APA Format and Style in a Nutshell

“Everything not forbidden is compulsory.”
(the motto of T. H. White’s Antland)

As you know, Rorschach responses are coded as W (uses the whole blot), D (refers to a frequently used detail), or Dd (unusual detail). APA style is Ddddddddddddd! Think of it as an arcane game you’re learning to play.

The Torah, Bible and Qur’ān, all rolled into one, is (citation in APA style):


For our purposes, it sets:

- page format
- headings and subheadings
- use of numerals
- spelling and punctuation conventions
- direct quotation format
- citation format
- reference format

Some of these standards are aspirational (“enhanced readability”, Manual, p. 228) and some are set in stone (no typed line shall be longer than 6½ inches, p. 229). It may be helpful to remember that APA format was developed to standardize articles submitted to journals for publication. That makes sense of requirements like running heads, which enable reviewers to identify loose pages of manuscripts.

**Page format**

The goal is readability. The preferred format is:

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1 The people who write the APA publication manual have way too much time on their hands! I list their arcane rules with a straight face, but I’ll bet they have to line their toys up just right before they can fall asleep at night.

2 White (1958, p. 121). Antland is the totalitarian state that White imagines as part of the education of Wart, the young King Arthur, in *The Once and Future King*.

3 Sometimes when I’ve been listening to too much outlaw country music, I’ve written lines 6½ inches long! Please don’t tell anyone.
- 1" margins on all four sides (in your dissertation, the left margin will be 1½" to leave room for binding)
- 12-point Times New Roman font
- double spacing (single spacing may be used in tables)
- left justification but never right justification
- ½" indentations at the beginning of paragraphs and footnotes

**Headings and Subheadings**

Again, the goal is clarity. APA style recommends the use of five levels of headings and subheadings (Manual, p. 62). There should be at least two subheadings under a heading, just as there should be at least A. and B. under a Roman numeral in an outline. The first level is

**Centered, Boldface, All Major Words Capitalized**

This level is used in two places in this handout: the title *APA Format and Style in a Nutshell*, and *References*.

The second level is

**Flush Left, Boldface, All Major Words Capitalized**

This level is used throughout, e.g.,

**Headings and Subheadings, and Citing Sources.**

The third level is

**Indented, boldface, only the first word capitalized, ending in a period.**

This level is used under *Citing Sources for Direct quotations, Citations, Author(s)*, etc.

The fourth level is

**Indented, boldface, italicized, only the first word capitalized, ending in a period.**

Only the Dalai Lama has ever attained the fifth level. You’ll know if you get there.

**Use of Numerals**

Lots of exceptions coming up! The general rule is that one through nine are spelled out, and 10 and greater are written as numerals. The general exception is that a sentence never starts with a numeral. So “With their parents’ permission, 10th-grade students were interviewed,” but “Tenth-grade students expressed a preference for unlimited cell-phone use in class.”
Except:

- All numbers that precede a unit of measurement are written as numerals even if they are less than 10: 5 seconds, 3 mg.
- Numbers in a statistical or mathematical formula: to convert from Fahrenheit to Centigrade, subtract 32, divide by 9, and multiply by 5.\(^4\)
- Times, dates, ages, scores, and points on a scale (Manual, p. 112): the modal score on a 7-point Likert scale was 5; we observed 18 3-year-olds for 45 minutes, noting their behavior at 3-minute intervals.
- A specific item in a numbered series: “Grade 8” but “the eighth grade.” Somebody at APA got paid for thinking of that! I suppose *DSM-5* belongs here.

Except except:

- approximations (whether the number is less than or greater than 10).

While trying to understand APA style, I started to dissociate about five minutes ago. It takes about ten years after graduation to believe that you really are a psychologist.

- common fractions.

APA style can be amended by a two-thirds majority of graduate students (not!).

- accepted usage: *One Thousand and One Nights*, not *1,001 Nights*. By the way, this example illustrates that numerals 1,000 and greater are written with a comma. Except... (see p. 114).

Plurals of numbers are made with *s* without an apostrophe:

- A commonly used memory task is counting backwards from 100 by 7s (not “sevens”? When numbers refer to numerals as such, they are written as numerals even when they are less than 10).

- The 1960s represented the high point of human culture.

**Spelling**

The APA follows the current edition of *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (Manual, p. 96). One to look out for: *data* is a plural noun (the plural of *datum*), so “the data show,” not “the data shows.”

\(^4\) You want picky, we’ve got picky: “We found that 7% of the sample...” but “Seven percent of the sample...” Isn’t this fun?
Capitalization

Different rules apply in the body of the text and in reference lists: All major words should be capitalized in titles in the text, but only the first word and the first word after a colon should be capitalized in titles in reference lists.

Except (come on, you knew there would be an exception to the exception) that all major words in the titles of journals are capitalized even in reference lists (see below for more examples).

Freud, in Civilization and Its Discontents (1930)...


Winnicott, in “Hate in the Counter-Transference” (1949), lists 18 objective reasons for a mother to hate her baby.


When a personal name is not capitalized in the text, it should still be capitalized at the beginning of a sentence: Bessel van der Kolk but “Van der Kolk (1987) asserts...” (Manual, p. 101).

Italics

Titles of books, periodicals, and visual media (movies, videos, television shows) (Manual, p. 104). If you are already in italics, put these in normal type.

The first time you introduce a new technical term, put it in italics; afterwards, use normal type:

Narrowly understood, countertransference refers only to those responses of the therapist to the client that are out of awareness and that are rooted in the therapist’s early relationships. However, countertransference is also used more broadly to refer to all of the therapist’s emotional responses to the client.

When you are using a word as a linguistic example, put it in italics. Example: in APA style, spellings like canceled are preferred to cancelled (p. 96), even though both are correct.

Statistical and test abbreviations:

5 Prepositions up to three letters long are not capitalized in the text; prepositions four or more letters long are capitalized (p. 101). I’m not making this up!
\[ p \leq .05 \]
\[ n = 20 \]

- \textit{t-distribution}
- Pearson’s \textit{r}

“Any \textit{W} response that is not \textit{Wv}, and any response in which white space is specifically identified as part, but not all, of the answer qualify as \textit{Z}” (Exner, 1990, p. 53).

Foreign words, phrases and abbreviations that have become part of the English language should not be italicized, e.g., (see, that was one right there!) et al., a priori, vice versa. True foreign words should be:

Freud used the plain-language term \textit{Besetzung} to refer to the investment of psychic energy. Strachey thought that this term did not sound scientific enough, so he coined the term \textit{cathexis} in 1922, but Freud was unhappy with this because he disliked technical terms (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 56, n. α).

Italics should not be used for “mere emphasis” (p. 106).

\textbf{Abbreviations}

When abbreviations are fully lexicalized, they may be used without explanation: IQ, HIV, VCR. If you are in doubt, look them up and see whether or not they are listed as \textit{abbr.} in your dictionary. When an abbreviation is in common usage in a community, you can use it without explanation, e.g., \textit{DSM-IV-TR} and APA style in this handout. However, spell such abbreviations out when they would be unfamiliar or ambiguous: both the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association refer to themselves as the APA. We’re right, of course.

All other abbreviations should be spelled out in full the first time they are used. Afterwards, they may be used without explanation. Examples:

- Body Mass Index (BMI)
- Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)
- Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI)

The plural of an abbreviation is formed with \textit{s} alone, without an apostrophe: Eds. for Editors in a reference list; vols. iv-v for volumes; “mind your \textit{ps} and \textit{qs}.”

\textbf{Punctuation}

APA style is profligate with commas! Citations in the text have the format (Skinner, 1971, p.
Commas are used to mark clauses that contain nonessential information; they should not be used for essential clauses:

“The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world,” not “The hand, that rocks the cradle, rules the world.”

When a clause or a sentence ends with one or more words in quotation marks, the comma or period is placed inside the closing quotation marks. Other punctuation marks such as ? and ! should be placed inside the closing quotation marks only if they are part of the original quotation (Manual, p. 92). Examples:

Freud famously asked, “What does woman want?”
How are we to understand the idea of “interminable analysis”? 

Citing Sources

Direct quotations. When you are quoting a source word for word, give the page number(s) as well as the author and year. The page number is preceded by p. and the plural of p. is pp. For sources which are not paginated (such as many online sources), give the paragraph number, abbreviated para. Page numbers are given in full: pp. 101-102, not 101-2.

If you have already cited the author and year, you do not need to repeat them; just give the page number:

Gregg (2005) points out that “most of the world’s preindustrial cultures are kinship based” (p. 59).

The magic number is 40: if a direct quotation contains fewer than 40 words, incorporate it into the body of the text and surround it with “ “. The page number(s) are placed in parentheses following the closing ” and are themselves followed by the final punctuation, as in the Gregg example above.

However, if the quotation contains 40 words or more, it is placed in an indented, double spaced block without quotation marks. The citation (author, year, page) follows the final punctuation (Manual, pp. 170-171).

6 Hermione Granger has noted that 347 is in italics but (2) isn’t. Ten points for Gryffindor!
7 For two authors, see under Author(s) below.
If you omit part of a direct quotation, use ... within a sentence and .... between sentences. You do not need to mark ellipses at the beginning or end of a sentence unless it would mislead the reader if you did not.

Paraphrased material should be cited using the same format as a direct quotation, with page numbers if possible, but of course without quotation marks.

**Citations.** All sources that you cite in the body of your text should be identified in your reference list, but no new sources should be added. Resources such as Wikipedia or popular magazines and newspapers (so-called “gray literature”) that are not reviewed by experts may be cited to catch your readers’ attention, but they should not be cited as stand-alone sources unless they themselves are your object of study. Example: if you are writing about discussions of Internet “addiction” in the media versus scientific research on problematic Internet use, you would want to cite both kinds of sources.

Internet “addiction” (Block, 2008; Young, 1998) has received a great deal of attention in the media (e.g., Latham, 2011, July 26), and several governments have declared that it is a public health problem (Frontline, 2010, February 2). However, there have been so few scientific studies (Byun et al., 2009) that it is too early to tell whether Internet “addiction” is a true mental disorder with subcortical activation like compulsive gambling or an unhealthy behavior under voluntary control.

Citations in the reference list differ from citations in the body of your text. In what follows, I’ll use “listed” to refer to your reference list at the end of your project, and “cited” to refer to references in your text.

**Author(s).** List in your reference list as Last name, First initials separated by spaces, e.g., Fairbairn, W. R. D. (1952). Cite him in the text as (Fairbairn, 1952); “As Fairbairn (1952) observed...”

For two authors, always cite both: “Grencavage and Norcross (1990) discuss the factors common to all therapies.” Use and in your narrative and & in citations in parentheses in the text and in your reference list. In the body of your text, cite them as (Grencavage & Norcross, 1990) with no comma after Grencavage. However, in your reference list, put a comma after Grencavage, L. M.:


First initials are used in citations only when authors have the same last name: if Sigmund Freud and his daughter Anna had written an article together, it would be listed in your reference list as Freud, S., & Freud, A. (1937), but cited in the text as (Freud, S. & Freud, 1937); “S. Freud and Freud (1937) claimed...”

When a reference has multiple authors, there are two “tipping points”: between two and three
authors, and between five and six authors. Always list and cite both authors if there are two. However, if there are three, list all three and cite all three the first time, but cite the first author et al. subsequently. Example:

List Westen, D., Novotny, C. M., & Thompson-Brenner, H. (2004) in your reference list. The first time you cite them in the text, it’s (Westen, Novotny, & Thompson-Brenner, 2004); “Westen, Novotny, and Thompson-Brenner (2004) assert...” After that, it’s (Westen et al., 2004); “Westen et al. (2004) have shown...” (no italics, period after al.).

Now it gets a little crazy: for five authors, list all five in your reference list, and use the rule for three as given above for four and five. BUT, when you get to six authors, list all six in your reference list, but it’s First author et al. all the way in the text.

List up to seven authors in your References. If there are more than seven authors, list the first six, then ..., then the last author. Cite this in the text as First author et al. Examples:


Cite in the text as Moseley et al. (2002).


Cite in the text as Byun et al. (2009).

When you cite more than one author or group of authors within the same parentheses, arrange them alphabetically by first author (not in chronological order), separated by semicolons. List single authors before multiple authors. If you cite more than one work by the same author(s), arrange them chronologically, separated by commas. Example: (Meichenbaum, 1977, 1985; Meichenbaum & Cameron, 1973; Wachtel, 1977). More than one work in the same year? (Meichenbaum, 1977a, 1977b, 1985).

When the name of the author and the name of the publisher are the same, use Author as the name of the publisher:


For government and corporate authors, use the following format:

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8 A great article that shows the power of the placebo effect and illustrates the value of “negative” results (placebo was superior to surgery) when interventions are invasive and/or expensive.

Disambiguation: ed. refers to the edition of a work (2nd ed.); Ed. identifies the editor of an edited work (more than one editor? Eds.).

**Date.** In the reference list, the year of publication follows the author(s) and is put in parentheses. In the text, it follows the author(s) after a comma. For magazines and newspapers, use (Year, Month) or (Year, Month Day).

For a reprinted work, use the date of reprint in the reference list. At the end of the reference, add (Original work published Year). In the text, cite the work as (Author, Original year/Reprint year). Example:


This work would be cited in the text as (Freud 1905/1955). If you cite multiple works from the *Standard Edition*, I would suggest using this full reference for the first work, and just using:

In *Standard Edition*, 7, 125-243

for the other works.

**Title.** As noted above, APA style is inconsistent—only the first word in a book or article title is capitalized in a reference list (as is the first word after a colon), but journal, magazine and newspaper names are capitalized throughout. Example:


When listing a work with a non-English title, give the title first in the original language, followed by a translation in square brackets. However, if you are listing a translation, give the English title only.

**Volume and page numbers.** As you can see in the example above, the volume of the *American Psychologist* is in italics but the page numbers aren’t.

The page numbers of a chapter in an edited book are given after the title:


If page numbers are discontinuous (as in some magazines), give all page numbers: 2-13, 16-19.

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI).** This is electronic, so I recoil from it in horror! You can read all about it on pp. 187ff.

**Electronic resources.** Use the same format as for conventionally published sources, but add Retrieved from [http://address](http://address). The date when you retrieved them is no longer required. Example:


Note that there is no period at the end of this reference.

**Blog post.** I cited (Latham, 2011, July 26) above. This is a blog post, and here’s how to describe it in your reference list:


**Self-plagiarism**

The sixth edition of the publication manual introduced the delicious concept of *self-plagiarism:* re-presenting your own work as new work without citing yourself! While self-plagiarism is considered by many to be a healthy alternative when others are not available to plagiarize from, the Church still considers it a sin.

**References**


