

APA Style: The Issue With Issues
William F. Doverspike, PhD, ABPP
Drwilliamdoverspike.com
770-913-0506
(Revised 01-01-2023)

The best method for improving the quality of a paper is for the author and a proof reader to carefully edit a printed hard copy of the final paper before submission. On a printed hard copy, editors can see errors in writing, formatting, and punctuation that are not as easily seen when reviewing a digital version on a screen. The APA (2010, p. 70; 2020, p. 126) *Publication Manual* also includes several strategies for improving a paper:

- Writing from an outline improves the flow of a paper.
- Putting aside a paper for a few days and rereading it allows a fresh perspective.
- Seeking help and soliciting feedback from colleagues helps provide a critical review.
- Revising a draft into a polished paper requires time and effort on the part of the writer.

Clarity and Precision

In her list of common grammar errors seen in undergraduate term papers, DesMarais (2017) includes overuse of the word “literally.” As DesMarais observes, “Some people throw this word around as an embellishment to intensify whatever they’re trying to say. But ‘literally’ means ‘actually’ or ‘in a strict sense.’ So, if you say, ‘My head literally exploded,’ you are lying” (2017, Item 36). Write concisely, use economy of expression, and avoid wordiness. Write with clarity and avoid ambiguity. Be aware of *contranym*s, which are words that can mean their opposite or serve as their own antonym. For example, “*Continue* usually means to persist in doing something, but as a legal term it means stop a proceeding temporarily” (Herman, 2018, Item 16).

With respect to choice of words, be sure that every word means exactly what you intend it to mean. Avoid colloquial expressions (e.g., awesome, issues, sign off), which diffuse meaning and weaken statements. For example, rather than using a vague expression such as a writing *issue*, use a particular word that means exactly what you intend it to mean. Unless referring to something that is printed or published and distributed, especially a given number of a periodical (e.g., “Have you seen the latest issue of the *American Psychologist*?”), strive for precision of meaning. Table 1 contains some examples of nouns, listed alphabetically, that be used to increase specificity in professional writing. ¹

Table 1 Examples of Nouns That Improve Specificity and Precision

Table 1 Examples of Nouns That Improve Specificity and Precision	
Adjective	Noun
Behavioral	antecedent, consequence, disorder, model, perspective, principle, problem, program, repertoire, skill, therapy, theory, topic
Clinical	disorder, disease, guidelines, illness, incident, management, problem, sequelae, setting, significance, symptom, syndrome
Emotional	conflict, control, disorder, dysfunction, dysregulation, functioning, growth, maturation, problem, regulation, stability, strength, topic
Ethical	aspect, code, conflict, consideration, dilemma, infraction, standard, principle, violation, practice, problem, quagmire
Family	boundary, chaos, conflict, dispute, enmeshment, harmony, meeting, problem, relationship, setting, violence
Interpersonal	agreement, amends, boundary, conflict, dispute, perspective, problem, reconciliation, relationship, situation, topic
Legal	aspect, citation, conflict, consequences, consideration, entanglement, statute, system, perspective, problem, question
Marital	bliss, conflict, contract, discord, dispute, disharmony, harmony, problem, relations, repair, residence, status
Medical	condition, diagnosis, doctor, facility, guidelines, hospital, illness, management, setting, school, symptom, syndrome, training
Mental	conceptualization, disorder, disability, effort, episode, health, hospital, hygiene, illness, model, problem, strength, status
Military	assault, base, benefit, branch, campaign, career, conflict, department, discount, intelligence, officer, secret, tactic, weapon
Spiritual	dimension, director, discernment, focus, growth, maturation, mentor, perspective, principle, program, problem, value

References

(2010 6th edition style)

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

DesMarais, C. (2017, July 11). *43 embarrassing grammar mistakes even smart people make*. Inc. <https://www.inc.com/christina-desmarais/43-embarrassing-phrases-even-smart-people-use.html>

Herman, J. (2018). *25 words that are their own opposites*. *Mental Floss*. <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/57032/25-words-are-their-own-opposites>

Notes

1. This stylistic requirement is stated in the syllabus of any course taught by Dr. Doverspike:

In order to encourage precision and specificity of expression, as well as to discourage vagueness of expression in written works, there will be a one (-1) point deduction each time the word “issue” or “issues” is used in a paper or presentation. Points will be deducted from the total points earned on the rubric score. If any student who does not understand the meaning of this statement (i.e., that stylistic errors will be deducted from the rubric score), please discuss the meaning of this statement with the course instructor before the paper is due.

Correct Citation for Reference Entry

The reference entry correct citation styles for this document are illustrated below. Students should defer to the style preferences of their individual course instructors to determine whether the course instructor has preferences that are more specific than those shown below:

American Psychological Association

Doverspike, W. F. (2020). *APA style: The issue with issues*. <http://drwilliamdoverspike.com/>

Chicago Manual of Style / Kate Turabian

Doverspike, William, “APA style: The issue with issues,” Oct. 31, 2020. <http://drwilliamdoverspike.com/>

Note: According to the Chicago Manual of Style, blog posts are typically not included in bibliographies, but can be cited in the running text and/or notes. However, if a blog is cited frequently, you may include it in the bibliography.

Modern Language Association

Doverspike, William F. “APA Style: The Issue With Issues” 31 Oct. 2020 [Date accessed]

Note: MLA guidelines assume that readers can track down most online sources by entering the author, title, or other identifying information in a search engine or a database. Consequently, MLA does not require a URL in citations for online sources such as websites. However, some instructors still ask for it, so check with your instructor to determine his or her preference.