

**APA Style Checklist**  
**Legal, Ethical, and Professional Standards**  
**William F. Doverspike, PhD, ABPP**  
**Drwilliamdoverspike.com**  
**770-913-0506**  
**(Revised 08-01-17)**

This checklist contains some common stylistic rules but is not an exhaustive list of all stylistic requirements of the American Psychological Association (APA). If you are unsure about any requirement, consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA; 2010), hereinafter referred to as the *Publication Manual*. It is the authoritative source of style guidelines. In the following checklist, most items contain the page on which the style requirement can be found in the *Publication Manual*. Onwuegbuzie, Combs, Slate, and Frels (2010) have addressed how to avoid some of the most common APA errors. If you are unsure about general grammar or punctuation requirements that are not addressed in the APA *Publication Manual*, consult the *Chicago Manual of Style* (2010). If you are unsure about the most acceptable spelling of a word, consult *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (2005). If you are unsure about when or how to cite or quote, read pages 169-174 (Crediting Sources), pages 174-175 (Citing references in Text), and Page 170 (Section 6.02: Plagiarism) in the APA *Publication Manual*. Be aware of Ethical Standard 8.11 (Plagiarism) of the APA (2017) Code of Ethics: "Psychologists do not present portions of another's work or data as their own, even if the other work or data source is cited occasionally" (p. 12).

### **Strategies to Improve Writing Style**

In the APA *Publication Manual* (2010, p. 70), three strategies are recommended for achieving professional and effective communication:

- writing from an outline
- putting aside the first draft, then rereading it later
- asking a colleague to review and critique the draft for you

### **Title page**

1. Title page is Page 1, but does not count as a text page. Number the pages consecutively, beginning with the title page. Number all pages in Arabic numerals in the upper right-hand corner (p. 230).
2. Page header is placed one inch from the top, five spaces to the left of the page number, on right margin (pp. 229-230).
3. A well-prepared abstract can be the most important single paragraph in an article (p. 26). In a literature review, an abstract should describe the problem under investigation; main results; conclusions (and limitations); and implications for theory, policy, and/or practice. Begin the abstract on a new page and identify it with the running head or abbreviated title and the page number 2 (pp. 26-27).
4. The running head is an abbreviated title that is printed at the top of the pages of a manuscript or published article to identify the article for readers. The running head should be a maximum of 50 characters, counting letters, punctuation, and spaces between words. It should appear flush left in all uppercase letters at the top of the title page and all subsequent pages (p. 229). In the 6th edition, the running head serves as both page header and running head for the manuscript. The words *Running head* are placed on the title page only.
5. Title, name, and institution, upper and lower case, double-spaced, centered on page (p. 229).
6. Title is repeated, one inch from the top, double-spaced (if more than one line) on first page of text (p. 229).

### Preparation

7. Use regular 12-point Times Roman or Courier font (p. 228).
8. Use one inch (2.54 cm) margins at top, bottom, left, and right of every page (p. 229).
9. All text is double-spaced (p. 229). **Note: This checklist is single-spaced to conserve space.**
10. Levels of heading, including boldface type, follow APA guidelines (p. 62).
11. The introduction states what you are going to say, the body gives the information, and the conclusion summarizes what you said (p. 27). As a rule of thumb, each paragraph is longer than a single sentence, but not longer than one manuscript page.
12. All strong assertions and empirical statements must be supported by citations (p. 28). Support your statements by citing empirical studies. When you cite nonempirical work, make this clear in your narrative (p. 28).
13. Use gender neutral language (p. 73). There are many alternatives to the generic *he*, including rephrasing, using plural nouns and plural pronouns, replacing the pronoun with an article, or dropping the pronoun (p. 74). Write in first person or third person, but not in more informal second person. Do not anthropomorphize or attribute human characteristics to inanimate sources. To avoid ambiguity, use a personal pronoun rather than the third person when describing steps taken in your experiment (p. 69).
14. With acronyms and abbreviations, spell out the term the first time you use it, and put the acronym in parentheses (or if already in parentheses, use brackets). Once a term is abbreviated, the abbreviation must be used consistently thereafter (i.e., do not switch between the abbreviated and written-out forms of a term) (p. 107).

### Grammar and Punctuation

15. Use a period to end a complete sentence (p. 88). Use one space after punctuation (p. 88), which is the same as the rule in the 2001 *Publication Manual*. In the 2010 *Publication Manual*, two spaces are recommended after a period at the end of a sentence: “Spacing twice after punctuation marks at the end of a sentence aids readers of draft manuscripts” (APA, 2010, p. 88).
16. Just as the heading structure alerts the reader to the order of ideas with the paper, seriation helps the reader understand the organization of key points with sections, paragraphs, and sentences. In any series, all items should be syntactically and conceptually parallel (p. 63). Present parallel ideas in parallel or coordinate form, and make certain that all elements of the parallelism are present before and after the coordinating conjunction (i.e., and, but, or now) (p. 84). Use economy of expression and avoid wordiness (p. 67).
17. Within a sentence, use commas to separate three or more elements that do not have internal commas; use semicolons to separate three or more elements that have internal commas (p. 64). In other words, use a comma between elements (including *and* and *or*) in a series of three or more items (p. 89); use a semicolon to separate elements in a series that already contain commas (p. 90). See Appendix on Page 7 of this checklist.
18. Use a comma to set off a non-restrictive or nonessential clause, that is, a clause that embellishes a sentence but if removed would leave the grammatical structure and meaning of the sentence intact (p. 88)
19. Use a comma following an introductory adverbial or introductory prepositional phrase (p. 88). [Such phrases are considered non-restrictive clauses.]
20. Use a comma to separate two independent clauses joined by a conjunction (p. 89).
21. Use a semicolon to separate two independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction (p. 89), and to separate elements in a series that already contain commas (p. 90).
22. Place periods and commas inside double quotation marks (with few exceptions) (p. 92).

23. Use only surnames (do not use first names but only initials) in text citations (p. 174).
24. Use only the standard Latin abbreviations in parenthetical material (e.g., i.e., etc.). In nonparenthetical material, use the English translation of the Latin terms such as *for example*, *that is*, and *so forth* (p. 108).
25. Make certain that every word means exactly what you intend it to mean. In informal style, for example, *feel* broadly substitutes for *think* or *believe*, but in scientific style such latitude is not acceptable. A similar example is that *like* is often used when *such as* is meant. Avoid colloquial expressions (*write up* for *report*), which diffuse meaning (p. 68). Avoid imprecise words such as *issue*, which are vague, diffuse meaning, and lack specificity.
26. Pronouns confuse the reader unless the referent for each pronoun is obvious; readers should not have to search previous text to determine the meaning of the term. Pronouns such as *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* can be troublesome when they refer to something or someone in a previous sentence. Eliminate ambiguity by writing, for example, *this test*, *that trial*, *these participants*, and *those reports* (p. 68). In other words, do not use *this* as a noun.
27. Each pronoun should refer clearly to its antecedent and should agree with the antecedent in number and gender (p. 79).
28. Verify noun-pronoun agreement so that nouns and pronouns agree in number. For example, always use a singular pronoun when referring to an antecedent singular noun (p. 79). Do not use the colloquial *they* when referring to an antecedent noun that is in singular form.
29. Use the pronoun “who” (not “that”) when referring to human beings and people. Use the pronoun “that” (not “who” when referring to inanimate things and objects (p. 79).
30. Use the relative pronoun “that” when writing restrictive clauses that are essential to the meaning of the sentence. Use “which” when writing nonrestrictive clauses that are non-essential (i.e., that merely add further information) to the meaning of the sentence (p. 83). Use a comma to set off a non-restrictive or nonessential clause (p. 88).
31. An adjective or an adverb, whether a single word or a phrase, must clearly refer to the word it modifies. Misplaced modifiers, because of their placement in a sentence, ambiguously or illogically modify a word. Eliminate these by placing an adjective or an adverb as close as possible to the word it modifies (p. 81).
32. Write the word for any number below 10, and use numerals for any number 10 or above and in a few other instances (pp. 111-112). If beginning a sentence with a number, always spell out the number using a word (pp. 111-112).
33. Use italics for titles of books and periodicals; a letter, word, or phrase used as a linguistic example; and the introduction of a new, technical, or key term or label. Note: After a key term or technical label has been used once, do not italicize it (pp. 104-105).

### **Text citations**

34. *Each time* you paraphrase another author (i.e., summarize a passage or rearrange the order of a sentence and change some of the words), you need to credit the source in the text (p. 15). Avoid using terms such as “research has shown.” Instead, cite the specific author(s) and publication date (p. 174). For example, Brown, Jones, and Smith (2008) have found that dogs can run faster when chased by dog trainers. As another example, dogs have been found to run faster when chased by dog trainers (Brown, Jones, & Jones, 2008).
35. A series of authors within parentheses are alphabetized in the same order in which they appear in the reference list (p. 175).

36. If one or two authors are cited in text, list both of them each and every time (p. 175).
37. If three to five authors are cited in text, list all authors the first time and then use “et al.” (with a period after the term but not in double quotation marks) subsequent times (p. 175).
38. If six or more authors are cited in text, cite only the surname of the first author followed by “et al.” (with a period after the term but not in double quotation marks) the first time (p. 175). When using et al., give enough information so the reader can identify the source (p. 175).
39. For back to back parentheses, use a semicolon within one set of parentheses (p. 94). To enclose parenthetical material that is already within parentheses, use brackets (p. 94).
40. When citing authors in text, use ampersand (&) inside parentheses and use conjunction (“and”) outside of parentheses (p. 175).
41. Within a paragraph, when the name of the author is part of the narrative, you need not include the year of publication in subsequent nonparenthetical references to a study as long as the study cannot be confused with other studies cited in the article. Do include the year in all parenthetical citations. However, when both the name and the year are in parentheses, include the year in subsequent citations with the paragraph (p. 174).

### **Direct quotes**

42. Quotation marks should be used to indicate the exact words of another (p. 15). Use quotation marks whenever quoting or duplicating words from an original source (p. 92, 171). When quoting, always provide the author, year, and specific page citation or paragraph number for nonpaginated material (p. 170).
43. Direct quotations must be accurate. The quotation must follow the wording, spelling, and interior punctuation of the original source, even if the source is incorrect (p. 172).
44. Use correct punctuation with commas and periods when citing or quoting authors (pp. 92, 170-171): Place periods and comma within closing single or double quotation marks (p. 92). Place other punctuation marks inside quotation marks only when they are part of the quoted material (p. 92). See examples on page 92 for correct style when quotation appears at the end of a sentence. If the quotation appears at the end of a sentence, close the quoted passage with quotation marks, cite the source in parentheses immediately after the quotation marks, and end with a period or other punctuation marks outside the final parenthesis (p. 171).
45. Use secondary sources sparingly, for instance, when the original work is out of print, unavailable through usual sources, or not available in English. Give the secondary source in the reference list; in text, name the original work and give a citation for the secondary source. Clearly indicate secondary source if you are quoting an author from a secondary source (p. 178). See Page 178 of the APA (2010) *Publication Manual* (6th ed.) or see Pages 245-247 of the APA (2001) *Publication Manual* (5th ed.) for examples.
46. All direct quotes in text require that a page number of the quote be specified (pp. 92, 171).
47. If the quotation comprises 40 or more words, display it in a freestanding block of text and omit the quotation marks. Start each *block quotation* on a new line and indent and block about a half inch from the left margin (in the same position as a new paragraph). Double-space the entire quotation. At the end of a block quotation, cite the quoted source and the page or paragraph number in parentheses after the final punctuation mark (p. 171).

## References

48. The reference list starts on a new page and the pages do not count as text pages (p. 37).
49. Reference pages contain the header and are continuously paginated from text (p. 37).
50. The words “References” is centered, double-spaced below the header, and located on the first page (only) of the references list (p. 37).
51. There should be a one-to-one correspondence between the text citations and the reference list. In other words, all citations in the text should be contained in the reference list, and all citations in the reference list should be contained in the text (p. 174).
52. In general, a reference should contain the author name, date of publication, title of the work, and publication data (p. 183).
53. Use only surnames (not first names) and initials of first (and middle) names in reference list (p. 175).
54. Use ampersand (&) between two names (p. 175).
55. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized. Titles of journal articles should not be italicized (p. 185). In titles of books and articles in reference list, capitalize only the first word, the first word after a colon or em dash, and proper nouns (p. 101), which is known as *sentence case*. Capitalize major words in titles of books and articles within the body of the paper (p. 101), which is known as *title case*. Use italicized title case for journal titles, and use non-italicized sentence case for titles of articles in journals. See this link for details: <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2012/03/how-to-capitalize-and-format-reference-titles-in-apa-style.html>
56. Volume numbers of journals should be italicized, but issue numbers should not be italicized (p. 185).
57. If each issue of a journal begins on page 1, give the issue number in parentheses immediately after the volume number (p. 198). Include the journal issue number if the journal is paginated by issue (p. 199). All APA journals use continuous pagination, and it is rare for journals to be paginated by issue.
58. Only a few cities don't need state designation. All the rest must have a postal abbreviation for the state (p. 187).
59. Omit superfluous terms such as “Publishers,” “Publishing Company,” and “Inc.” Retain “Books” and “Press” (p. 187).
60. References are alphabetized by the first author's last name. If one author (or a set of authors) has more than one publication, order them with the earliest year first (p. 181).
61. References are double-spaced only and typed according to APA guidelines (p. 228).
62. Each citation is indented with a “hanging indent” format, which meaning that the first line of each reference is set flush left and subsequent lines are indented (pp. 37, 198).
63. Include the digital object identifier (DOI) in the reference if one is assigned. Use this format for the DOI in references: <http://dx.doi.org/> [followed by the DOI, with no period after the DOI. If no DOI is assigned to the content and you retrieved it online, include the home page uniform resource locator (URL) for the journal, newsletter, or magazine in the reference (p. 191). For further details, see the following link: <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2014/07/how-to-use-the-new-doi-format-in-apa-style.html>
64. Finish the element of an entry in the reference list with a period (p. 186). However, do not use periods with web addresses in text or in the reference list, to prevent the impression that the period is part of the URL (p. 192). This is not a style issue but a retrieval issue. In text, include web addresses in parentheses when possible or revise the sentence to avoid ending a sentence with a URL and no punctuation (<http://www.apa.org>).

### References

- American Counseling Association. (2014). *ACA code of ethics*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychological Association. (2017). Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct (2002, Amended June 1, 2010 and January 1, 2017). Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>
- Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary* (11th ed.). (2005). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Combs, J. P., Slate, J. R., & Frels, R. K. (2010). Editorial: Evidence-based guidelines for avoiding the most common APA errors in journal article submissions. *Research in the Schools*, 16(20), ix-xxxvi.
- Strunk, W., & White, E. B. (2009). *The elements of style* (4th ed.). New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company.
- Truss, L. (2003). *Eats, shoots & leaves: A zero tolerance approach to punctuation*. London: Profile Books.
- Truss, L. (2004). *Eats, shoots & leaves: Why, commas really do make a difference!* New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- University of Chicago Press. (2010). *Chicago manual of style* (16th ed.). Chicago, IL: Author.
- Walsh, J. M., & Walsh, A. K. (1959). *Plain English handbook-Revised edition*. Wichita, Kansas: McCormick-Mathers Publishing Company.
- Warriner, J. E., Mersand, J., & Griffith, F. (1977). *English grammar and composition: Fifth course*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Webster's third new international dictionary, unabridged: The great library of the English language*. (1993). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.

## Appendix A: Why Punctuation Commas Matters

### Why Punctuation Matters

An unknown English professor is reported to have written the following words on the chalkboard before asking his students to punctuate it correctly: “A woman without her man is nothing.”

All of the males in the class wrote: “A woman, without her man, is nothing.”

All of the females in the class wrote: “A woman: without her, man is nothing.”

Punctuation is power because it can change the entire meaning of a sentence.

### Why the Introductory Comma Matters in Religion

“Verily I say unto thee, This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.”

or

“Verily I say unto thee this day, thou shalt be with me in Paradise.”

“...huge doctrinal differences hang on the placing of this comma. The first version, which is how Protestant’s interpret the passage (Luke, xxiii, 43), lightly skips over the whole unpleasant business of Purgatory and takes the crucified thief to heaven with our Lord. The second promises Paradise at some later date...and leaves Purgatory in the picture for Catholics, who believe in it.”

Hartley, Cecil (1818). *Principles of punctuation: Or, the art of pointing.*

### Why the Serial Comma Matters in Psychotherapy

The use of serial commas separates the three subjects of this sentence:

Her professional counselor, sexual partner, and father of Maria’s first child confirmed that Jane had in fact suffered abuse as a child.

The missing serial comma creates a non-restrictive clause that completely changes the meaning:

Her professional counselor, sexual partner and father of Maria’s first child, confirmed that Jane had in fact suffered abuse as a child.

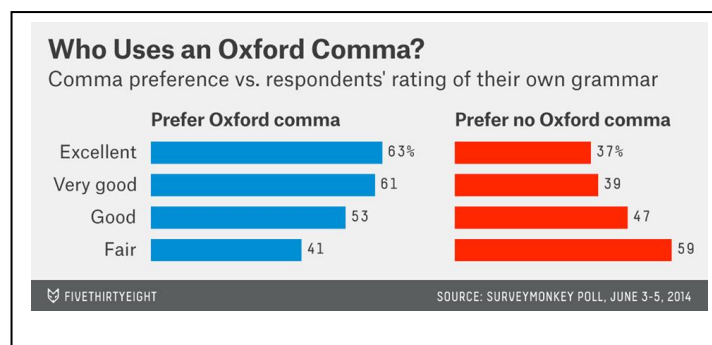
## Appendix B: The Oxford Comma

### Origin of the Oxford Comma

The serial comma is also known as the Oxford comma, because it is part of the house style of Oxford University Press. Not only required by the APA guidelines (APA, 2010, p. 88; 2001, p. 64), the serial comma has been advocated for over 50 years in American English handbooks. For example, in the *Plain English Handbook*, Walsh and Walsh (1959) state, “Use commas to separate the items of a series of words, phrases, or short clauses” (p. 78). In *English Grammar and Composition*, Warriner, Mersand, and Griffith (1977) state, “Use commas to separate items in a series” (p. 427). Lynne Truss, whose book on punctuation won the British Book of the Year award in 2004, gives the following example of the serial comma: “Every day, Anthony turns, slides, and swings” (Truss, 2004, p. 8). Ms. Truss also has a website in which one can test his or her “Comma IQ” (<http://www.savethecomma.com/game/>). In their authoritative *Elements of Style*, which has been referred to as “the English major’s Bible,” Strunk and White (1979, 2009) list the serial comma as their second rule: “In a series of three or more terms with a single conjunction, use a comma after each term except the last” (1979, p. 2). This comma is often referred to as the “serial comma.” Strunk and White give the following examples are taken from Strunk and White (1979, p. 2) to illustrate the stylistic rule of the serial comma:

Thus write ,  
    red, white, and blue  
    gold, silver, or copper  
He opened the letter, read it, and made a note of its contents.

Table 1  
Who Uses an Oxford Comma?





### Appendix C: Additional Resources

In addition to the aforementioned references, which provide resources for professional writing style, the following online resources may also be useful:

- Read the APA Style Blog ([www.apastyle.org](http://www.apastyle.org))
- Read the [Frequently Asked Questions](#), [Quick Answers-References](#), [Capitalization](#), [Quotations](#), [Quick Answers-Formatting](#), [How to Avoid Wordiness](#), [How to Format Reference Titles](#), and [Best of the APA Style Blog \(2016 Edition\)](#).
- Read [Authors With Only One Name](#)
- Read [Names With Titles in Them](#)
- Read [Cultural Variations in Name Order](#)
- Read [The Use of First Person in APA Style](#) and [The Use of Singular “They.”](#)
- View the [Free Tutorial on the Basics of APA Style](#)
- Visit the searchable [APA Style Blog](#); new topics are addressed each week.
- Refer to [\*The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association\*](#)