

USING APA STYLE IN AN ACADEMIC PAPER

The American Psychological Association has created a guide that is used by academics and students in several disciplines, including education. This style guide, called the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, outlines many conventions that a writer needs to use (including how to reduce bias, which words should be capitalized and which should be lowercased, and how to format research results in tables and figures). There are other style guides for other academic disciplines, but APA style is the standard in education.

All university libraries will have a reference copy of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th edition). You might decide to buy a copy of it for yourself (especially if you're a graduate student or if you're planning to pursue graduate studies). However, the OWL at Purdue University is also a great source of information about APA style conventions and it's free. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

So, what can APA do for you? Well, recall that when you're writing a paper, you're sharing your original thesis with your professor and your peers, and proving that it's true by relying on scholars' research. By using APA style conventions correctly and consistently, you ensure that you're

- using writing conventions that are standard in your profession and so you're identifying yourself as a member of that profession
- writing with integrity and giving credit where credit is due

USING OTHERS' WORK IN YOUR WRITING

According to APA style, there are two ways to communicate to your reader that you've used others' work:

- In your text, you need to show that you've paraphrased or directly quoted someone else.
- At the very end of your paper, you need to provide a list of all the articles, chapters, books, and websites that you've used within the body of your text.

IN-TEXT CITATIONS

PARAPHRASING SOMEONE ELSE

When you paraphrase someone else, you're putting someone else's work in your own words. To make that happen, you need to select only the most important information and do one or both of the following:

- completely change the original wording.
- completely change the order of the ideas and words.

It is important to paraphrase because it shows your readers that you can distill an author's ideas into a tight, compact sentence. While it does require more effort than directly quoting an author, it is an important skill that you have to demonstrate when you're writing an academic paper.

To signal to your reader that you have paraphrased an author, you need to indicate the **author** and the **year** that the article/chapter/book/website was published.

According to Paulo Freire (1977), we need to start by changing the consciousness of the oppressor and the oppressed in order to create a pedagogy that is truly liberating.

A number of surveys of history textbooks currently used in American high schools have shown that the accomplishments of black Americans have been consistently minimized or overlooked (Ali Khan, 2009; Parmar, 2007; Smith 2006).

Notice that when you paraphrase, you don't need to provide the page number or the website where the original text appeared.

DIRECTLY QUOTING SOMEONE ELSE

When you directly quote someone else, you need to keep all or almost all of the original wording intact.

Directly quoting others' work can be effective, especially when the original wording is powerful or when there is no way for you to reasonably paraphrase the original wording.

To signal to your reader that you have directly quoted someone, you need to use quotation marks around the quoted words and you need to indicate the **author**, the **year** that the article/chapter/book/website was published, and the **page number** or **URL** where the quotation can be found.

In an article that was published in the Chicago Tribune on September 25, 2007, Howard Witt wrote that "in the average New Jersey public school, African-American students are almost 60 times as likely as white students to be expelled for serious disciplinary infractions" (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/services/newspaper/edition/chi-070924discipline,0,7975055.story>). This statistic highlights the racism within the infrastructure of American schools.

The public tends to think of segregated schools as an appalling, antiquated practice. This could not be further from the truth: "Racism, inequality, and poverty are on full display in the growing resegregation of public schools in the United States" (Giroux, 2007, p. 35). As educators, we must question the current policies and practices that are dragging our students into a system that divides and conquers.

USING QUOTATIONS OF DIFFERENT LENGTHS

When you directly quote someone else's work and the quotation is less than 40 words, the quotation remains part of your paragraph (see the examples above). When you directly quote someone's work and the quotation is more than 40 words, the quotation needs to be blocked off.

When bell hooks outlined a vision for education in the United States, she called for

progressive, holistic education, "engaged pedagogy," [which] is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes well-being. That means that teachers must be actively involved committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. (hooks, 1994, p. 15)

Her vision of engaged pedagogy offers our greatest hope to reverse the harm done by the racist nature of the American education system and empower our students.

Notice that there are no quotation marks at the beginning or the end of a blocked quotation.

MAKING SMALL CHANGES

When you want to make a very slight change to the wording of a direct quotation, place the change that you've made in square brackets. (I added *which* to the bell hooks quotation above by putting square brackets around *which*.)

POINTING OUT AN ERROR BY THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR

When you want to point out that a mistake was made in the original author's work and that the mistake is not your error, place *[sic]* immediately following the error.

The banking system of education "transforms students into receiving objects. It attempt *[sic]* to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power" (Freire, 1970, p. 77).*

STRIKING A BALANCE

Keep in mind that you need to strike a balance in your writing between using paraphrases and direct quotations. Many university students use direct quotations and long blocked quotations too frequently. This results in a research paper that is loaded with others' words, not the words of the student writer.

If you notice that this is a problem in your work, here's a trick that can help: for each paragraph, ensure that all but one reference is paraphrased. Try to limit yourself to a maximum of one direct quotation per paragraph. Also, if you feel the need to use blocked quotations in your paper, use only one or two.

REFERENCES

As you make note of your in-text citations, it is a good idea to keep track of them in a list at the very end of your paper. This will become your reference list. APA specifies that the word *References* should appear as the heading for this section of your paper. Do not call this your *Reference List*.

For every source of information that you have used, you need to include the following information:

Lastname, Firstinitial. (Year of publication). *Title of the work*. City of publication, State, province, or country of publication: Publishing House.

Notice the positioning of commas, periods, parentheses, colons; the use of italics; and the capitalization of the title. The capitalization and italics must change slightly depending on whether you've used a book, a book chapter, a journal article, or web content (there are other sources of information that you can use, but these are the ones used most frequently in academic writing).

Book

Trainor, M. (2009). *Racism in school*. New York: Peter Lang.

Chapter in an edited book

Titone, C. (1991). "Educating the White teacher as ally." In J. L. Kincheloe, S. R. Steinberg, N. M. Rodriguez & R. E. Chennault (Eds.), *White reign: Deploying whiteness in America* (pp. 159–176). New York: St. Martin's Press.

Journal article

Pachter, L. M., Bernstein, B. A., Szalacha, L. A. & Coll, C. G. (2010). Perceived racism and discrimination in children and youths: An exploratory study. *Health and Social Work, 35*(1), 61–69.

* There is no such error in Freire's work. I made this error up to provide an example

Web content

Emdin, C. (2010, April 24). From the frying pan into the fryer (pun intended): Thoughts on paying students of color to learn [Web blog message]. Retrieved from <http://freireproject.org/blogs/frying-pan-fryer-pun-intended:-thoughts-paying-students-color-learn>

Once your list is complete, you need to organize it alphabetically according to each author's last name.

There are many possible variations within each kind of reference and for the alphabetization of your reference list. If you run into a problem, refer to the APA style guide or check the OWL at Purdue's website.

Now you're ready to keep writing or move on to editing.

See also: "Planning an Academic Paper" "Writing an Academic Paper"
 "Editing an Academic Paper"