

An Introduction to APA Style

A Student Guide for the 7th edition of the
APA Publication Manual

An Introduction to Writing in APA Style

This document provides an introduction to writing in American Psychological Association (APA) style. All of the information in this document is contained within the **seventh edition** of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. If you need more details, please refer to the APA manual available in the: Douglas College Library, Psychology Lab, and Learning Centre.

Student papers for psychology courses usually fall into 2 categories: a literature review or an empirical study.

Literature Review

A literature review, also referred to as a “narrative literature review”, provides a narrative summary or evaluation of the findings or theories of an area of research. A thorough, if not exhaustive, search of published work (qualitative, quantitative, mixed-model research) is conducted for a given topic within a defined time frame. The resulting list of research articles are carefully examined to find trends, similarities, differences, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies. The resulting literature review synthesises this information resulting in an overview of past research with suggestions for future research. In sum, the narrative literature review should:

- define and clarify the problem;
- summarise previous research by identifying trends, similarities, differences, contradictions, gaps, and inconsistencies; and
- suggest directions for future research.

The organisational structure of a narrative literature review is at the author’s discretion. The paper may be organised based on similarities in concepts, research methodology, outcomes, theoretical perspectives, etc., with subsections detailing specifics when necessary. A literature review consists of, at minimum:

- title page
- introduction
- body — divided into sections and/or subsections
- conclusion
- references list

Empirical Study

An empirical study is a report of original research in which an hypothesis is tested; data is collected; and the results are presented and evaluated. An empirical study consists of, at minimum:

- title page
- abstract
- introduction
- method
- results
- discussion
- references

Formatting for a literature review and empirical study follows the same conventions. Because the sections within an empirical study are more prescriptive, this document focuses on writing an empirical study.

This document is divided into three sections:

1. Writing an APA style Empirical Study

The first section provides a description of each of the major sections of an APA style empirical study.

2. Citations and References

The second section provides information on how to document your work: it tells you how to cite and reference the research articles that you will include in your paper. Read this section before gathering library materials (e.g., journal articles and books) and taking notes so you know what type of information to record (e.g., author's name, date of publication, name of journal, DOI). Also, carefully read the subsection on plagiarism.

3. Sample APA style Empirical Study

The third section provides an example of an APA style empirical study.

Formatting

General Guidelines

- Leave 2.54 cm (1") margins at the top, bottom, left and right sides of all the pages of the paper.
- Double space all lines of text including the title page and the reference section.
- Bold section headings and sub-headings (see "Level of Headings" on page 4).
- Insert one space after all punctuation; in other words, one space follows a period at the end of a sentence, a comma, a semi-colon, a colon, and after each initial in the author's name.
- Use an Oxford comma (serial comma) to separate items in a list including the last item. For example, "The stimuli colours were blue, green, orange, purple, and red."
- Use left justification only; leave the right edge of the text ragged.
- Choose **one** of the following fonts. Once a font is chosen, it must be used throughout the paper including page numbers; the only exception is for figures and tables (see "Results" on page 8 for additional information).
 - Arial 11 pt.
 - Calibri 11 pt.
 - Georgia 11 pt.
 - Lucida Sans Unicode 10 pt.
 - Times New Roman 12 pt.
- Begin page numbering on the title page. Page numbers appear on the upper-right-hand corner of each page of the document. Use the "page number" function on your word processing program; do **not** manually type-in the page numbers.
- Indent paragraphs 5-7 spaces (1.27cm or ½"); do not indent the first line of the "Abstract".
- When reporting a numerical value, present the numerical value as digits if the value is greater than or equal to 10. If the numerical value is less than 10, type the value as a word, unless it contains a decimal. **Exception:** Do not begin a sentence with a digit, even if it is greater than or equal to 10.
- Submit a single-sided copy of your paper for grading.
- Staple the paper once in the upper left-hand corner. Do not use folders or duo-tangs.
- Keep a back-up copy of your paper.

Comments on Writing Style

- You should strive to present your ideas clearly and logically. Be precise in your choice of words. Get to the point, this is a scientific paper and therefore wordiness is frowned upon.
- Do not use colloquialisms (informal language): this is a formal paper.
- Refrain from making over-generalisations. For example, "Since the dawn of time, man has been intrigued about . . ."
- Academic papers are generally written in the third person. Although the use of personal pronouns are acceptable (e.g., we, our, I, my), they should be used judiciously: this is, after all, a formal paper. For example, both "The hypothesis for the experiment was . . ." (third person) and "Our hypothesis for the experiment was . . ." (first person), would be acceptable whereas "In my opinion, . . ." would be unacceptable because of the shift in tone from formal to informal.
- The active voice is preferable to the passive voice. For example, it is preferable to say "Participants completed a questionnaire" (active voice) rather than "Participants were given a questionnaire" (passive voice).

Level of Headings

Use different heading levels to divide the body of the paper into sections and subsections. Format the heading levels according to APA Style; see table below. Generally, speaking there should be at minimum Level 1 headings with increasing levels dependent on the content of a section.

Level	Format
1	Centred, Bold, Title Case Heading
2	Flush left, Bold, Title Case Heading
3	<i>Flush left, Bold, Italics, Title Case Heading</i>
4	Indent, Bold, Title Case Heading, ending with a period. Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.
5	<i>Indent, Bold, Italics, Title Case Heading, ending with a period.</i> Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.

Title Page

(See p. 1 of the Sample Paper)

The title page is comprised of the following elements:

- title
- author's name(s)
- affiliation
- course name
- instructor's name
- due date

Title

The title summarises the main topic of the paper and mentions the variables considered in the study (e.g., The Effectiveness of Excuse-Validation in Reducing Negative Affect). Remove unnecessary phrases such as "A Study of . . .".

Typing

The title is centred, bolded, and typed-in upper and lower case. The title appears in the top one-third of the page.

Author's Name

Each author's name should be included on the title page.

Typing

The author's first and last name is centred and **quadruple** spaced below the title. If there is more than one author, then list the names in alphabetical order; for example, Melanie Anderson, Jaspreet Brar, Jason Huang, etc. Each author's name should be centred, doubled spaced, and on a separate line below the previous author's name.

NOTE: If your student number is required, type this after your name, on the same line.

Affiliation

The affiliation is the name of the department and institution at which the study or experiment was conducted.

Typing

The affiliation is centred, typed-in upper and lower case, and is double spaced below the author(s) name. The department name is typed first followed by a comma, then the name of the institution. All this information is presented on one line. For example, "Psychology Department, Douglas College".

Course Name

The course name includes the abbreviated name, section, and full name of the course for which the paper is to be submitted.

Typing

The course name is centred, typed-in upper and lower case, and is double spaced below the affiliation. The abbreviated course name, number, and section is first, followed by a colon with the full name of the course typed after the colon. For example, "Psyc 1100 (001): An Introduction to Psychology I".

Instructor's name

The name of the instructor to whom the paper is to be submitted.

Typing

The instructor's name is centred, typed-in upper and lower case, and is double spaced below the course name. Your instructor's name may take any of the following forms: "Dr. Nicole Vittoz"; "Dr. N. Vittoz"; "Nicole Vittoz, PhD"; or "N. Vittoz, PhD". Ask your instructor which form they prefer.

Due date

Include the due date for the paper. Use Canadian date format: day month year.

Typing

The due date is centred, typed-in upper and lower case, and is double spaced below the instructor's name. The day is typed using two digits; the name of the month is typed in full; and the year is typed using all 4 digits. For example, "01 June 2020".

Abstract

(See p. 2 of the Sample Paper)

The “Abstract” is a summary of the entire paper; do not include material that is not presented in the paper. The “Abstract” is comprised of the following:

- the purpose of the research
- the variables being investigated
- a description of the participants
- a description of the method including materials, data gathering procedures, names of tests, etc.
- a description of your findings; do NOT include numerical results
- a conclusion, implication, or application of the research findings

The “Abstract” is written in past tense. Report numerical values (e.g., number of participants) as digits unless the numerical value begins a sentence, in which case, report the numerical value as a word. The “Abstract” is no more than 250 words.

Typing

The abstract appears on the second page of the paper. The word "Abstract" is centred, bolded, and typed-in upper and lower case. Do NOT indent the first line of the abstract.

Introduction

(See pp. 3-5 of the Sample Paper)

This section introduces the topic being studied, reviews previous research, and clearly states the hypothesis for the study.

Academic journal articles are used to review previous research; this is referred to as a literature review. The literature review is NOT a passive summary of each academic journal article, but an active, critical discussion of past research. The active discussion involves integrating and synthesising the main research trends as well as noting limitations of past research. Because you are borrowing ideas from previous research, this section will be filled with citations (see pp. 16-18 for examples of APA style citations). In addition, APA style rarely uses direct quotes; paraphrasing (putting it into your own words), with proper citations, is preferred. The literature review should serve as a rationale for the present study, and the hypothesis becomes a logical extension of the literature review. Past tense is used for the literature review.

Following the literature review, the variables used in the present study are defined and the rationale for the hypothesis is developed. The hypothesis is then stated and predictions are made. At the end of the introduction, the reader should have a clear idea of what was expected to happen in the study and the reasons for the predictions. It is important to emphasise that the “Introduction” section moves from the general (i.e., the general topic, why it is important, theory, previous research findings) to the specific (i.e., the present study).

Typing

The “Introduction” section begins on the third page of the paper. The title of the paper is centred, bolded, and typed-in upper and lower case instead of the word "Introduction". The “Introduction” is approximately two to three pages in length. Each new paragraph should be indented 5-7 spaces (1.27cm or ½”).

Method

(See pp. 5-6 of the Sample Paper)

The “Method” section describes how the study was conducted, and provides enough information to facilitate replication. The “Method” section is usually divided into, at minimum, two subsections: (1) “Participants”, and (2) “Procedure”.

Typing

The word "Method" is centred, bolded, typed-in upper and lower case, and immediately follows the last sentence of the “Introduction” section.

Participants

The “Participants” subsection describes the individuals who participated in the study. Include information about the number of participants, their sex, gender identity, and average age. Describe how and from where participants were selected, and whether there were any incentives to participate (for example, course credit). Provide any other defining characteristics, but do not list details of individual participants. A clear description of the participants enables the reader to understand for whom the results may be generalised.

Typing

The word "Participants" is left justified, bolded, and typed-in upper and lower case. This subsection is written in past tense. The first line of this subsection is indented 5-7 spaces (1.27cm or ½”). When reporting the number of participants, present the number as digits if the numerical value is greater than or equal to 10. If the number of participants is less than 10, type the numerical value as a word.

Procedure

The “Procedure” subsection provides a description of: the equipment and/or tests that were used; the research design; and a summary of the steps followed during data collection. Provide enough information to enable replication.

When describing standard materials (e.g., a stop-watch) a detailed description is not required. If a test was used, cite the test name and author(s) in APA style and include the source of the test in the “References” list. If the test (or data recording form) has instructions typed on the test form, describe the instructions; do not provide verbatim instructions. If the test uses a rating scale, include a description of the rating scale and how total scores are produced. When describing a test that uses a rating scale, type the rating scale as digits and the anchors for the scale should be italicised and in parentheses. For example, the participants rated their responses from 1 (*most important*) to 5 (*least important*).

The description of the procedure should be in chronological order. Provide enough detail to enable the reader to understand how the data was collected. This description should include: how participants were separated into groups or conditions; where the testing took place; any verbal instructions given to each group or condition; the order of presentation of testing material; a description of the testing materials; any experimental manipulations; how the dependent variable(s) were measured; and any variables that were held constant.

Typing

The word "Procedure" is left justified, bolded, typed-in upper and lower case, and immediately follows the last sentence of the “Participants” subsection. This subsection is written in past tense. The first line of this subsection and subsequent paragraphs are indented 5-7 spaces (1.27cm or ½”).

Results

(See pp. 7-8 of the Sample Paper)

The main purpose of the “Results” section is to convey the numerical data obtained. Begin with a reiteration of the hypothesis. Describe the statistic(s) that will be used to evaluate the results. Include all relevant data even those that may contradict the hypothesis. If data exclusion occurred (e.g., incomplete responses) indicate the number that was excluded along with the rationale for exclusion; and state whether there were any demographic differences between excluded and included responses. Follow this with a written description of the results for each group or condition. Once all results have been reported, clearly state whether the results support the hypothesis; do not draw any conclusions.

Report the mean (*M*), standard deviation (*SD*) for each group or condition and, when appropriate, the correlation coefficient (*r*); do NOT include the participants' individual scores. Raw data, if requested by your instructor, is included in the “Appendix” section (see the “Appendix” sub-section of this document for appropriate APA style). Numerical results (*M*, *SD*, *r*) are reported as digits. Report all results in sentence format. If a figure or table (see below for a description of an APA style figure or table) is included in this section, refer to the figure or table and state its relevance in the text of this section. The values you choose to report in this section should justify any conclusions you draw in the “Discussion” section.

NOTE: this section is written as a coherent paragraph(s).

Typing

The word "Results" is centred, bolded, typed-in upper and lower case, and appears immediately after the last sentence of the “Procedure” subsection. This section is written in past tense and should be approximately one-half to one page long including a table or figure. The first line of this section and subsequent paragraphs are indented 5-7 spaces (1.27cm or ½”).

Tables (see p. 8 of the Sample Paper)

Your instructor may require a table as part of the “Results” section. Tables are usually included if the results contain several sets of numbers that would be difficult to understand in sentence format. For example, if the results consisted of several means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*), reporting these values as a list of digits would detract from the readability and comprehension of the overall results. A table, therefore, serves as an organised presentation of the results. Values that are to be compared should be next to each other. For example, means (*M*) should be in one column, standard deviation (*SD*) should be in an adjacent column. Provide a brief summary of the table in the text of the “Results” section; highlighting the relevant comparisons.

Typing

Number each table with an Arabic numeral. The word "Table" and its corresponding number is left justified, bolded, and typed-in upper and lower case. The title for the table appears below the table number and is left justified, italicised, typed-in upper and lower case with the first letter of each main word in upper case. The heading for each column should be clear and concise; in addition, the heading should not be wider than the longest column entry. A horizontal line divides: the title from the headings; the headings from the numerical values; and the last row of the table from the rest of the text. Do **not** use vertical lines to separate each column. Line spacing may deviate from the required double-spacing for the rest of the paper. The table may be single-spaced, one-and-a-half spaced, or double-spaced. Choose spacing that optimises the readability of the data. Do not vary the line spacing within a table: keep the line spacing consistent within a table.

Figures (see p. 7 of the Sample Paper)

“Figures” are graphs, charts, maps, drawings, photographs, or diagrams. Your instructor may require a graph (referred to as a “figure”) of your results. The graph should provide a visual representation of the over-all results. Provide a brief description of the graph in the text of the “Results” section. Unless otherwise specified, the graph should be computer generated.

Typing

Number each figure with an Arabic numeral. The word "Figure" and its corresponding number is left justified, bolded, and typed-in upper and lower case. The title for the figure appears below the figure number and is left justified, italicised, and typed-in upper and lower case with the first letter of each main word in upper case. Label each axis indicating the quantity being measured and the units used. Use abbreviations — “no.” instead of “number” — or symbols —

“%” instead of “percentage” — in the axis label. Each label is parallel to its axis; for example, the label for the ordinate/vertical axis should be printed vertically whereas the label for the abscissa/horizontal axis is printed horizontally. Provide the unit of measure in brackets after the label. Always include a zero point. Use a sans serif font, for example, Arial, Calibri, or Lucida Sans Unicode for the labels and numbers of the ordinate and abscissa. The font size should be no larger than 14 pt and no smaller than 8 pt; the point size should not vary more than 4 pt. For example, if 8 pt is used for the ordinate then the font size cannot be greater than 12 pt for the abscissa. Axis labels are bolded. When choosing a grid scale, take into consideration the range of both axes. The graph should be two dimensional NOT three dimensional. Unless printing from a colour printer, limit the colours for the bars to black and white: visually discriminating between different levels of shading can be difficult. If your graph includes a legend, then the legend should be centred, above the graph, with a box around it.

Discussion

(See pp. 8-10 of the Sample Paper)

In the “Discussion” section, the results are examined, interpreted, and evaluated. Inferences may be drawn. The “Discussion” moves from the specific (e.g., your results described in words) to the general (e.g., why the results are theoretically important and how they relate to other findings in psychology).

The “Discussion” section usually opens by clearly stating whether the hypothesis was supported by the results. The results of the study are then evaluated against previous research.

Discuss the similarities and differences between your results and past research results; limit your comments to those journal articles used in your literature review (include citations). Follow-up with a discussion of the limitations and strengths of your study, and generalisability of results. Methodological problems should be discussed with the expectation of suggestions to improve the study.

End the “Discussion” with a comment about the implications of the study: how does the study contribute to your understanding of the phenomenon being investigated; are there real-world applications; are there unanswered questions; if “yes”, then provide suggestions for future research; and finally, provide an overall general conclusion.

Do NOT introduce new journal articles in this section. Do NOT repeat points already made or refer back to the introduction section; each new comment should help bolster your conclusions. If the results do not support the hypothesis, provide a plausible explanation; this should NOT be a list of excuses.

Typing

The word “Discussion” is centred, bolded, typed-in upper and lower case, and immediately follows the “Results” section. This section is written in present tense. The “Discussion” is approximately 2-3 pages in length. The first line of this section and subsequent paragraphs are indented 5-7 spaces (1.27cm or ½”).

References

(See p. 11 of the Sample Paper)

The “References” section is a list of cited works in an APA paper. It appears as a separate page at the end of the paper. Entries are listed in alphabetical order by the first author’s surname, or title if there is no author. Do not list articles that were not cited in your report, but include all articles that were cited. For more information on how to complete a references list, please refer to pp. 18-25 of this document.

Appendix

(See pp. 12-13 of the Sample Paper)

This section is optional; check with your instructor.

The “Appendix” contains information that is essential for the reader, but would be distracting in the body of the paper. For example, a long and detailed description of a complex piece of equipment may be necessary for the replication of a study but detracts from the readability of the “Method” section. This description would then be placed in an appendix and referred to in the body of the paper. As mentioned in the “Results” section, your instructor may want you to include the participants' scores. The participants' scores would be included in the “Appendix”. To draw the reader's attention to the participants' scores refer to them in the “Results” section of the paper. Signed consent forms, if required by your instructor, should also be included as part of the “Appendix”.

Typing

The “Appendix” follows the “References” list on a new page. The word "Appendix" is centred, bolded, typed-in upper and lower case, with an identifying letter typed-in upper case. Double-spaced beneath the “Appendix” label is the “Appendix” title. The “Appendix” title is also centred, bolded, and typed-in upper and lower case. The title should succinctly describe the content of the appendix. If there is more than one appendix, then type each appendix on a separate page with the corresponding appendix letter and title. The order of appearance is based on the order in which the items are mentioned in the paper; for example, “Appendix A” materials would have been mentioned prior to “Appendix B” materials, etc. If there is only one appendix, then an identifying letter is not necessary.

Citations and References

Empirical research is based on previous research. When formulating an hypothesis for a new study, the researcher pursues a line of inquiry that is an extension of previous published work. To acknowledge the influence of previous published work, authors routinely cite sources in their “Introduction” and “Discussion” sections of their empirical report. In the case of narrative literature reviews, cited sources would be used throughout the paper: a literature review without extensive citations would be inadequate because the purpose of a literature review is to provide narrative summary of an area of research.

APA follows particular conventions when citing published work:

- the citations are in text rather than as footnotes;
- work cited is primarily paraphrased rather than quoted;
- primary sources are preferred over secondary sources; and
- all cited work must be included with a full reference in the “References” section.

A “full reference” means providing enough information so that the reader is able to retrieve the original source. To facilitate this, APA follows particular conventions for references; broadly, these elements are provided for all references:

- the author(s);
- the date of publication;
- the title of the work;
- title of source (journal, book, newspaper, magazine, etc.); and
- DOIs or URLs when applicable.

APA has specific conventions based on the source of the information; several examples will follow.

Appropriately citing sources and including them in your “References” section is a professional courtesy: it is respectfully acknowledging those who have contributed ideas for your research and, consequently, your paper. Failure to acknowledge your sources or to cite your sources properly is considered academic dishonesty and in particular plagiarism. Before we continue with the discussion of APA style citations and references, it is important that you are familiar with what the college considers academic integrity and the consequences if one engages in academic dishonesty.

Below are selected excerpts from the Douglas College “Academic Integrity Policy”. To view the entire document go to: <https://www.douglascollege.ca/sites/default/files/docs/finance-dates-and-deadlines/Academic%20Integrity%20Policy%20w%20Flowchart.pdf>

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity: the fundamental ethics of scholarship and knowledge creation and transmission, including the principles of honesty, respect for truth and knowledge, fairness and responsibility.

Academic Dishonesty: any act that breaches one or more of the principles of academic integrity identified in the definition, above, or the policy statement, below. Acts of academic dishonesty may include but are not limited to the following types:

- **Misuse or misrepresentation of sources:** presenting source material in such a way as to distort its original purpose or implication(s); misattributing words, ideas, etc. to someone other than the original source; massaging or manipulating research findings or data; suppressing aspects of findings or data in order to present conclusions in a light other than the research, taken as a whole, would support.
- **Plagiarism:** presenting or submitting as one’s own work the work, research, words, ideas, artistic imagery, arguments, calculations, illustrations or diagrams of another person or persons without explicit or accurate citation or credit; this includes submission of purchased material as well as material in which the student has permitted someone else (a

fellow student, tutor, mentor or teaching assistant, friend, etc.) to contribute unacknowledged.

- **Self-plagiarism:** submitting one's own work for credit in more than one course without the permission of the instructors, or re-submitting work, in whole or in part, for which credit has already been granted.

PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS OF THE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

It is recognized that acts of academic dishonesty or misconduct will vary in degree of seriousness. This policy allows for a range of penalties and encourages Responsible Administrators to consider the context and severity of each confirmed policy breach, as well as any recommendation made by the faculty member bringing the instance forward. It is understood that penalties with the most serious of consequences, such as expulsion or the recording of a grade of "FD" (fail, academic dishonesty) or "NMD" (non-mastery, academic dishonesty) on a transcript, will be reserved for egregious breaches of academic integrity and/or for repeat violations of a significant nature.

First and Second Offense

Typical penalties for first and second offenses may include (but are not limited to) one or more of the following:

- completion of a replacement assignment / test (the same or a substitute)
- a reduction in the grade earned for the assignment / test (e.g., a 50% reduction)
- a grade of zero on the assignment / test, which may or may not lead to failure in the course
- failure of the course and a notation on the transcript of "FD"
- non-mastery of the course and notation on the transcript of "NMD"
- suspension of the student, effective immediately and for a minimum of one additional semester
- a recommendation to the President to expel the student from Douglas College

Third Offense

For a third offense, the Responsible Administrator will recommend to the President that the student be expelled from Douglas College.

Note: Where a student is expelled from Douglas College for reasons of academic dishonesty, a notation such as "Expelled for reason of academic dishonesty, effective (date or date range)" will be placed on the student's permanent file and transcript.

Paraphrasing

APA style writing rarely includes direct quotes; paraphrasing is more common. Paraphrasing requires the internalisation of ideas, concepts, and theories; and then, in your own words, summarising and integrating them to provide a unique perspective of past research. Replacing a few words, rearranging the words, and/or splicing sentences together from a source is NOT paraphrasing – this would be considered plagiarism because you are using the source's words, but claiming them as your own. Although the ideas, concepts and/or theories are now in your own words, you still need to acknowledge the source hence the use of citations: see pages 16-18 for examples of APA citations.

Quotations

It is better to paraphrase than to quote. Any material of three or more words taken from another source is a quote. When quoting, ensure that the words, punctuation, and grammar is an exact replica of the original source. In addition to the author(s) surname(s) and year of publication, the page number for the quotation MUST be included. When quoting from a source that does not provide page numbers use paragraph numbers (type "para." and the number) or, if the paper is divided into sections, provide the section and the paragraph number (type "para." and the number) within that section.

If the quotation is short (≤ 40 words) insert the quotation as part of the sentence. Remember to enclose the quote within quotation marks.

Example of a short (≤ 40 words) quotation with page number:

Kahneman (2011) states “... that when people believe a conclusion is true, they are also very likely to believe arguments that appear to support it, even when these arguments are unsound” (p. 45).

OR

“... when people believe a conclusion is true, they are also very likely to believe arguments that appear to support it, even when these arguments are unsound (Kahneman, 2011, p. 45).

Citations in “References” list:

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Doubleday Canada.

If the quote is greater than 40 words type the quote as a separate block. The block quote is double spaced, indented 5-7 spaces, (1.27cm or $\frac{1}{2}$ "), and is NOT surrounded by quotation marks.

Example of a long (> 40 words) quotation with page number:

Kahneman (2011) states that:

Sunstein came to believe that biased reactions to risks are an important source of erratic and misplaced priorities in public policy. Lawmakers and regulators may be overly responsive to the irrational concerns of citizens, both because of political sensitivity and because they are prone to the same cognitive biases as other citizens (p. 142).

OR

Sunstein came to believe that biased reactions to risks are an important source of erratic and misplaced priorities in public policy. Lawmakers and regulators may be overly responsive to the irrational concerns of citizens, both because of political sensitivity and because they are prone to the same cognitive biases as other citizens (Kahneman, 2011, p. 142).

Citations in “References” list:

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Doubleday Canada.

If the source document does not provide page numbers — common with e-textbooks — include the section or heading name and paragraph number from which the quote was taken.

Example of a short (\leq 40 words) quotation without a page number:

In describing how sensory thresholds are established, Schacter et al. (2017) state that “[p]sychophysicists begin the measurement process with a single sensory signal to determine precisely how much physical energy is required for an observer to become aware of the sensation” (Measuring Thresholds section, para. 1).

OR

To establish a sensory threshold “[p]sychophysicists begin the measurement process with a single sensory signal to determine precisely how much physical energy is required for an observer to become aware of the sensation” (Schacter et al., 2017, Measuring Thresholds section, para. 1).

Citations in “References” list

Schacter, D., Gilbert, D., Nock, M., Johnsrude, I., & Wegner, D. (2017). *Psychology* (Canadian 4th ed.). Worth Publishers MacMillan Learning.

Example of a long ($>$ 40 words) quotation without a page number:

Jensen Arnett and Arnett Jensen (2019) defines heritability as:

... an estimate of the extent to which genes are responsible for differences among persons within a specific population. The value of the heritability estimate ranges from 0 to 1.00. If the heritability estimate is 0.70, for example, this means that genetic and environmental factors are estimated to contribute 70% and 30 % to a trait, respectively. (Principles of Behavior Genetics section, para. 2)

OR

Heritability is:

... an estimate of the extent to which genes are responsible for differences among persons within a specific population. The value of the heritability estimate ranges from 0 to 1.00. If the heritability estimate is 0.70, for example, this means that genetic and environmental factors are estimated to contribute 70% and 30 % to a trait, respectively. (Jensen Arnett & Arnett Jensen, 2019, Principles of Behavior Genetics section, para. 2)

Citations in “References” List:

Jensen Arnett, J., & Arnett Jensen, L. (2019). *Human Development: A cultural approach* (3rd ed.). Pearson.

Primary versus Secondary Source

A primary source refers to information, ideas, or research findings obtained from reading the original research article whereas secondary sources refers to information, ideas, or research findings that were obtained from a source other than the original research article; a secondary source is analogous to second-hand information. Primary sources are preferred over secondary sources because you are obtaining first-hand information from the original author(s). If you should come across information that you find intriguing and would like to include in your paper: look-up the cited work in the paper's "References" list; obtain the original research article; read it; paraphrase the idea(s) from the original source; and cite the original author(s) in your paper.

If your instructor allows you to cite material from your textbook without having to obtain the original source of the information, then: cite the author(s) of the original idea along with the year of publication; followed by the phrase "as cited in"; and then the secondary source and year of publication. See examples below.

Example of a secondary source citation:

Paraphrased citation: Observational learning not only occurs with humans, but also occurs across species. For example, pigeons given the opportunity to watch other pigeons pecking a feeder or pressing a lever for food mimicked the behaviour when placed in the same apparatus (Zental et al., 1996, as cited in Schacter et al., 2017).

Narrative citation: Observational learning not only occurs with humans, but it also occurs across species. For example, Zental et al. (1996, as cited in Schacter et al., 2017) found that pigeons who had observed other pigeons pecking a feeder or pressing a lever to obtain food tended to emit the observed behaviour when placed in the same apparatus.

NOTE: Only include the secondary source in your "References" list.

Citation in "References" list:

Schacter, D., Gilbert, D., Nock, M., Johnsrude, I., & Wegner, D. (2017). *Psychology* (Canadian 4th ed.). Worth Publishers MacMillan Learning.

Reference Citations in Text

The surname(s) of the author(s) and the date of publication are inserted directly into the text at the point where the author's work is mentioned. The complete citation is included in the "References" list at the end of the paper. Put parentheses around the author, the date, or both if they do not form a normal part of the sentence.

To ensure your sentence is grammatically correct, the sentence should be complete without the information contained within the parentheses.

1. One Author

Insert the author's last name and the date of publication into the text.

Example: In 2006, Brown investigated shame resilience theory . . .

or Brown's (2006) investigation of shame resilience theory . . .

or Shame resilience theory (Brown, 2006) . . .

Citations in "References" list

Brown, B. (2006). Shame resilience theory: A grounded theory study on women and shame. *Families in Society, 87*(1), 43-52. <https://doi.org/10.1606/1044-3894.3483>

2. Two Authors

When there are two authors always cite both surnames.

Parenthetical citation: In an earlier study (Tooby & Cosmides, 2006) . . .

Narrative citation: An earlier study by Tooby and Cosmides (2006)

Citations in "References" list

Tooby, J., & Cosmides, L. (2006). The evolved architecture of hazard management: Risk detection reasoning and the motivational computation of threat magnitudes. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 29*(6), 631-633. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X06009538>

3. More than Two Authors

When there are more than two authors, cite the first author's surname followed with "et al." (which is Latin for "and others").

NOTE: that "et" is not followed by a period, but "al" is.

Parenthetical citation: The results were supported by a later discovery (Talhelm et al., 2015) that showed . . .

Narrative citation: Talhelm et al. (2015) discovered . . .

Citations in "References" list:

Talhelm, T., Haidt, J., Oishi, S., Zhang, X., Miao, F. F., & Chen, S. (2015). Liberals think more analytically (more 'WEIRD') than conservatives. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 41*(2), 250-267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167214563672>

4. Same first author and year of publication

Include as many subsequent author's surnames as necessary to clearly identify the source followed by a comma, then "et al." and the year of publication. In this case alphabetise, the citations based on the second author's surname.

Parenthetical citation: (Garcia, de Freitas, et al., 2013; Garcia, Hirotsu, et al., 2013)

Narrative citation: Garcia, de Freitas, et al. (2013) and Garcia, Hirotsu, et al. (2013)

Citations in "References" list:

Garcia, V. A., de Freitas, B. S., Busato, S. B., Portal, B. C. D., Piazza, F. C., & Schröder, N. (2013). Differential effects of modafinil on memory of naïve and memory-impaired rats. *Neuropharmacology*, 75, 304-311. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuropharm.2013.07.038>

Garcia, V. A., Hirotsu, C., Matos, G., Alvarenga, T., Pires, G. N., Kapczinski, F., Schröder, N., Tufik, S., & Andersen, M. L. (2013). Modafinil ameliorates cognitive deficits induced by maternal separation and sleep deprivation. *Behavioural Brain Research*, 253, 274-279. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbr.2013.07.029>

Exception: if the final author's surname is the only one that differs between the two sources, then cite all author's surnames: "et al." means "and others" (plural) which doesn't make grammatical sense when there is only one additional author (singular).

Parenthetical citation: (Bodenhausen, Kramer, & Süsser, 1994; Bodenhausen, Sheppard, & Kramer, 1994)

Narrative citation: Bodenhausen, Kramer and Süsser (1994) and Bodenhausen, Sheppard, and Kramer (1994)

Citations in "References" list:

Bodenhausen, G. V., Kramer, G. P., & Süsser, K. (1994). Happiness and stereotypic thinking in social judgment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(4), 621-632. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.66.4.621>

Bodenhausen, G. V., Sheppard, L. A., & Kramer, G. P. (1994). Negative affect and social judgment: The differential impact of anger and sadness. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 24(1), 45-62. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420240104>

5. Same surname, different first name, same publication year

In this case, the second initial was used to alphabetise the entries because the first author of each article share both the same surname and first initial.

Paraphrased citation: (L. D. Smith, Peck, & McGovern, 2002; L. F. Smith & Smith, 2002)

Narrative citation: L. D. Smith, Peck, and McGovern (2002) and L. F. Smith and Smith (2002)

Citations in “References” list:

Smith, L. D., Peck, P. L., & McGovern, R. J. (2002). Comparison of medical students, medical school faculty, primary care physicians, and the general population on the attitudes toward psychological help-seeking. *Psychological Reports, 91*(3, Pt2), 1268-1272. <https://doi.org/10.2466/PRO.91.8.1268-1272>

Smith, L. F., & Smith, J. K. (2002). Relation of test-specific motivation and anxiety to test performance. *Psychological Reports, 91*(3, Pt1), 1011-1021. <https://doi.org/10.2466/PRO.91.7.1011-1021>

6. Same author with multiple publications within a year

To disambiguate sources from the same author who has more than one publication within a calendar year, assign a letter — starting with “a” — to each source. Letter assignment is based on the date of publication and will be clarified within the “References” list. Use the volume number, or issue number, if the work is published in the same journal or look at publication date (month) to determine chronological order.

Paraphrased citation: (Godwin-Jones, R., 2018a; Godwin-Jones, 2018b)

Narrative citation: Godwin-Jones (2018a) and Godwin-Jones (2018b)

Citations in “References” list:

Godwin-Jones, R. (2018a). Second language writing online: An update. *Language Learning & Technology, 22*(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10125/44574>

Godwin-Jones, R. (2018b). Chasing the butterfly effect: Informal language learning online as a complex system. *Language Learning & Technology, 22*(2), 8-27. <https://doi.org/10125/44643>

References List

The purpose of a “References” list is to enable the reader to retrieve the sources for the document. As a general rule, references are alphabetised according to the first author’s surname, with additional rules for the following circumstances:

- **2 or more references with the same first author:** alphabetise based on the subsequent author’s surname.
- **2 or more references from the same author(s), but a different publication year:** list the sources in chronological order.
- **2 or more references with identical author(s) and publication year:** insert a lowercase letter – a, b, c, etc., – at the end of the publication year, but before the parentheses to uniquely identify each source. **NOTE:** the lettered publication year will be used when citing the article in the paper.
- **20 authors or less:** list all authors’ surnames.
- **21 or more authors:** list the first 19 authors’ surnames, followed by an ellipsis (. . .), then insert the last author’s surname
- **Use DOIs or URLs when available.** If the cited work does not include a DOI, do the following:
 - go to <http://library.douglascollege.ca>
 - select “Research Guides” → “Cite Your Sources” → “DOI Form”.
 - Enter the full reference for the item in the “Enter text in the box below:”
 - Select “Submit” → a DOI, if available, will appear.

Typing

The word "References" is centred, bolded, typed-in upper and lower case, and appears on a separate page. Each new entry is flush left, with the subsequent line of the entry indented 5-7 spaces (1.27cm or ½”), referred to as a hanging indent. The titles of books, journals and volume numbers are italicised. **NOTE:** the comma after the journal title is not italicised.

Below and on the subsequent pages are examples of how to reference various sources.

Periodicals

Periodicals are journals, magazines and newspapers. The basic elements are:

- author(s)
- date of publication
- title of the work
- source
- DOI or URL

NOTE: format DOIs or URLs as “active” hyperlinks when submitting an e-copy of your paper, but format the hyperlinks as “inactive” when submitting a hard copy of your paper. Because this is an e-copy of the student manual, all DOIs and URLs are formatted as “active”.

1. Journal

Krebs, D. L., & Denton, K. (2006). Explanatory limitations of cognitive-developmental approaches to morality.

Psychological Review, 113(3), 672-675. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.113.3.672>

Parentetical citation: (Krebs & Denton, 2006)

Narrative citation: Krebs and Denton (2006)

2. Journal without volume number, issue number, or page numbers.

Ionita, G., & Fitzpatrick, M. (2020). Barriers and facilitators to the use of progress-monitoring measures in psychotherapy. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000205>

Parenthetical citation: (Ionita & Fitzpatrick, 2020)

Narrative citation: Ionita and Fitzpatrick (2020)

3. Journal with 20 authors or less

Include all authors' surnames when there are 20 or fewer authors. Use an ampersand (&) between the second-to-last and last author's surname.

Beyers-Heinlein, K., Bergman, C., Davies, C., Frank, M. C., Hamlin, J. K., Kline, M., Kominsky, J. F., Kosie, J. E., Lew-Williams, C., Liu, L., Mastroberardino, M., Singh, L., Waddell, C. P. G., Zettersten, M., & Soderstrom, M. (2020). Building a collaborative psychological science: Lessons learned from ManyBabies 1. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie canadienne*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000216>

Parenthetical citation: (Beyers-Heinlein et al., 2020)

Narrative citation: Beyers-Heinlein et al. (2020)

4. Journal with 21 or more authors

Include the first 19 authors' surnames followed by an ellipsis (. . .) but no ampersand (&) and then the final author's surname.

Nichols, H. B., Schoemaker, M. J., Cai, J., Xu, J., Wright, L. B., Brook, M. N., Jones, M. E., Adami, H.-O., Baglietto, L., Bertrand, K. A., Blott, W. J., Boutron-Ruault, M.-C., Dorransoro, M., Dossus, L., Eliassen, A. H., Giles, G. G., Gram, I. T., Hankinsen, S. E., Hoffman-Bolton, J., . . . Sandler, D. P. (2019). Breast cancer risk after recent childbirth: A pooled analysis of 15 prospective studies. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *170*(1), 22-30. <https://doi.org/10.7326/M18-1323>

Parenthetical citation: (Nichols et al., 2019)

Narrative citation: Nichols et al. (2019)

5. Article from the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews

Abraha, I., Rimland, J. M., Lozano-Montoya, I., Dell'Aquila, G., Véllez-Díaz-Pallarés, M., Trotta, F. M., Cruz-Jentoft, A. J., & Cherubini, A. (2020). Simulated presence therapy for dementia. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD011882.pub3>

Paranthetical citation: (Abraha et al., 2020)

Narrative citation: Abraha et al. (2020)

6. Magazine article

Hamblin, J. (2020, May 22). Is everyone depressed? *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/05/depression-coronavirus/611986/>

Paranthetical citation: (Hamblin, 2020)

Narrative citation: Hamblin (2020)

Newspaper

7. Newspaper article

Gaiimo, C. (2020, June 26). How bees avoid bumping into nature's obstacle course. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/science/bees-obstacles-collisions.html>

Paranthetical citation: (Gaiimo, 2020)

Narrative citation: Gaiimo (2020)

Books

A reference for a book requires the following elements:

- author, group author, or editor(s)
- Date
- Title
- Publisher information
- DOI or URL when available

NOTE: Place of publication is not required.

8. Authored book without DOI

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Doubleday Canada.

Paranthetical citation: (Kahneman, 2011)

Narrative citation: Kahneman (2011)

9. Authored book with DOI

Sternberg, R. (2020). *Perspectives on hate: How it originates, develops, manifests, and spreads*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000180-000>

Paraphrased citation: (Sternberg, 2020)

Narrative citation: Sternberg (2020)

10. Edited book with DOI

Aber, J. L., Bishop-Josef, S. J., Jones, S. M., Taaffe McLearn, K., & Phillips, D. A. (Eds.). (2007). *Child development and social policy: Knowledge for action*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/11486-000>

Paraphrased citation: (Aber et al., 2007)

Narrative citation: Aber et al. (2007)

11. Chapter from an edited book with a DOI.

Krebs, D. L., & Janicki, M. G. (2004). The biological foundations of moral norms. In C. Crandall & M. Schaller (Eds.) *The Psychological Foundations of Culture* (pp. 125-148). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410608994>

Paraphrased citation: (Krebs & Janicki, 2004)

Narrative citation: Krebs and Janicki (2004)

12. Book with government agency or corporate author

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>

NOTE: Because the author and publisher are the same, the publisher's name is omitted.

Include manual name, edition, and abbreviation when **first cited**.

Paraphrased citation: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Narrative citation: American Psychiatric Association (2013) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed., DSM-5).

Subsequent citations:

Paraphrased citation: (American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Narrative citation: American Psychiatric Association (2013)

Dictionary or Encyclopaedia

13. Dictionary

VandenBos, G. R. (Ed.). (2015). *APA dictionary of psychology* (2nd ed.). American Psychological Association.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/14646-000>

Paranthetical citation: (VandenBos, 2015)

Narrative citation: VandenBos (2015)

14. Encyclopaedia

Kazdin, A. E. (Ed.). (2000). *Encyclopedia of psychology*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/10517-000>

[10.1037/10517-000](https://doi.org/10.1037/10517-000)

Paranthetical citation: (Kazdin, 2000)

Narrative citation: Kazdin (2000)

Tests, Scales, and Inventories

A reference for tests, scales, and inventories requires the following elements:

- author(s)
- Date
- Title of the test or Title of the test bank record [Database record]
- Publisher information; or
- Test Database name; or
- DOI or URL when available

15. Database record for a test

Fajkowska, M., Domaradzka, E., & Wytykowska, A. (2018). *Anxiety and Depression Questionnaire — Anhedonic*

Depression (ADQ-AD) [Database Record]. PsycTESTS. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t67045-000>

Paranthetical citation: (Fajkowska et al., 2018)

Narrative citation: Fajkowska et al. (2018)

16. Manual for a test, scale, or inventory

McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T., Jr. (2010). *NEO Inventories for the NEO Personality Inventory-3 (NEO-PI-3), NEO*

Five Factor Inventory-3 (NEO-FFI-3), NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R): Professional

Manual. PAR.

Paranthetical citation: (McCrae & Costa, 2010)

Narrative citation: McCrae and Costa (2010)

Audiovisual Media

This includes films, TV series, podcasts, streaming videos, and TED Talks. Referencing of audiovisual media follows the same convention as references for periodicals and books except substitute either the writer, director or host in place of “author”.

17. Streaming video

Beck, A. T. (Host). (2012). *Aaron Beck on cognitive therapy* [Video]. Psychotherapy.net. <http://www.psychotherapy.net.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/stream/douglascollege>

Paraphrased citation: (Beck, 2012)

Narrative citation: Beck (2012)

18. Film or Video

Howard, R. (Director), & Grazer, B. (Producer) (2001). *A beautiful mind* [Film]. Imagine Entertainment.

Paraphrased citation: (Howard & Grazer, 2001)

Narrative citation: Howard and Grazer (2001)

19. Podcast

Santos, L. (Host). (2019—present). *The happiness lab* [Audio podcast]. Pushkin Industries.

Paraphrased citation: (Santos, 2019—present)

Narrative citation: Santos (2019—present)

20. Episode from a Podcast

Bragg, M. (Host). (2018, 21 June). Echolocation [Audio podcast episode]. In *In our time*. BBC Radio 4.

Paraphrased citation: (Bragg, 2018)

Narrative citation: Bragg (2018)

This is an example of an episode from a podcast. Follow the format for a chapter in a book except list the host of the podcast as the author; the date in which the podcast was aired; the title of the episode and episode number if available — indicate whether it is audio or video in square brackets —; the title of the podcast; the publisher; and the URL. If the URL is unknown, because the podcast is available via an app, then omit the URL.

NOTE: The URLs were omitted from the above examples because the podcasts were accessed via an app.

21. TV Series

Anderson, G., Cubitt, A., Irwin, P., Thomson-Glover, J., & Wright, S. (Executive Producers). (2013–2015). *The Fall* [TV series]. Fables Limited, Artist Studio, BBC Northern Ireland, & RTÉ; BBC Two.

Paraphrased citation: (Anderson et al., 2013-2015)

Narrative citation: Anderson et al. (2013–2015)

22. Episode from a television series

Rosenberg, M. (Writer), & Lieberman, R. (Director) (2006, October 29). Love American style (Season 1, Episode 5) [TV series episode]. In J. Manons, Jr., J. Goldwyn, S. Colleton, & C. Phillips (Executive Producers), *Dexter*. John Goldwyn Productions; Showtime.

Parenthetical citation: (Rosenberg & Lieberman, 2006)

Narrative citation: Rosenberg and Lieberman (2006)

Follow the format for a chapter in a book, except insert the writer(s) and director(s) name in place of the author(s) of the chapter; and insert the name of the producer(s) in place of the editor.

23. TED Talk

Loftus, E. (2013, June). *How reliable is your memory?* [Video]. TEDGlobal 2013. https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_loftus_how_reliable_is_your_memory

Parenthetical citation: (Loftus, 2013)

Narrative citation: Loftus (2013)

Social Media

Cite only original content that has been posted on social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). If the posted material includes a content link and the material cited is from the link, then cite the content link as the source for the material.

24. Facebook page

Canadian Psychological Association|Société canadienne de psychologie (n.d.). *Home* [Facebook page]. Facebook. Retrieved July 03, 2020, from <https://www.facebook.com/CPA.SCP/>

Parenthetical citation: (Canadian Psychological Association|Société canadienne de psychologie, n.d.)

Narrative citation: Canadian Psychological Association|Société canadienne de psychologie (n.d.)

25. Facebook post

Enter the first 20 words of the post in the “title” element.

National Institute for Mental Health. (2020, July 02). *Mental disorders are like medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes. The earlier the treatment begins, the more effective* [Post]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/pg/nimhgov/posts/?ref=page_internal

Parenthetical citation: (National Institute for Mental Health, 2020)

Narrative citation: National Institute for Mental Health (2020)

26. Twitter profile

Health Canada and PHAC [@GovCanHealth]. (n.d.). *Tweets* [Twitter profile]. Retrieved July 03, 2020, from <https://twitter.com/GovCanHealth>

Parenthetical citation: (Health Canada and PHAC, n.d.)

Narrative citation: Health Canada and PHAC (n.d.)

27. Tweet

Enter the first 20 words of the tweet in the “title” element.

CMHA National [@CMHA_NTL]. (2020, July 02). *Social connection can lower #anxiety and #depression, help us regulate our emotions, lead to higher self-esteem and #empathy, and actually* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/CMHA_NTL

Parenthetical citation: (CMHA National, 2020)

Narrative citation: CMHA National (2020)

Curriculum and Course Material

28. Presentation Slides

Janicki, M. G. (2020, February 24). Social Influence, Part I: Psychology 3330 Winter 2020 [PowerPoint slides].

Douglas College Blackboard Community. https://douglascollege.blackboard.com/webapps/portal/execute/tabs/tabAction?tab_tab_group_id=381_1

Parenthetical citation: (Janicki, 2020)

Narrative citation: Janicki (2020)

NOTE: If the slides are from a class’ website, Learning Management System’s (e.g., Blackboard), or intranet, and the reader has access to this material, provide the name of the site and it’s URL; in the case of an LMS use the URL for the login page.

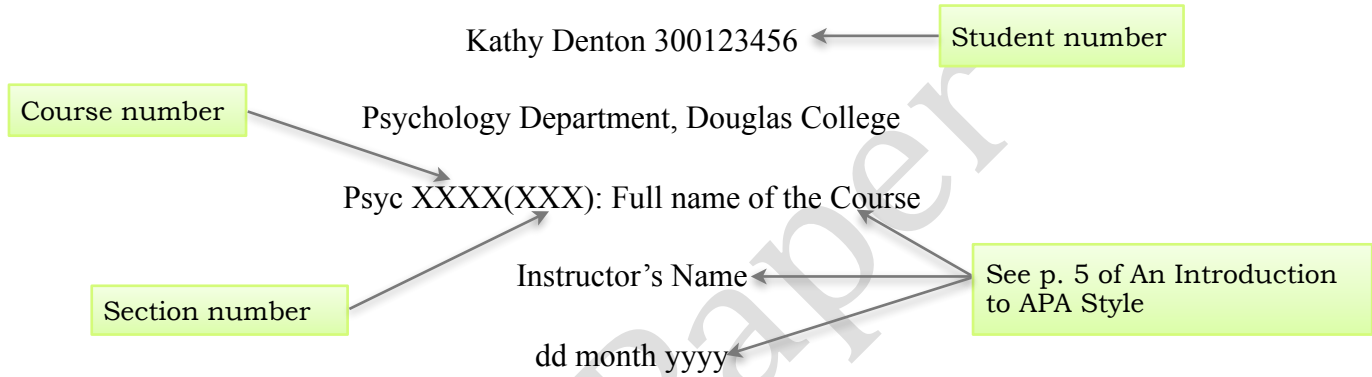
References

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.).

See p. 5 of An Introduction to APA style



The Effectiveness of Excuse-Validation in Reducing Negative Affect



Sample Paper

See p. 6 of An Introduction to
APA Style

Abstract

Excuse-making is a common strategy people invoke to feel better following a negative event.

When excuses are advanced in public, their effectiveness may depend on whether they are

validated by others. The present study was conducted to assess the emotional impact on

participants of having their excuses validated by a supportive stranger in a conversation about a

real life negative event, as compared to receiving no support from an attentive audience.

Participants were 31 male and 39 female undergraduate students, who participated for course

credit. Participants' affective state was assessed prior to and after talking to a supportive stranger

who either validated or did not validate their excuses. It was hypothesized that participants in the

excuse-validation condition would report lower levels of negative affect at the post-conversation

assessment than participants whose excuses were not validated. The results indicated that excuse-

validation is an effective form of social support and is necessary for publicly made excuses to

alleviate negative affect.

See p. 6 of An Introduction to APA style

The Effectiveness of Excuse-Validation in Reducing Negative Affect

Social psychology is replete with evidence that people who receive information that threatens their sense of self, such as a negative evaluation, will distort the information in self-serving ways (see Miller & Porter, 1988; Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Taylor & Brown, 1988, for reviews). Snyder et al. (1983) have demonstrated that making excuses (e.g., trivializing negative feedback, making an external attribution for the cause of an unfavourable outcome) is a common way in which people attempt to construct a less threatening reality following upsetting experiences.

Investigations of excuses and related processes tend to focus on excuses people make in private, laboratory contexts after receiving some form of negative feedback (see Snyder & Higgins, 1988, for a review). The results of this research suggest that processes that help people evade responsibility for their negative outcomes, such as excuses, are beneficial. Excuses preserve people's self-concepts and alleviate negative affect associated with unfavourable outcomes (Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Taylor & Brown, 1988).

See pp. 16-18 of An Introduction to APA style.

It is unclear whether excuses provide relief from negative events when they are advanced outside of the lab, in public contexts. Few researchers have assessed the effectiveness of publicly-made excuses. Three studies (Denton & Zarbatany, 1996; Mehlman & Snyder, 1985; Schönbach, 1990), however, suggest the effectiveness of publicly-made excuses may depend on the audience who receives the excuse and context in which the excuse is invoked.

A study by Schönbach (1990) revealed that audiences in competitive or antagonistic contexts (e.g., people on an opposing side of a dispute) have a vested interest in challenging people's excuses, which constrains the excuse-maker's ability to evade responsibility and to alleviate negative affect. Similarly, a study by Mehlman and Snyder (1985) demonstrated that

excuses examined by an "all knowing," electronic audience in an experimental context were constrained by anticipated challenges to their validity, and, therefore, less effective than privately-made, unexamined excuses in relieving negative affect.

In contrast, in a study of social support strategy effectiveness, Denton and Zabatany (1996) observed that when people discussed real life negative experiences with friends during supportive conversations, their friends not only agreed with their excuses (i.e., provided excuse-validation) but also made excuses for them. In terms of the effectiveness of excuses and excuse-validation in reducing negative affect, Denton and Zabatany (1996) reported that the excuses people made for themselves were ineffective in reducing negative affect; but, friends' validation of these excuses helped alleviate negative affect. Indeed, the validation of excuses by friends was found to be a more effective support strategy than any other form of social support or coping assessed in this study (i.e., excuse-making, emotional support, advice, discussing a more pleasant topic). The correlational nature of this study, however, does not permit conclusions to be drawn about whether excuse-validation caused reductions in negative affect or was a consequence of negative affect reduction.

The present study was a first attempt to test the effectiveness of excuse-validation as a social support strategy in a controlled experiment. Participants discussed a real-life negative event with a supportive stranger who either validated their excuses or listened attentively without providing excuse-validation. Prior to and after this discussion, participants completed a questionnaire to assess their level of negative affect. Based on past correlational research on excuse-validation (Denton & Zabatany, 1996) and related research on the effects of implicit (Mehlman & Snyder, 1985) and explicit (Schönbach, 1990) challenges to people's excuses, it

was expected that participants whose excuses were validated would benefit more from the supportive conversation than participants whose excuses were not validated.

See p. 7 of “An Introduction to APA Style”

Method

Participants

Participants were 31 male and 39 female undergraduate students (M age = 25.8) who attended the University of Western Ontario. Participants were told that the study assessed how people talk about negative events. Volunteers received course credit for their participation.

Procedure

Two brief versions of the Multiple Affect Adjective Check List (MAACL; Zuckerman & Lubin, 1965) were used to assess negative affect (see Appendix). Each checklist contained 42 words that described various emotional states (e.g., happy, nervous). Participants were instructed to read each item and place an “x” beside those items that described how they felt at that moment. Total negative affect scores were created by adding together the number of negative emotional words in each of three subscales (i.e., anxiety, depression, anger) that were marked with an “x” and the number of positive emotional words (e.g., relaxed, happy) that were not marked with an “x,” then dividing by three. The highest possible score on the test was 14, which indicated a very high level of negative affect.

In addition to the MAACL, a short, written questionnaire was created for this study. This five-item questionnaire assessed participants impressions of the supportive stranger (e.g., “How supportive was she?”; “How comfortable did you feel talking to her?”). Responses were made on 7-point rating scales and aggregated to produce an impression of supportive stranger score. The higher the score, the more positively participants viewed the supportive stranger.

A research assistant contacted potential participants by telephone and provided them with a brief description of the study. Meeting times were arranged for volunteers, who were tested individually in a Psychology lab.

When participants arrived at the Psychology lab, the experimenter asked them to (a) disclose an upsetting incident from their past that still bothered them to think about and (b) complete a brief version of the MAACL. Next, participants discussed the incident they disclosed to the experimenter with a "supportive stranger" (who was referred to as a research assistant) for seven minutes in front of a video camera.

During the seven-minute conversation, the supportive stranger interacted with participants according to the social support requirements of the experimental condition to which subjects' were randomly assigned: excuse-validation or attentive listening. In the excuse-validation condition, the supportive stranger was instructed to validate every excuse participants made by nodding or by verbalizing agreement. For example, if a participant minimized the seriousness of getting an "F" on a test by saying it was only a quiz, the supportive stranger might say, "yeah, quizzes aren't worth much." In contrast, in the attentive listening condition, the supportive stranger would not validate participants' excuses or invoke any other form of support, but merely provide an opportunity for participants to express their feelings and points of view by encouraging conversation and asking questions. For example, after learning about a failing grade, the supportive stranger might ask, "What did you do when you received your grade?"

After seven minutes of conversation with the supportive stranger, the experimenter entered the room and asked the supportive stranger to leave. Participants then completed the second version of the MAACL and the set of five questions about the supportive stranger. Participants were then thanked and debriefed.

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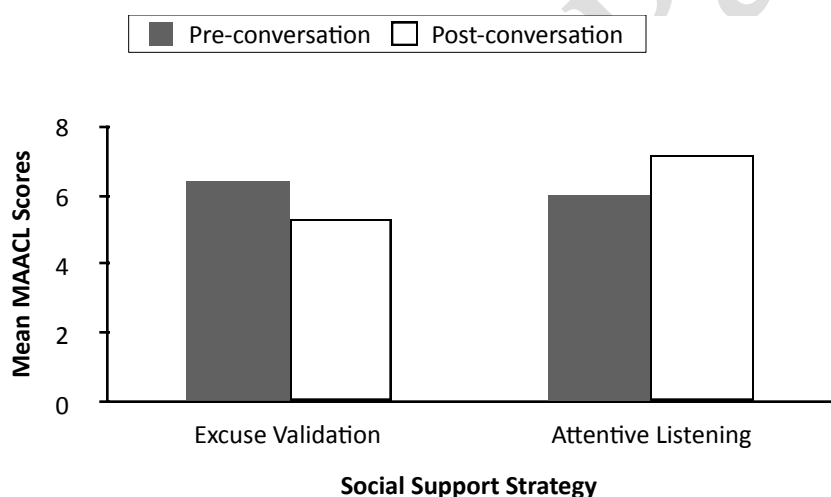
Results

The effectiveness of the three forms of social support were assessed by comparing the mean pre- and post-conversation MAACL scores of participants in both experimental conditions. As expected, participants in the excuse-validation condition reported higher negative affect scores before ($M = 6.4$) than after ($M = 5.3$) talking to the supportive stranger (see Figure 1). In comparison, participants in the attentive listening conditions experienced an increase in negative affect from the pre-conversation assessment to the post-conversation assessment ($M_s = 6.0$ and 7.2 , respectively).

Figure 1

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Mean Pre- and Post-conversation MAACL Score by Experimental Condition



Analyses of participants' impressions of the supportive stranger revealed that she was viewed as highly supportive in both experimental conditions. As shown in Table 1, participants in both experimental conditions viewed her very positively. The average impression of supportive stranger rating by participants in the excuse-validation condition was 5.9 (on a 7-point scale). The average rating by participants in the attentive listening condition was 6.0.

Table 1

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Mean Impression of Supportive Stranger Ratings Across Experimental Conditions

Experimental Condition	Mean Rating
Excuse-Validation	5.9
Attentive Listening	6.0

Discussion

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The results of this study demonstrated that excuse-validation was effective in reducing negative affect. As expected, participants whose excuses were validated by the supportive stranger reported lower levels of negative affect at the post-conversation assessment than at the pre-conversation assessment. Reductions in negative affect from pre- to post-conversation were not reported by participants in the attentive listening condition, whose excuses were not validated. These results were not moderated by participants' impressions of the supportive stranger. Participants in both experimental conditions rated the supportive stranger very positively.

Past research suggests that excuses are commonly invoked following negative events (Snyder & Higgins, 1988). The results of the present study demonstrate that the validation of excuses is an effective way to help people feel better. The reason why excuse-validation may alleviate negative affect is because validation strengthens the credibility of excuses, making them believable. According to Snyder et al. (1983), when excuses are believed, excuse-makers may feel less responsible for the event that evoked the excuses ("It wasn't my fault") or the event may

seem less important (“It wasn’t worth getting upset about”). In contrast, when excuses do not receive validation, as in the attentive listening condition where excuse-validation was prohibited, the excuse-maker may have difficulty evading responsibility or minimizing the event (Denton & Zarbatany, 1996; Mehlman & Snyder, 1985; Schönbach, 1990).

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Although the hypothesis in this study was supported, the study has a number of limitations. First, no controls were taken to ensure that excuse-making occurred in both experimental conditions. It is possible that only participants in the excuse-validation condition made excuses or that participants in the excuse-validation condition made more excuses than participants in the attentive listening condition. Therefore, the results of the experimental condition may be confounded by excuse-making. To minimize the confounding effects of excuse-making, future researchers may consider assessing the amount of excuse-making across conditions and, if necessary, invoking statistical controls.

A second limitation of the present study concerns the type of negative event disclosed by participants. The only constraint imposed on participants was that the event disclosed continued to evoke negative affect. It is possible that factors like the type of negative event (e.g., academic failure, loss of relationship) may affect the type of social support needed. Accordingly, excuse-making and excuse-validation may be more effective for some events than others. Therefore, to rule out the confounding effects of event type, future researchers may consider putting additional constraints on the type of event disclosed or ensuring that similar types of events are disclosed by subjects across experimental conditions.

In conclusion, the findings of this study are consistent with the claim of researchers such as Snyder and Higgins (1988) that the ability to make and benefit from excuses may depend on the receptiveness of one's audience. When audience members behave as though they believe the

excuses people make for themselves, the audience communicates that the excuses are valid. This may engender greater confidence in excuse-makers about their perception of a self-serving reality, which, in turn, may give rise to a more positive affective state.

Sample Paper

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Appendix ← See p. 10 of An Introduction to
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MAACL Form A

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MAACL Form B

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