Tips for Writing a Research Paper in APA format:

Basics:
- A research paper (especially one that requires APA style) is different than a term paper, a creative writing paper, a composition-style paper, or a thought paper.
- A research paper requires you to leave out any personal information (both as content or in your writing style – see below) and to focus on research findings that have been put forth previously (the Intro section), that you have looked at and how (the Purpose (hypothesis), and Method section), and what your findings were (the Results and Discussion section).
- Research papers although generally similar may have different requirements depending on the course (and more specifically the instructor). This is not meant to confuse or frustrate students, rather it comes out of the requirements for publication that vary among fields (e.g., the type of information and the way it is presented has different requirements for behavioral journals than for social psychology journals). Best advice is to follow your instructor’s guidelines!
- APA style, although similar, may change over the course of time – information such as how to write the reference section has been changed from edition to edition in the APA Publication Manual

General Tips on Writing Style:
- Impersonal style – as a guideline minimize using first person (e.g., “this study was conducted…” rather than “we conducted this study…”)) although there are exceptions; see the APA Publication Manual for any questions about this
- Do not include any personal statements or anecdotes (e.g., “I was interested in studying eating disorders because my sister was diagnosed with…” does not belong in a research paper!)
- Verb tense – as a guideline use past tense (e.g., “the results indicated” rather than “the results indicate”) although there are exceptions; see the APA Publication Manual for any questions about this
- Contractions – do not use contractions! (e.g., “it does not follow” rather than “it doesn’t follow”)
- Biased language– keep up to date with appropriate terms, especially if you are writing a paper that involves gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. The APA Manual includes information about terms that are deemed appropriate for use in research papers
- Citations – be sure to cite your sources. Try to paraphrase as much as possible (as opposed to quoting)...a couple of ways to do this:
  1. State a fact or make a claim in the text; then cite your source in parentheses within the same sentence: “It has been demonstrated that immediate recall is extremely limited for 5-year-old children (Jones, 1998).” OR “Previous research has shown that response to an auditory stimulus is much faster than response to a visual stimulus (Smith & Jones, 2003).”
  2. Can use source as the subject of your sentence: “In a related study, Jones (2005) found that…” OR “In a similar study, Jones and Smith (1999) found that…”
Sections of an APA formatted research paper:

**Title Page**

- Should include a running head (an abbreviated title, no more than 50 characters long and is in all capital letters) and page number, title, author name(s), and affiliation – all double-spaced (should not include instructor’s name, name of the course, etc.)
- Title – centered about half-way down page
- Name – centered under titled
  - Ex: “Jane Smith”
- Affiliation – school you are attending; centered under name(s)
  - Ex: “University of North Dakota”

The running head is an abbreviated version of your title, normally the first 4 or 5 words of your title (Note: the use of “Running head:” is for research papers only, not for lit reviews, experimental papers, or meta-analyses)

Page numbers are always in the upper right hand corner

The title of the paper, name of the author, and affiliation should be centered both vertically and horizontally on the page, and double spaced
Abstract

- Should include a basic description of the study in about one sentence per section of an APA paper
- Should be between 150 - 250
- Should look like:

"Running head:" is now removed for all remaining sections

The abstract should be the 2nd page of your paper, and should be the only thing on that page.

Listing keywords help researchers find your article in databases.
Introduction – Should include:

- Clear and explicit introduction of the construct being investigated
- All constructs should be accurately and clearly defined
- Literature review conveys what is known about the construct under investigation
- Literature used in review is appropriate (i.e., from a professional journal)
- Literature used in review is accurate in ideas
- Logical presentation of ideas (i.e., no illogical jumps or omissions)
- Research proposed is discussed in the context of what is already known
- Hypotheses are stated
- Should look like:

In-text citation: Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963)

Another example of an in-text citation: (Bandura, 1978)
Method
Should provide sufficient information to allow reader to easily replicate study, including:

- **Participants**
  - Describe how many (N=), gender, race/ethnicity, mean age, etc. (any demographic information that may be relevant to the study) as well as how participants were recruited

- **Materials**
  - Describe measures or apparatus used, include information about the scale of any measures as well as validity and reliability if available

- **Procedure**
  - Describe the process of conducting the study (e.g., signing of informed consent, the order of procedures – or questionnaires, if or how participants were compensated for their time, any debriefing procedure, etc.)

- **Should look like:**

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Most of the recent research has declared that blaming the victim does not really play a role in the decision making of others. However, when a second variable that could explain the perpetrator’s actions is available it may play a role in the decisions that others make. This study will examine if the status of the perpetrator and the status of the victim affect the length of sentencing in a murder trial.

Method

Participants
Participants were 50 undergraduate students, men (n = 34) and women (n = 16). The participants consisted of Caucasian (n = 50), Asian American (n = 10), African American (n = 7) and other (n = 3). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 25 (M = 20.00, SD = 1.92). The participants signed up to take part in the experiment via the SONA experiment management system.

Materials
Participants read one of four vignettes: stemming from a 2 (sober vs. intoxicated) x 2 (survivor vs. non-survivor) between-subjects factorial design. The vignettes described an assault that took place between a perpetrator armed man who was either sober or intoxicated at the time of the assault and a victim who was either part of a political activist group or had no mention of any affiliation.

Procedure
Participants were randomly assigned to a condition where they read a scenario about the
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**Results** - Should include:

- **Appropriate statistics**
  - This will depend on the design of your study; see your instructor with questions pertaining to the appropriate statistical test to use
  - The exact value is reported, for instance \( p = .02 \), NOT \( p < .05 \)

- **Appropriate presentation of statistics**
  - An example of appropriate presentation for an ANOVA is given below; consult the APA Manual (or your instructor) regarding appropriate presentation for differing statistics (i.e., how to present a t-test vs. an ANOVA)

- **Appropriate interpretation of statistics**
  - Be sure you are interpreting the *meaning* of your results accurately (e.g., \( p = .04 \) = significant result); know what the numbers mean

- **Should look like:**

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It was predicted that when Jon was sober that the length of the sentence would be longer. The data was analyzed using an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). When examining the length of the sentence time of participants there was a main effect for Jon’s status (sober or intoxicated), \( F(1, 76) = 4.02, p = .048 \). To explore this significant main effect, the Fisher Least Significant Difference (LSD) test was done with a priori alpha level of .05. Participants reading a scenario where Jon was intoxicated did not give a longer sentence regardless if the victim was an activist or non-activist (M = .15, SE = .30) \( p = .70 \). However participants reading a scenario where Jon was sober did give a longer sentence depending on if the victim was an activist or non-activist (M = 1.15, SE = .30) \( p = .004 \).

A second prediction was that participants would give a longer sentence if the victim was an activist in gay rights. When examining the length of the sentence the participants gave the perpetrator there was no significant main effect for the victim’s status (activist or non-activist) \( F(1, 76) = 2.20, p = .137 \), n.s. However there was a significant interaction between Jon’s status and the victim’s status \( F(1, 76) = 5.62, p = .02 \). See Figure 1.
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Discussion – Should include:

- A clear statement of support or nonsupport of the original hypotheses
- An exploration of the similarities and differences between the present findings and the work of others, including relating findings to applicable theory
- A description of limitations and alternative explanations
- Commentary on the importance and implications of the findings
- Should look like:

Bold and centered

Restate hypothesis

Restate results

Relate findings to previous research

Discuss implications of your study

Discuss limitations of your study and potential future research
References

- Should be in alphabetical order, see examples of different forms of references below
  - The examples are of journal articles
  - Consult the APA Manual for other forms of referencing (e.g., internet sources, edited books)
- Should look like:

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References


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Tables/Graphs

- All tables and graphs should be labeled with a number, have a title, listed on its own page, and included in the appendices
  - The example table below is a typical “APA-style” table
  - Graphs should be appropriate to the scale being used (e.g., nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio)
  - Consult the APA Manual or your instructor for further information on other types of tables and graphs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-American</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Length of sentence as a function of the perpetrator’s status and the victim’s status.