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Seventh Edition of APA Style: A Foundation for Advocacy in Counseling

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Seventh Edition of APA Style: A Foundation for Advocacy in Counseling

Abstract
Counselors-in-training are asked to write in a professional voice using APA style but rarely make the connection between the writing style and therapeutic or advocacy work. While the American Psychological Association's (APA) *Publication Manual* presents didactic rules on form and style, it is not intended to provide professional context for the purpose of the adoption of the style. This manuscript draws parallels between the seventh edition of APA's writing style and the four domains outlined in the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2015) and concludes with a concise writing resource.

Keywords
APA, Advocacy, Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, Counselor Training, Written Communication, American Psychological Association Style, Professional Voice, Writing Style
In the counseling profession, where purpose and meaning hold much value, the purpose and meaning of writing style should also be considered. In this manuscript we provide a rationale for using the style guidelines in the seventh edition of The American Psychological Association’s (APA) *Publication Manual* (subsequently referred to as “APA style”) in counseling by drawing parallels between these guidelines and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2015). We also offer a simplified APA resource for quick reference for written advocacy.

**APA Style and Counseling Practice**

APA style originated from a seven-page article published with the purpose of creating a standard writing procedure (APA, 2020). Since that article in 1929, APA has made additions and changes to not only reflect current best practices and new knowledge but also to be inclusive of many professional fields, including but not limited to social and behavioral sciences, natural sciences, health care, and humanities (APA, 2020). Each edition of the APA manual intends to update the style to reflect current knowledge and context.

While APA’s (2020) *Publication Manual* provides a guide to uniformity and consistency in writing, any writing style can do so. The seventh edition of APA format, however, offers parallels to counseling competencies. While it is outside the scope of this manuscript to outline all of the changes between the sixth and seventh editions of APA (please see the *Publication Manual* Introduction for a summary of changes), several specific changes in the seventh edition are overt and progressive style changes to expand guidance on bias-free language. These changes align with the four domains outlined in the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts et al., 2015): domains of (a) counselor self-awareness, (b) client worldview, (c) counseling relationship, and (d) counseling and advocacy interventions.
Self-Awareness

The first domain multicultural and socially just counselors must address is self-awareness, to “explore their attitudes and beliefs, develop knowledge, skills, and action relative to their self-awareness and worldview” (Ratts et al., 2015, p. 5). APA’s (2020) Publication Manual calls for authors to recognize that authors’ past experiences have influence over them and may result in biased language. In fact, APA’s Publication Manual has an entire chapter dedicated to bias-free language, calling for students to be affirming and inclusive in their language about persons, especially regarding “age, disability, gender, participation in research, racial or ethnic identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or some combination of these or other personal factors (including marital status, immigration status, religion)” (APA, 2020, p. 131). Authors are asked to be aware that our own biases may present themselves in our writing and to actively look for and address these biases (APA, 2020). In practicality, authors are encouraged to be self-aware by re-reading their own writing to identify and correct preconceptions and biases about groups of people (APA, 2020).

Client World View

Multicultural and socially just counselors work to understand the clients’ worldview and to have knowledge of historical events and current issues that may impact the client’s worldview (Ratts et al., 2015). One way that the APA’s (2020) Publication Manual enables understanding of how historical events may impact the client’s (or student’s) world view is through requiring in-text references to prominently include the date of publication. The Modern Language Association Style (MLA, 2016) and Chicago Style (University of Chicago Press, 2019), for example, include a page number citation instead of a date. This may be appropriate for some professions, but in counseling, the date offers critical context to assist readers in evaluating relevancy and historical context.

Not all manuscripts age well. For example, when reading about the wellness of children raised by same-sex parents, a reader should heed information differently if the research is from 1975 or 2020, as
the worldviews and research methodologies have changed significantly between those years. Similarly, cultural considerations from publications in 1985 should be considered differently than current publications; the date of the publication may significantly impact the conclusions a reader makes 35 years later. Finally, including the date when citing a Code of Ethics enables the reader to know if the author was working from the current code or a dated code.

While media may not initially seem like an element specifically for client world view, we make the argument that APA’s (2020) Publication Manual validates various ways in which people communicate and share information and perspectives. For example, APA provides guidance for citing media such as tweets, podcast episodes, and even Wikipedia. The simple act of providing guidance on how to cite these media sources provides evidence that APA values these media sources. Furthermore, the APA’s seventh edition revises the Byzantine process of referencing online journals to place the focus on the reader (not the author) when determining the information necessary for the reader to find the material.

Counseling Relationship

Multicultural and socially just counselors are “aware, knowledgeable, skilled, and action-oriented in understanding how client and counselor privileged and marginalized statuses influence the counseling relationship” (Ratts et al., 2015, p. 9). The goal of APA’s (2020) Publication Manual is to “support the many ways in which people communicate” (APA, 2020, p. xviii); communication is a critical facet of the counseling relationship. The seventh edition of APA makes clear efforts to affirm dignity and worth of all people and more clearly communicates the value of humanity over formality; this promotes relationship building, which is a critical part of the therapeutic relationship.

Although the author of a manuscript may not know each reader, some sort of relationship is formed when the manuscript is read. To enhance that relationship, there are directions to emphasize accessibility for users with disabilities. For example, there are typography, color, citation, and reference
formatting guidelines that privilege accessibility for people who use various technologies (e.g., screen readers) to consume and create manuscripts.

APA aligns to counseling skills as well, as APA format helps facilitate effective communication in the therapeutic relationship. For example, a key microskill in counseling is paraphrasing (instead of parroting) to show comprehension and enhance the counseling relationship. Similarly, authors are asked to paraphrase (instead of quoting) unless the material is seminal, such as counseling competencies. Another critical counseling skill is documenting case notes at the end of sessions. These case notes typically involve the use of headings such as Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan or Data, Assessment, and Plan. APA style provides clear direction on how to present information within headings so that information is clear, concise, and professional; this is especially important in a profession where case notes may be subpoenaed. Counselors are ethically bound to “open, honest and accurate communication” (ACA, 2014, p. 8), including written communication such as informed consent with a client or collaborating with other professionals.

Counseling and Advocacy Interventions

Multicultural and socially just counselors “intervene with, and on behalf of clients at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional, community, public policy, and international/global levels” (Ratts et al., 2015, p. 11). The American Counseling Association (ACA)'s mission includes advocacy (ACA, n.d.), and the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) calls for counselors to “advocate at individual, group, institutional, and societal levels to address potential barriers and obstacles” (p. 5).

Writing is necessary for academic success of course, but a strong professional written voice is also necessary for professional excellence and successful advocacy efforts. In fact, ACA Advocacy Competencies (2020) present an outline of actions advocacy-oriented counselors should attend to, which include written materials. Counselors-in-training and helping professionals use written communication to advocate for clients, students, the profession, and themselves (McDonald, 2011). Professionals often
rely on writing skills to advocate for positive social change through grant writing and policy writing, advocate for client and student services through insurance companies, and may even deliver therapeutic services through written distance counseling. All of these advocacy efforts require the written brevity, clarity, and precision APA (2020) offers to drive positive social change.

One practical way that authors can advocate and be an ally for others is through using inclusive unbiased language. In APA style, authors are asked to recognize that language adapts over time and to use language that the person being described uses to describe themselves. Language evolves and refines itself based on the people who use the language, and APA style embraces and endorses the evolution of language to promote inclusion. For example, the APA makes a clear acceptance (and encouragement) for the use of “they” as a singular pronoun to avoid making assumptions about gender. In general, APA asks for authors to use language that reflects the world view of those being written about. In fact, APA stated that “honoring the preference of the group is not only a sign of professional awareness and respect…but also a way to offer solidarity” (p. 133).

This call for flexibility with language also aligns with other counseling competencies such as the Disability-Related Counseling Competencies (Chapin et al., 2018), the Competencies for Counseling with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Ally Individuals (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce, 2013), and Competencies for Counseling the Multiracial Population (Multi-Racial/Ethnic Counseling Concerns Interest Network of the American Counseling Association Taskforce, 2015). Like Chapter 5 of the APA’s (2020) *Publication Manual*, these competencies are intended to provide a framework of best practices to attend to the diverse population counselors work with and write about; they are not a set of absolute rules.

*APA’s (2020) Publication Manual* provides guidance on how to reduce bias when writing about topics such as age, disability, gender, racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, as well as the intersectionality of identities. Awareness leads to positive changes in behaviors
(LaMantia et al., 2015), bringing awareness to the way that characteristics and group memberships intersect and relate to inequality is advocacy in and of itself.

Counseling students can practically advance their advocacy skills by developing their professional writing style in their coursework. Consistent format in writing style helps advocacy efforts shine through by allowing the readers to focus on the content as opposed to format. To that end, a sample student paper is included after this paragraph to provide a visual and concise example of APA’s seventh edition. This sample paper is a parallel process of a paper written about APA style in APA style (note this is McDonald’s [2011] sample paper updated for the seventh edition of APA’s Publication Manual). While APA’s (2020) Publication Manual itself is the comprehensive standard, the following sample paper—which uses the format indicated for a student rather than professional paper for this context—provides the basic tenets of APA style to help students begin navigating the complex set of standards for their academic writing in order to perfect their advocacy skills.
An Example of the American Psychological Association’s Seventh Edition Student Format

Student N. Class

School of Counseling, Walden University

COUN 6100: Introduction to Counseling

Dr. Facul T. Member

February 14, 2021
An Example of the American Psychological Association’s Format

The line above this paragraph is the title of the paper from the title page. It is centered and bolded. Please also note it is not labeled “Introduction.” There is no heading of “Introduction” in APA. The purpose and format of the paper are introduced here. The purpose of this paper is to provide a basic written example of the format of the American Psychological Association (APA). The first section of this manuscript, APA Basics, is an overview of elements used in all APA papers, including the title page and headings. The next section, Citations and References, focuses on how to cite and reference citations, including the format of the reference page. The third section, Specific Concerns, handles special instances in APA that may or may not be utilized in an APA document (e.g., quotations, the usage of numbers, and seriation). Finally, I will present a conclusion section.

APA Basics

This section includes information about the standards used throughout every APA document. I will present standards for the entirety of the manuscript (e.g., spacing, font, margins, paragraph length, and person) followed by standards that should be included in every manuscript (e.g., title page, page headers, and headings).

Standards for the Entirety of a Manuscript

All typing in APA is double spaced. Use a consistent font throughout the document, choosing from the options listed in 2.19 of the APA manual (e.g., 11-point Calibri, 11-point Arial, 10-point Lucida Sans Unicode, 12-point Times New Roman, or 11-point Georgia). The spacing between paragraphs should be set to zero. Margins are 1 inch on the top, bottom, and sides. Default font, margins, and spacing in Microsoft Word documents are not APA standard; wise authors reset the standard margins to 1 inch and the standard spacing between paragraphs to zero. Authors should vary sentence and paragraph length for interest and comprehension.
Bias-Free Language

APA (2020) devoted a full chapter to guidelines for ensuring bias-free language. These guidelines include advice for treatment of age, disability, gender, race, ethnic identity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, alongside the intersectionality of these and other characteristics and contexts. APA provided specific recommendations for using sensitive, respectful, and inclusive language within each of these topics, but the guiding principles are that “authors should use affirming and inclusive language” (p. 131) and “accept that language changes with time and that individuals within groups sometimes disagree about the designations they use” (p. 133). The wording and recommendations will evolve over time, and writers should anticipate and reflect that dynamic in their writing.

Standards to be Included in Every Manuscript

This section is about standards that happen only once in a manuscript, including the title page and page headers. A title page is similar to a cover for a book and is necessary for the front of every manuscript. Page headers ensure that the manuscript is in the correct order.

Title Page

The title page is page 1 of this document. For student papers, the title page consists of (a) the title, (b) the byline and institutional affiliation, (c) course prefix and title, (d) your instructor’s name, and (e) the date. This information is all center justified, in uppercase and lowercase letters, and positioned in the upper half of the page (nothing should be in the lower half of the page). The title should be in bold, but all other lines should be in plain text. The byline is the author’s name. Institutional affiliation is the name of the department and university.

Headings

Headings are similar to chapter titles in textbooks. It is often helpful for the author to begin writing out the headings of the document before actually writing, as it provides the structure for the paper. Headings help the reader know the purpose of the section and allow for others to refer back to a
section easily (e.g., information about headings can be found under the Headings section of “Standards to be Included in Every Manuscript”). Headings are never underlined, nor do they use bullet points or colons.

**Levels of Headings.** There are five potential headings in APA, although authors may only use two or three. Regardless of the number of headings used, headings should always be used in order, beginning with Level 1. It is rare to only have one heading; one level of heading offers little guidance to the readers as to the purpose/point of the document.

It is likely that most papers for school work will need three levels of heading. This document uses four levels of heading. Most literature reviews should be either three or four levels to provide direction and guidance to the reader. The format of each level is illustrated below (note that all are set in bold):

**Level 1 is Centered, Bold, Uppercase and Lowercase**

Content follows on a new line.

**Level 2 is Left-Aligned, Bold, Uppercase and Lowercase**

Content follows on an indented new line.

**Level 3 is Left-Aligned, Bold, Italicized, Uppercase and Lowercase.**

Content follows on an indented new line.

**Level 4 is Indented, Bold, Uppercase and Lowercase, Ending with a Period.** Content continues on the same line.

**Level 5: Indented, Bold, Italicized, Uppercase & Lowercase, Ending with a Period.** Content continues on the same line.

**Citations and References**

Citations are credit given to authors in the text. When an author fails to cite others for their ideas, the author plagiarizes. References are included at the end of the document and include all
information needed for the reader to locate the original documents (e.g., book, journal, website) that have been cited in the text. The next section covers how to cite in text, followed by how to format the reference page.

Citations in Text

Document manuscripts by citing the author and date of the works used to compose the document. This allows the reader to quickly identify sources and locate the entire source at the end of the manuscript (in the references). In order to cite a source, first determine if there is/are (a) one author, (b) two authors, or (c) three more authors. An example of how to cite each of these appears here, both narrative (when the author’s name appears as part of a sentence), and parenthetical (when it appears alongside the year inside parentheses). Please note that “once you have provided a narrative citation to a work in a paragraph, do not repeat the year in subsequent narrative citations in that same paragraph” (APA, 2020, p. 266). See the APA manual for more information.

One-Author Citation

Cook (2019) indicated that red, blue, and yellow helium balloons make her happy. The primary colors are frequent indicators of joy (Cook, 2019). Cook discovered that, within a paragraph, authors need not include the year of an already cited source in subsequent citations, so long as it is in the narrative and not in a parenthetical. Citing one author is rather straightforward (Cook, 2019).

Two-Author Citation

McDonald and Merk (2018) snuggled with assistance dogs in training. Cats can be assistance animals too, but they are harder to train (McDonald & Merk, 2018). Always cite both names every time the reference occurs in the text (McDonald & Merk, 2018). McDonald and Merk, however, discovered that the year need not be included in subsequent in-text citations as long as it is not in a parenthetical. Note that when citing multiple authors in the narrative, the word and is used, but when the names are in a parenthetical, an & is used (McDonald & Merk, 2018).
Three-or-More-Author Citation

Hutchison et al. (2016) like to publish together. When there are three or more authors, only the first surname followed by *et al.* is cited (Hutchison et al., 2016). Cite only the surname of the first author followed by “*et al.*” (with a period after “*al*”) and the year for the first and subsequent citations (Hutchison et al., 2016). In the reference list, however, instead of using *et al.*, cite all authors (up to 20).

Reference List

The reference list is how readers can locate the original documents being referenced in your paper. Start references on a new page at the end of the document. Type the word “References” in uppercase and lowercase letters, bolded, and centered at the top of the page. Use hanging indent format (the first line of each references is flush left, while subsequent lines are indented) and double spacing for each reference. The reference list of this paper begins on page 13.

Arrange entries in alphabetical order by surname of the first author. Remember: nothing precedes something (e.g., Brown, J. R. precedes Browning, A. R.). If there are two entries with the same author, the earliest date goes first. References with the same first author and different second or third authors are arranged alphabetically by the surname of the second author or, if the second author is the same, the surname of the third author, and so on.

Periodical

A periodical is printed periodically, such as a journal. After this paragraph there will be an example of how to reference a periodical. Note only the periodical title and volume number are in italics. Include the issue number if one is listed. Capitalize only the first letter of the title of an article (and first letter of subheading if applicable) and any proper nouns, such as a place or name. Place a period at the end of the reference. If the article has a DOI, include it at the end of the reference, even if you did not access it online.

**Online Periodical**

An online periodical is posted online periodically, in a source such as an online journal. After this paragraph there will be an example of how to reference an online periodical. Note only the periodical title and volume number are in italics, and the issue number is in plain text, in parentheses. In the title, capitalize only the first letter of the title of article (and first letter of subheading if applicable). For example, in the article “Night Owls Who Love Cheese,” only “Night” would be capitalized in the reference. The journal title is italicized and capitalized. Include the article’s DOI, if it has one.


**Nonperiodical**

A nonperiodical is printed once, such as a book. After this paragraph there will be an example of how to reference a nonperiodical. Note only the *Title of work* is italicized. Capitalize only the first letter of the title of the source (and first letter of subheading if applicable). Place a period at the end of the reference.


**Part of a Nonperiodical**

A book chapter is an example of part of a nonperiodical. After this paragraph, there will be an example of how to reference part of a nonperiodical. Note only the title of work is italicized. Capitalize only the first letter of the title of the article or chapter (and first letter of subheading if applicable). Place a period at the end of the reference.

Author, A. A. (2009). Title of chapter: Subheading if applicable. In A. Editor, B. Editor, & C. Editor (Eds.) *Title of work* (pp. xxx–xxx). Publisher.
Online Document

After this paragraph there will be an example of how to reference an online document. Capitalize only the first letter of the title of article (and first letter of subheading if applicable). After the title, include the name of the website and then the URL of the article.


Online Document Created by a Private Organization

After this paragraph there will be an example of how to reference an online document. The author slot will use the name of the organization. If the date is given, simply omit n.d. (which stands for no date) and insert the date. Note only the title of the webpage is in italics. Capitalize only the first letter of the title of article (and first letter of subheading if applicable). After the title, include the name of the website and then the URL of the article.


Stand-Alone Online Document, No Author

After this paragraph there will be an example of how to reference a stand-alone online document. If the date is given, simply omit n.d. (which stands for no date) and insert the date. Note only the title of the webpage is in italics. Capitalize only the first letter of the title of article (and first letter of subheading if applicable).


Specific Concerns

There are many specific concerns that the APA manual addresses. This section presents a few of those concerns: quotations, lists, i.e. and e.g., and the use of numbers. Please refer to the manual for more information.
Quotations

Credit must be given to the source of information, regardless of whether it is a paraphrase or a direct quote (APA, 2020). According to the APA manual, there are two ways to quote in a manuscript. One is applicable for quotes containing fewer than 40 words, and the other is applicable for quotes encompassing 40 or more words. Examples of both are given here. See the APA manual for more information.

Quotations With Fewer Than 40 Words

For a quotation with fewer than 40 words, writers “should incorporate it into the text and enclose it within double quotation marks” (APA, 2020, p. 271). More information about quotes can be found on pages 270-278 of the APA manual.

Quotations With 40 or More Words

Quotations with 40 or more words should be used sparingly, if at all. At the end of the quote, after the punctuation, enclose the page number in a parenthetical. The APA (2020) manual instructs as follows:

If a quotation contains 40 words or more, treat it as a block quotation. Do not use quotation marks to enclose a block quotation. Start a block quotation on a new line and indent the whole block 0.5 in. from the left margin. (p. 272)

Quotations From Electronic Documents

A special note should be given regarding quotations from electronic documents without page numbers. For these sources, you have four options from which to choose:

1. Provide a heading or section name.
2. Provide an abbreviated heading or section name in quotation marks, if the full name would be too long to list practically.
3. Provide a paragraph number preceded by the abbreviation “para.”
4. Provide a heading or section name alongside a paragraph number.

Lists

To create lists within a paragraph or sentence, use lowercase letters (not italicized) in parentheses. The following provides an example: Students correctly used APA format in the (a) margins, (b) title page, (c) page headers, and (d) headings. Longer lists or those that include complete sentences can use numerals or bullets, with examples on pp. 189–191.

Use of “e.g.” and “i.e.”

The Latin phrase “Exempli gratia” (which means “for example”) has been shortened to “e.g.” in APA format. A mnemonic device to remember this may be helpful: if “example” were to be spelled like it sounds, it would start with “eg”. Use “e.g.” when the phrase “for example” can be substituted. Often “e.g.” is used when a complete listing is not possible (e.g., fruit), so examples are given (e.g., apples, bananas, and kiwi). The Latin phrase “id est” (which means “that is”) has been initialized to “i.e.” in APA format. Use “i.e.” when the phrase “that is” can be substituted (i.e., when writing completely, not simply giving examples).

Numbers

In general, numbers nine and below should be expressed in words. Use numbers or figures to express numbers 10 and above. Do not begin sentences with numbers. See the APA manual pp. 178–181 for exceptions.

Conclusion

Just as fifth grade teachers instruct, every well-written document summarizes what was covered and identifies the most salient points of the paper. The last section is perhaps the most important section of the entire paper, as it clarifies the author’s intention. Think of the conclusion section as the punch line to a joke; the rest of the information is important to understand the punch line, but without the punch line, the purpose of the joke is lost.
This document serves as a visual example and written direction of writing in APA format. It is not meant to be a substitute for the APA manual, but it lays the foundation for those who are new to APA format. It covered the logistics of APA format, including how to write a title page, format a document, cite and reference others, and conclude the document.
References


Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to draw connections between the guidance in APA’s *Publication Manual* and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies. Seeing these connections can help counselor educators work with students who may be reluctant to embrace APA style. In addition to weaving these two sets of principles together, we presented practical suggestions for supporting APA compliance among counselors-in-training, including a sample paper to serve as a visual.
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Multi-Racial/Ethnic Counseling Concerns MRECC Interest Network of the American Counseling Association Taskforce (2015). *Competencies for counseling the multiracial population.* American Counseling