

Most Common APA Mistakes

1. **Headings**—The Chapter Title IS NOT considered level 1—It is a **CHAPTER TITLE**, bold, in ALL CAPS, double spaced between CHAPTER and TITLE. **Level 1 is Centered, Initial Caps, Bold, triple spaced before and after, no longer than 5” in length—anything over 5” should be double spaced, inverted pyramid style, with a triple space before and after the heading.** **Level 2 is Flush Left, Initial Caps, triple spaced before and double space after** (anything over 3” long must be split into 2 or more lines, inverted pyramid style, and single spaced). **Level 3 is an indented paragraph, sentence cap, bold,** followed by a period and then the text of your paragraph. **Level 4 is indented, italicized, bold, and sentence caps followed by a period** and then the text of your paragraph. **Level 5 is indented, italicized, and sentence caps followed by a period** and then the text of your paragraph. More than 5—you have too many headings! ☺ **YOU MUST ALWAYS HAVE AT LEAST TWO HEADINGS AT ANY GIVEN LEVEL WITHIN EACH SUBSECTION.**

Example:

CHAPTER I
(DS)
INTRODUCTION

(TS)
Background (Level 1)

(TS)

The History of the Utah Jazz (Level 2)

(DS)

Where they originated. This is an example of a Level 3 heading. It is bold, sentence caps, and indented the same as regular paragraphs. (Level 3)

Early beginnings in New Orleans. This is an example of a Level 4 heading. It is the first heading at this level within this subsection (e.g., “*Where they originated*”). It is bold and italicized and indented as a regular paragraph. (Level 4)

Why they were sold. This is the second heading within this subsection (e.g., “*Where they originated*”). You must have 2 headings at this level within this subheading.

Why the Millers purchased the Utah Jazz. This is an example of a Level 5 heading. It is the first heading at this level within this subsection (e.g., “*Why they were sold*”). It uses sentence caps, is italicized (NOT BOLDED), and indented as a regular paragraph. (Level 5)

How much Millers paid for the Jazz. Must have 2 headings at this level within this subheading (e.g., “*Why they were sold*”).

When they moved to Utah. Must have 2 headings at this level within this subheading (e.g., “*The History of the Utah Jazz*”).

The Owner of the Utah Jazz was Larry H. Miller and His Family

Conclusions

2. Tables

- a. **Table titles.** Table titles appear at the top of the table. The actual table title uses initial caps and is italicized and is double spaced BELOW the table number.
- b. **Figure captions.** Figure captions appear BELOW the figure. The word “Figure” and the figure number is italicized. The actual captions are sentence caps only and NOT italicized.
- c. **Use of horizontal (left to right) and vertical (top to bottom) lines.** The ONLY lines used should be one horizontal line at the beginning and end of a table and then one solid line that separates the column heading row from the text of the table. Absolutely NO vertical lines are used in APA.
- d. **Use of bold and italics.** Using bold and italics in tables is generally not encouraged. Only use italics to denote statistical symbols (e.g., p value, t test, etc.).
- e. **Use of shading.** Shading in tables is not allowed.
- f. **Use of asterisks (*).** Asterisks (*) are ONLY used in tables to designate two-tailed p values (e.g., * $p = .05$; ** $p = .01$, *** $p = .001$). If you need to designate a one-tailed, then use another symbol, such as †. For all other table footnotes, use a superscript (e.g., a, b, c, etc.).
- g. **Headings.** ALL COLUMNS MUST have a heading—NO EXCEPTIONS!
- h. **Font.** Use the same font STYLE for tables as is used for the text of your dissertation. The size of the font can be smaller.
- i. **Column alignment.** Columns should be aligned on the decimal. Round the number behind the decimal consistently (either always use 1 behind the decimal or 2 behind the decimal, etc.)
- j. **Placement.** Tables and figures should either appear at the TOP or BOTTOM of a page. DO NOT “sandwich” tables or figures between text or vice versa. The table/figure should appear as soon as possible after it is first called out in the text (IT MUST BE CALLED OUT IN THE TEXT).

Example

Table 6

t Test of Continuous Variables (in Years) by Clinical Outcomes

NEED Heading	Severe dementia			Institutionalization			Death		
	No	Yes	p	No	Yes	p	No	Yes	p
Education									
Mean	13.26	13.23	0.95	13.38	12.49	0.06	13.37	13.15	0.90
SD	2.93	3.03		2.99	2.62		3.12	3.00	
Dementia duration									
Mean	1.47	1.93	< 0.01***	1.51	1.90	0.04*	1.29	1.74	0.140
SD	1.15	1.26		1.18	1.26		1.13	1.28	
Onset age of dementia									
Mean	85.18	81.94	< 0.01***	84.43	82.34	0.04*	80.34	84.07	< 0.01***
SD	5.81	6.46		6.10	6.66		5.59	6.22	

Note. Severe dementia incorporates cognitive and functional measures. Institutionalization incorporates nursing home placement only.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

3. References

- a. **Order of references when citing in the text.** References should always be cited ALPHABETICALLY when parenthetical. If there is more than one reference with the same author, THEN it is alphabetically by year—oldest reference first (e.g., Casto, White, & Taylor, 1986, 1995; Innocenti, Cook, & Boyce, 2012).
- b. **Multiple authors with same last name but different first name.** When you have multiple references with the same last name but different first name, include the initial (e.g., K. White, Taylor, & Innocenti, 1994; T.

White, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2001).

- c. **Use of et al. in text.** Use et al. if 6 or more authors OR after the first citation of 3-5 authors.
- d. **Reference of 8 or more authors in reference list.** If the reference has 8 or more authors, list the first 6 authors followed by ... and then the last author.
- e. **Multiple references with same author and year.** If you have more than one reference with the same author(s) and year, you MUST indicate each year with an “a” or “b” (e.g., White, K. R. (1984a). The efficacy of early intervention.... White, K. R. (1984b). A meta-analysis of....)
- f. **Personal communication.** When citing “personal communication” as a source, IN THE TEXT, include the month, day, and year (e.g., K. White, personal communication, December 1, 2014). DO NOT include the citation in your reference list.
- g. **Complete references.** One of the most frequent problems I have seen is incomplete references. When citing an article in a journal, make sure you include the Volume # and THE COMPLETE RANGE OF ALL OF THE PAGE NUMBERS FOR THAT ARTICLE. Many times I see only the first page. Another problem I see is a reference for a book or chapter in a book that is missing the City, State, or Publisher. You must include ALL THREE.
- h. **URLs.** When including a URL (in either the text or the reference list), make sure they work!
- i. **Use the hanging indent function!!!!** Please don't put in hard returns at the end of each line and then tab in the 2nd and succeeding lines of your references. Use the hanging indent and let the line automatically wrap and automatically indent the second and succeeding lines. ONLY put a hard return at the end of the entire reference, which then moves the cursor back to the left margin to start the next reference.

4. General Errors

- a. **Contractions.** NEVER use contractions UNLESS you are doing a direct quote (e.g., Results of the interviews indicated that they did not want to go to school. vs She said, “They didn't like going to school.”)
- b. **Quotations.** Quotations of more than 3 lines long should be single spaced and indented from the left only (use the indent function rather than a hard return at each line and tabbing in). When including a direct quote from a written source, ALWAYS INCLUDE THE PAGE NUMBER OF THAT QUOTE and make sure the page you cite falls within the range of what you cite in your reference list.
- c. **Abstract.** The maximum length of the Abstract should be 350 words or less. DO NOT INCLUDE REFERENCES IN THE ABSTRACT.
- d. **Ellipses (...).** Ellipses are used when you omit quoted text. When omitting text WITHIN A SENTENCE, use three ellipses (...) with no space before or after the ellipses. When omitting text that falls at the END OF A SENTENCE, use four ellipses (....) no space before or between but add one space after the last period.
- e. **Past Tense.** Report everything in PAST TENSE—including the literature review, methods, and results (e.g., White et al. (1984) reported that....; or The students in this study WERE.... The first participant, Rachel, WAS a 17-year-old student).
- f. **Use of numbers.** When referring to units of measure or time, use the Arabic number—do not spell it out (e.g., 8 inches, 3 minutes, 5 years). All other numbers if UNDER 10, spell out—unless in a series (there were three people in the class; the number of responds included 8 from class A, 10 from class B, and 14, from class C).
- g. **Double vs. single quotation marks.** Always use a double quote (“) UNLESS you are quoting something within a quote (e.g., The researcher chose to use a “blind” review... NOT The researcher chose to use a ‘blind’ review. She said, “My major professor said ‘that is not the right answer’ for that question”).
- h. **Capitalization of subtests.** As a rule, subtest, subcategory names ARE NOT capitalized in APA (e.g., Within the Vocabulary section there are three subcategories—proper names, names of cities, names of states.)
- i. **The use of the word “DATA.”** Data is plural (e.g., Data WERE collected on 356 subjects... NOT Data WAS collected on 356 subjects).

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- j. **Acronyms.** The use of acronyms is great. The PURPOSE of acronyms is so you do not have to keep spelling the word out. Therefore, once you have defined the acronym, use it unless it is in a heading or you are quoting something verbatim.
 - k. **Appendices.** Make sure that ALL APPENDICES are called out in the text or do not include them in the document.
 - l. **Use of copyrighted material.** If you include ANY ITEMS that have a copyright, you MUST OBTAIN WRITTEN COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FROM THE COPYRIGHT HOLDER.