

APA 7 Quick Guide

Junior Edition: Student Paper Formatting, In-Text Citations, References, Quotations, Paraphrases, Tables, Figures, Bias-Free Language, and Final APA Quality Control

JUNIOR SUCCESS VAULT

A practical teaching guide for common APA 7 student-paper situations. This resource explains patterns and decision logic; it does not replace the official Publication Manual, instructor directions, or institutional templates.

Student: _____

Course / Assignment: _____

Plan. Prepare. Progress.

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How to Use This Guide

Use this guide while planning, drafting, and checking an APA-style student paper. Start with your instructor's directions because course-specific requirements can override general student-paper conventions. Then use the relevant sections for formatting, citations, references, quotations, tables, figures, and final quality control.

Examples are instructional and intentionally generic. For unusual source types or questions not covered here, consult the current APA Style guidance or Publication Manual.

APA 7 SCOPE

APA Style covers much more than citation formatting. It also addresses paper organization, headings, numbers, tables, figures, language, source attribution, and scholarly communication. This guide focuses on the situations undergraduate students encounter most often.

1. What APA Style Does

APA Style creates conventions for presenting scholarly work so readers can identify structure, trace sources, interpret tables and figures, and understand the writer's meaning consistently.

Your instructor may require APA even when the assignment is not a journal manuscript.

2. Student Papers vs. Professional Papers

APA 7 distinguishes student and professional papers. Student papers generally have simpler title-page requirements and ordinarily do not require a running head unless the instructor requests one.

Always follow course-specific directions.

3. Instructor Directions Come First

If an instructor provides a template, rubric, or explicit formatting requirement, follow it. Do not argue that a generic APA rule should override an assignment-specific instruction.

When uncertain, ask the instructor.

4. Consistency Matters

Formatting should be consistent across headings, spacing, citations, references, tables, and figures. Small inconsistencies can make a paper difficult to review.

Use a final formatting pass after substantive revision.

5. Margins

APA student papers generally use one-inch margins on all sides unless the instructor specifies otherwise.

Check document settings rather than relying on visual appearance.

6. Line Spacing

APA papers generally use double spacing throughout, including the title page and reference list, with limited exceptions permitted for certain elements.

Avoid adding extra blank lines between ordinary paragraphs.

7. Paragraph Indentation

The first line of most body paragraphs is indented 0.5 inch. Use paragraph settings rather than pressing the space bar repeatedly.

Reference entries use a hanging indent instead.

8. Fonts

APA 7 permits several accessible fonts rather than requiring only one. Common accepted options include 12-point Times New Roman, 11-point Calibri, 11-point Arial, and other listed fonts.

Use one appropriate font consistently unless a figure or special element requires otherwise.

9. Page Numbers

Student papers use page numbers beginning on the title page. The number appears in the header at the top right.

A running head is normally not required for student papers unless instructed.

10. Title Page

A typical student title page includes the paper title, author, institutional affiliation, course number and name, instructor, and assignment due date, centered in the upper half according to APA student-paper conventions.

Use the exact course and instructor information provided.

11. Paper Title

Use a concise, informative title in bold title case on the title page and again at the beginning of the paper's text.

Do not use 'Introduction' as a heading immediately under the paper title in a standard APA paper because the opening text itself functions as the introduction.

12. Abstract

Student papers do not automatically require an abstract. Include one only if the assignment, program, or instructor requires it.

If required, follow the appropriate APA abstract conventions.

13. Student Paper Setup Checklist

Element	Typical APA 7 student-paper approach	My assignment
Margins	1 inch on all sides	
Spacing	Double-spaced unless an allowed exception applies	
Paragraph indent	0.5-inch first-line indent	
Page number	Top right, beginning on title page	
Running head	Usually not required for student papers unless instructed	
Title page	Title, author, affiliation, course, instructor, due date	
Abstract	Only when required	
References	New page with centered bold heading	

14. APA Heading Levels

APA provides five heading levels. Most undergraduate papers use only the levels needed to represent the hierarchy of sections.

Do not choose a heading level because you like its appearance.

15. Level 1

Level 1 is centered, bold, and in title case. Text begins as a new paragraph below it.

Use it for major sections.

16. Level 2

Level 2 is flush left, bold, and in title case. Text begins as a new paragraph below it.

Use it for subsections within a Level 1 section.

17. Level 3

Level 3 is flush left, bold italic, and in title case. Text begins as a new paragraph below it.

Use only when the hierarchy requires it.

18. Levels 4 and 5

Levels 4 and 5 are indented paragraph-style headings. They are less common in shorter undergraduate papers.

Check the official APA manual for exact punctuation and formatting when you need them.

19. Heading Hierarchy

Do not skip levels merely for visual preference. A subsection under Level 1 should normally be Level 2, not Level 3.

Hierarchy communicates organization.

20. Why In-Text Citations Matter

An in-text citation tells the reader which source supports an idea and connects that use to the full reference entry.

Citation is required for quotations and for paraphrased or summarized ideas that are not your own.

21. Parenthetical Citation

A parenthetical citation places author and year in parentheses, usually near the borrowed idea. Example pattern: (Rivera, 2025).

The punctuation placement depends on the sentence and quotation structure.

22. Narrative Citation

A narrative citation integrates the author into the sentence. Example pattern: Rivera (2025) reported that...

Use narrative citations when the author is part of the sentence's meaning.

23. One Author

Use the author's surname and year: (Patel, 2024) or Patel (2024).

The full first name is ordinarily not included in the in-text citation.

24. Two Authors

Cite both surnames every time. In parenthetical citations use an ampersand: (Lee & Morgan, 2023). In narrative text use 'and': Lee and Morgan (2023).

This distinction is a common student error.

25. Three or More Authors

Use the first author's surname followed by 'et al.' from the first citation: (Garcia et al., 2026).

The reference entry follows separate author-list rules.

26. Group Authors

Organizations can serve as authors. Write the organization's name as the author; an abbreviation may sometimes be introduced if it is well known and will be reused.

Do not create an abbreviation that confuses the reader.

27. No Author

When no author exists, use the title or a shortened form of the title in the author position according to APA rules. The formatting of the title depends on the source type.

Do not use 'Anonymous' unless the work is actually credited to Anonymous.

28. No Date

Use 'n.d.' when the source has no date.

Do not guess a publication year.

29. Multiple Sources in One Parenthesis

Multiple works can be cited together in one parenthesis and are generally ordered alphabetically by first author, separated by semicolons.

Use this only when all cited sources support the relevant point.

30. Same Author, Same Year

Distinguish works with letters such as 2025a and 2025b based on the ordering of the reference entries.

The letters must match in text and references.

31. Secondary Sources

APA permits secondary-source citation when the original work is unavailable, but it is preferable to consult the original whenever possible.

Do not imply you read a source you did not access.

32. In-Text Citation Pattern Guide

Situation	Parenthetical pattern	Narrative pattern
One author	(Rivera, 2025)	Rivera (2025)
Two authors	(Lee & Morgan, 2023)	Lee and Morgan (2023)
3+ authors	(Garcia et al., 2026)	Garcia et al. (2026)
Organization	(National Example Agency, 2025)	National Example Agency (2025)
No date	(Patel, n.d.)	Patel (n.d.)
Direct quote	(Rivera, 2025, p. 14)	Rivera (2025) stated ... (p. 14).

33. Paraphrase vs. Direct Quote

A paraphrase expresses the source idea in genuinely new wording and sentence structure; a direct quote reproduces exact words.

Both require citation.

34. Paraphrase Citations

APA requires author and year for paraphrases. A page or paragraph number is not generally required, but it can help readers locate a specific passage in long or complex works.

Follow instructor requirements if stricter.

35. Short Quotations

Quotations under 40 words are incorporated into the text with quotation marks and include author, year, and a locator such as page number when available.

Do not change wording silently.

36. Block Quotations

Quotations of 40 words or more are formatted as block quotations: begin on a new line, indent the entire block 0.5 inch, and omit quotation marks.

Citation punctuation differs from ordinary short quotations; consult the official guidance when formatting.

37. Sources Without Page Numbers

For sources without pages, use another logical locator when needed for a direct quotation, such as paragraph number, section heading, or a combination appropriate to the source.

The goal is to help the reader locate the quoted passage.

38. Changes to Quotations

APA has conventions for ellipses, brackets, emphasis, and errors in quoted material. Use them only when needed and without changing the source's meaning.

For uncommon quotation alterations, verify the official rule.

39. Overquoting

Even correctly cited quotations can weaken a paper if they replace the student's analysis. Quote when exact wording matters; otherwise synthesize or paraphrase from understanding.

Your reasoning should remain visible.

40. Patchwriting

Replacing a few words in a source sentence while preserving its structure is not a strong paraphrase and may create plagiarism concerns.

Read, understand, look away, write from understanding, then compare for accuracy.

41. Paraphrase Practice - Fictional Example

Source idea for practice: Students who plan complex assignments by intermediate milestones may be better able to identify delays before the final deadline. This sentence is fictional and is not a real source.

Weak patchwrite: Students who plan difficult assignments with intermediate milestones can identify delays before the final due date. The sentence structure remains too close.

Stronger paraphrase: Breaking a major assignment into earlier checkpoints can make schedule problems visible while there is still time to respond. A real paper would cite the actual source supporting the idea.

42. Reference List Purpose

The reference list provides enough publication information for readers to identify and retrieve the sources cited in the paper.

It is not a bibliography of everything you read unless the assignment specifically requests one.

43. Reference Page Setup

Begin references on a new page with the centered, bold heading 'References.' Entries are double-spaced and use a 0.5-inch hanging indent.

Do not number entries unless instructed for a different format.

44. Alphabetical Order

Order references alphabetically by the surname of the first author or by the appropriate title when no author exists.

APA has additional rules for identical authors and dates.

45. Author Names

References generally invert author names: surname followed by initials. The number of authors shown in a reference entry follows APA's specific rules.

Do not convert first names to initials incorrectly when metadata are unclear.

46. Date Element

The date appears after the author. The amount of date detail depends on source type.

Use n.d. when no date exists.

47. Title Capitalization

Titles of articles, books, reports, and webpages generally use sentence case in reference entries; periodical titles use title case.

This differs from title-case formatting used in some headings.

48. Italics

APA uses italics differently by source type. For journal articles, the journal title and volume are italicized; the article title is not.

Learn the pattern rather than italicizing everything.

49. DOI

When a DOI exists, APA presents it as a URL beginning with <https://doi.org/>.

Do not write 'doi:' before it.

50. URLs

For many online works, provide the URL when it is part of the reference pattern. Retrieval dates are used only in certain circumstances, especially content designed to change over time.

Do not add a retrieval date automatically.

51. Database Information

Most academic journal references do not include the name of a common academic database.

Exceptions exist for certain proprietary or limited-circulation works.

52. Journal Article Pattern

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Year). Title of article. Journal Title, volume(issue), page-page. DOI

Include issue number when applicable under APA 7 conventions.

53. Book Pattern

Author, A. A. (Year). Title of book. Publisher. DOI when available.

Do not include publisher location in APA 7.

54. Chapter in an Edited Book

Chapter Author, A. A. (Year). Title of chapter. In E. E. Editor (Ed.), Title of book (pp. xx-xx). Publisher. DOI when available.

The chapter author, not the editor, leads the entry.

55. Webpage Pattern

Author or Group. (Date). Title of page. Site Name. URL

When the author and site name are the same, APA generally omits the repeated site name.

56. Report Pattern

Authoring organization. (Year). Title of report (Report No. if applicable). Publisher if different from author. URL

Treat the report as a standalone work.

57. Government Webpage or Report

Government agencies can be group authors. Identify the specific agency responsible for the content rather than automatically using the highest-level government entity.

Use the pattern that matches the actual source.

58. Newspaper Article

Author, A. A. (Date). Title of article. Newspaper Name. URL

Online newspaper articles generally do not require page numbers in the reference if the online version is cited.

59. Magazine Article

Author, A. A. (Date). Title of article. Magazine Name, volume(issue), pages when applicable. URL or DOI as appropriate.

Use the actual publication information available.

60. Dissertation or Thesis

The pattern depends on whether the work is published in a database/repository or unpublished. Include the degree/work type and institution as required by the applicable APA pattern.

Verify the exact source category.

61. Conference Presentation

Conference presentations include presenter, date, title, presentation type, conference name, and location or URL when appropriate.

Use the official APA example for the presentation type.

62. Dataset

Datasets can be cited with author, date, title, version where relevant, bracketed description, publisher/repository, and DOI/URL.

Do not cite a webpage about a dataset when the dataset itself is the source you used.

63. YouTube or Streaming Video

Audiovisual references identify the responsible account/author, date, title, bracketed format, platform, and URL.

The uploader may differ from the person appearing in the video.

64. Podcast Episode

Podcast episode references identify host or responsible creator, date, episode title, episode number when available, bracketed description, podcast title, production company, and URL.

Verify the exact APA pattern.

65. Social Media

APA provides patterns for posts on social platforms. Include author/account, date, up to the first 20 words as the title element, bracketed description, platform, and URL as appropriate.

Use social media as evidence only when relevant to the research purpose.

66. Fictional Reference Examples

These examples demonstrate structure only. The sources are fictional, so do not cite them in academic work.

Type	Fictional example
Journal article	Rivera, M. L., & Chen, T. R. (2025). Student planning behaviors and project completion. <i>Journal of Academic Planning</i> , 18(2), 44-61. https://doi.org/10.0000/example.2025.001
Book	Patel, N. J. (2024). <i>Evidence-based student learning</i> . Example Academic Press.
Webpage	National Student Learning Center. (2026, March 4). Building a semester study plan. https://www.example.org/study-plan
Report	Center for Undergraduate Research. (2025). Undergraduate research participation report. https://www.example.org/report

67. Personal Communications

Emails, private messages, interviews, phone calls, and other nonrecoverable personal communications are generally cited in text but not included in the reference list.

Obtain permission and follow research/assignment ethics when relevant.

68. Course Materials

How to cite slides, lecture notes, learning-management-system content, or course packs depends on whether the material is recoverable by the intended audience and the source type.

Ask the instructor or consult official APA guidance for ambiguous cases.

69. Lecture Content

A classroom lecture that readers cannot retrieve may be treated as personal communication in some contexts, but course requirements may differ.

Prefer original published sources when the assignment expects research evidence.

70. Laws and Legal Materials

Legal citation in APA follows specialized conventions influenced by legal citation systems.

Use the APA legal-reference guidance rather than ordinary author-date patterns.

71. Standards

Professional or technical standards may have specialized group-author and publication patterns.

Verify the exact issuing organization and standard identifier.

72. AI-Generated Content

Rules and institutional expectations for citing or disclosing generative AI can evolve. APA has issued guidance for certain uses, but students must also follow current instructor and institutional AI policies.

Never fabricate citations generated by AI.

73. Repeatedly Updated Pages

For content designed to change over time, a retrieval date may be appropriate under APA rules.

Use the official guidance to determine when.

74. Tables vs. Figures

Tables organize values or text in rows and columns. Figures include charts, graphs, photographs, diagrams, maps, and other visual displays.

Use a visual only when it improves communication.

75. Table Number and Title

APA tables have a bold table number followed by an italicized title in title case on the next line.

Place the table where instructed by the assignment.

76. Table Body

Use clear headings, consistent alignment, and only necessary borders. APA generally favors clean tables without vertical gridlines.

Do not shrink text until it becomes unreadable.

77. Table Notes

Notes below a table can explain abbreviations, symbols, statistical information, or source attribution.

General, specific, and probability notes have distinct purposes.

78. Figure Number and Title

APA figures use a bold figure number and italicized title. The figure itself should be clear and legible.

Use labels that remain understandable when printed or viewed at normal size.

79. Figure Notes

A figure note can explain content, abbreviations, or attribution.

If adapting or reproducing copyrighted material, permissions and attribution requirements may apply.

80. Mention Every Table and Figure

Refer to each table or figure in the text and explain what the reader should notice.

Do not insert visuals without analytical purpose.

81. Bias-Free Language

APA encourages language that is accurate, respectful, specific, and free of unnecessary labels or stereotypes.

Terminology can evolve; follow current guidance and the preferences of groups or individuals when known.

82. Person-First and Identity-First Language

Different communities and individuals prefer different conventions. APA recognizes that identity-first language may be preferred in some contexts.

Use informed, respectful terminology rather than applying one rule universally.

83. Age

Use specific age ranges when relevant rather than vague or potentially biased labels.

Do not mention age when it is irrelevant.

84. Disability

Use respectful terminology and avoid language that defines a person solely by disability unless identity-first language is preferred.

Follow current APA guidance and community preferences.

85. Race and Ethnicity

Capitalize racial and ethnic group names as appropriate and use specific terms supported by the research context.

Do not use broad categories when the evidence supports more precise identification.

86. Gender and Pronouns

Use people's stated names and pronouns when known. Singular 'they' is accepted in APA Style.

Avoid assuming gender from names or roles.

87. Socioeconomic Status

Use precise descriptions of income, education, occupation, or resource context when relevant rather than stigmatizing labels.

Explain how categories were defined in the source or study.

88. Concise Scholarly Writing

APA favors clear, direct writing. Remove unnecessary jargon, inflated phrases, and repetition.

Complex ideas can be expressed clearly without sounding simplistic.

89. Active and Passive Voice

Both can be appropriate. Active voice often improves clarity; passive voice can be useful when the actor is unknown or less important.

Choose based on meaning, not a blanket prohibition.

90. Numbers

APA has detailed rules for numerals and words. A common general rule is to use numerals for 10 and above and words for numbers below 10, with many important exceptions.

Measurements, statistics, ages, dates, times, percentages, and mathematical expressions often use numerals regardless.

91. Percentages

APA 7 generally uses the percent symbol with numerals, such as 35%, rather than spelling out percent.

Check context for exceptions.

92. Statistical Symbols

Statistical symbols such as *M*, *SD*, *p*, and *r* follow specific italicization and formatting conventions.

Use the official APA statistical guidance for formal results reporting.

93. Abbreviations

Introduce an abbreviation only if it helps the reader. Write the full term at first use followed by the abbreviation in parentheses, then use the abbreviation consistently.

Do not abbreviate terms used only a few times.

94. Lists

APA permits numbered, lettered, and bulleted lists depending on whether sequence or emphasis matters.

Maintain grammatical parallelism.

95. Seriation in Sentences

Letters or numbers can organize items within a sentence when appropriate. Punctuation depends on structure.

Do not over-format simple prose.

96. Case: Maya Cites Every Sentence

Maya paraphrases one source across an entire paragraph and places the same citation after every sentence. The paragraph becomes visually cluttered and it is unclear where her own analysis begins.

She revises the paragraph so attribution remains clear while integrating her own reasoning. APA citation placement should make source boundaries unambiguous, not mechanical.

97. Case: Daniel Uses et al. Incorrectly

Daniel writes both authors plus et al. for a three-author work. He also uses et al. for a two-author source.

He learns that three or more authors use first author plus et al. in text, while two authors are both named each time.

98. Case: Leila Trusts a Citation Generator

Leila exports references from a website and assumes they are correct. Several titles use the wrong capitalization and one DOI is missing.

She compares each reference with the source metadata and APA pattern before submission.

99. Case: Andre Confuses a Webpage With a Website

Andre lists the site's home page instead of the specific page containing the information he used.

He cites the actual recoverable source.

100. Case: Nina Has a Perfect Reference List but Missing In-Text Citations

Nina's reference page is polished, but several paragraphs paraphrase sources without attribution.

She performs a claim-by-claim citation audit. Reference-list inclusion does not replace in-text citation.

101. Case: Jordan Overformats

Jordan adds bold text, decorative headings, colored section labels, and extra spacing because he thinks APA should look formal.

He returns to the required heading hierarchy and simple, consistent academic formatting.

102. In-Text / Reference Cross-Check

Source short name	Cited in text?	Reference entry?	Author/year match?	DOI/URL checked?	Fix needed

103. APA Reference Builder

Element	Source information
Author(s) / group author	
Date	
Title	
Container / journal / site	
Volume	
Issue	
Pages	
Publisher	
DOI	
URL	
Retrieval date if actually required	
Final reference draft	

104. APA Citation Decision Guide

Question	Decision
Am I using someone else's idea?	Cite it, even if paraphrased.
Am I using exact words?	Use quotation formatting plus author, year, and locator.
Are there 3+ authors?	Use first author + et al. in the in-text citation.
Does the source have no date?	Use n.d.
Is the source nonrecoverable personal communication?	Usually cite in text only.
Did a citation generator create the reference?	Verify every element against the source and APA rules.
Is this an unusual source type?	Consult current official APA guidance.

105. Final APA Student Paper Audit

APA check	Complete / revise
Assignment-specific instructions checked	
1-inch margins unless instructor says otherwise	
Approved/readable font used consistently	
Double spacing checked	
First-line paragraph indents checked	
Page numbers correct	
Student title-page elements complete	
Heading hierarchy correct	
Every borrowed idea attributed	
Direct quotations include locators	
Block quotations formatted when applicable	
3+ author citations use et al. correctly	
Two-author citations name both authors	
Reference list starts on a new page	
References alphabetized	
Hanging indents applied	
Reference titles use correct capitalization	
Journal/volume italics checked	
DOIs formatted as URLs	
In-text citations and references match both directions	
Tables/figures numbered and titled correctly	
Bias-free and precise language reviewed	
Citation-generator output verified	
AI use/disclosure follows current course rules	
Final file checked after export	

106. When Individual Guidance Can Help

An SBH tutoring or Academic Strategy Session can help a student understand APA patterns, diagnose citation errors, distinguish paraphrasing from patchwriting, organize a reference list, or learn how to apply formatting rules to their own paper.

SBH can teach APA Style and provide educational feedback. SBH does not create citations for sources a student has not actually reviewed or complete graded papers on a student's behalf.

AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE REMINDER

APA guidance can be updated, and unusual sources require rules beyond a quick guide. Verify uncertain cases using the current Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, the official APA Style website, your institution's writing center/library guidance, and your instructor's directions.

107. APA Error Log

Error I made	Correct rule/pattern	Where I verified it	How I will prevent it

108. The APA Standard

APA competence is not memorizing every rare citation pattern. It is understanding the system well enough to recognize the source type, apply common rules accurately, know when a situation is unusual, and verify uncertain details using an authoritative source.

Build habits that prevent errors: capture source information early, cite while drafting, distinguish quotations from paraphrases in your notes, cross-check citations and references, and perform a dedicated APA review before submission.

FINAL STANDARD

Format consistently. Attribute ideas clearly. Quote accurately. Build references from the actual source. Verify unusual cases. Follow the instructor's requirements first.

Plan. Prepare. Progress.

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