, Rogers (1961) once wrote that two important elements of a helping relationship are "genuineness and transparency" (p. 37). Notice that the page number is included here. Unless a direct quote is taken from a source, the page number is not included.

The last section of the Introduction states the purpose of the research. The purpose can usually be summarized in a few sentences. Hypotheses are also included here at the end of this section. State your hypotheses as predictions (e.g., "I predicted that..."), and try to avoid using passive tense (e.g., "It was predicted that..."). You will notice that hypotheses are written in past tense because you are describing a study you have finished.

Method

The Method section is the second of four main parts of an empirical paper (see Section 2.06 of the APA [2010] manual). (Be aware that some papers are reviews of the literature and therefore would not have a separate Method section.) There are typically three or four major

subsections in the Method although there can be more. These subsections are separated by

headings which are described in sections 3.02 and 3.03 of the APA manual (APA, 2010).

Participants

        This brief section describes the people who participated in your study. (They should be

called "participants," not "subjects," by the way.) Mention the number of participants, the

percentage of female and male participants, the mean age (where "mean" is abbreviated *M*), and

their ethnicity or cultural background. Any other demographic information would be appropriate

here.

Research Design

        Experimental studies often have a section in the Method describing the design of the

study. Typically the independent variables in the study would be described here. For example, the

study might involve a 2-by-2 design with one independent variable being treatment/control

conditions and the other independent variable being biological sex. It would be helpful to

describe dependent variables in this subsection as well.

Measures

        This section describes the tests or instruments used to collect data. It would be

appropriate to describe any questionnaires that you used. For example, if you used the Marlowe-

Crowne Social Desirability Scale in your research, you may say that the Marlowe-Crowne Social

Desirability Scale (MCSD; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) comprises 33 true-false items that

measure social desirability. You would also provide the reader with information regarding the

MCSD scores' reliability and validity. Do this for each and every measure used in the study. In

the event that the purpose of your paper is to develop a new questinnaire, you may wish to

describe reliability and validity in the Results section (see below). However, you would only do this for a scale-development project.

Procedure

This section describes in great detail the data-collection procedures. Describe how participants were recruited, whether they participated alone or in groups, how informed consent or assent was obtained, what they were asked to do, how they were compensated for their participation, etc. It is hard to make this section too detailed. You should describe the procedure in a way that another researcher could conduct the same study (i.e., replicate it) just by reading about the procedure.

Results

The Results section may be the most difficult to write, at least until you get a little practice with reporting statistical analyses. This is the section where the results of the data analyses are presented. Section 2.07 in the APA manual (APA, 2010) will help a little bit. It's often helpful to use tables (see Table 1) to help describe your results, especially when you have a lot of data to report, such as means and standard deviations. Table 2 provides another example of a table, this one describing correlations.

You may find it helpful to remind the reader of the hypothesis before presenting each result. It is also a good idea to tell the reader what type of data analysis was done (e.g., correlation, ANOVA) before it is presented. State what alpha level you adopted; an alpha level of .05 is the standard. Although you should be sure not to try to interpret or explain your results here, it is appropriate to state whether or not your hypotheses were supported. Just don't try to

explain why the hypotheses were or were not supported; that's why you have the Discussion section.

Discussion

The Discussion is the fourth and final section of the paper. This is the part where you interpret and explain your results. Try to explain why you found what you did in your study. Is it what you predicted? If not, why? You may have to think about your results in a theoretically meaningful way. Also, how do your findings fit in with previous theory and literature? Are your results consistent or inconsistent with what has been found in the past? If they are inconsistent, how can you explain this? The explanation and interpretation of results will probably be the biggest part of the Discussion.

There are at least two additional parts of the discussion. First, include limitations of the study. Describe the ways in which the internal or external validity of the study may have been compromised. Was the sample biased? Were the measures problematic? Think about what you would do different next time if you conducted a similar study. Future research ideas are often discussed when limitations are discussed.

Second, describe the implications of your findings to theory and practice. Answer the question, "How does my study add to psychological theory?" Also, think about practical applications of your findings. Perhaps give some additional directions for future research. When you've done that, you have written a paper in APA style!

References

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological*

Association (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.*

Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Cronbach, L. J., & Meehl, P. E. (1955). Construct validity in psychological tests. *Psychological*

Bulletin, 52, 281-302. doi:10.1037/h0040957

Crowne, C. P., & Marlowe, D. (1960). A new scale of social desirability independent of

psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 24,* 349-354. doi:10.1037/h0047358

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Table 1

Sample Table Describing Fake Data

	Variable A		Variable B	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Men (*n* = 100)	32.61	8.95	17.08	5.25
Women (*n* = 80)	33.02	9.17	16.91	5.13

Note. These data were totally made up. They are just presented to give you an idea about how to present information in a table.

Table 2

Convergent and Discriminant Validity of Depression Scale

Variable	Correlation
Convergent Validity	
Self-Esteem	.44*
Hopelessness	.51**
Discriminant Validity	
Social Desirability	.11
Anxiety	.22

*p < .05; **p < .01.