Preview the basics of APA style

Used in many social science disciplines, APA style requires a list of references, giving publication information for all the sources you have paraphrased, summarized, or quoted following APA's guidelines.

For an overview of related key topics on working with documentation styles, visit the videos and quizzes in this tutorial.

Explore It

Required by most courses in the social sciences, APA style uses in-text citations and a list of sources used that are placed at the end of the paper, called References. In the body of your draft, for each source you use APA requires you to include the author name, the year of publication, and in some cases the page number in the text. When citing a source without page numbers, omit the page number.

For complete advice on citing sources APA style, see Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition (2010). You can also find comprehensive coverage in any composition handbook. Questia School’s bibliography tool allows you to save APA-style references entries for the sources you locate there. For practice using the tools that offer help with APA style in Questia School, see the Use It section, below.

Learn It

Following is a preview of the basics of APA style, offering a closer look at examples of some of the more widely cited sources: books with a single author, articles found in magazines and via databases, and works found on websites. (For additional advice on in-text citation, see the other examples in this tutorial.)

APA In-text Documentation

In APA style, when you include a quotation, paraphrase, or summary of a source in your draft you must include information to indicate where the material comes from using in-text citation. In most cases, this means giving the name of the author, the year of publication, and the page where the material was found. Often you can cite the author in a signal phrase and follow with the year of publication, given in parentheses. For quotations, give the page number(s) in parentheses. Include a page number for paraphrases or summaries if your readers might need it to find the material in a long work.

Paumgarten (2011) cautioned that the legal issue of using drones domestically is itself like a drone: “it has stolen up on us and is now hovering noiselessly overhead” (p. 48).

If you do not name the author of the source in a signal phrase, include it in the parentheses with the page number: (Paumgarten, 2011, p. 48).

If your source has no page numbers or is a single page, omit the page numbers. If the author of your source is unknown, use the title (or a shortened version) in the signal phrase or in a parenthetical reference:

Teen athletes are at higher risk of concussion and take longer to recover (“Concussion in Sports,” 2012).
APA List of References
The complete listing of all sources you use in your paper appears on a separate page, labeled References. Here you record all the sources you cite, listed in alphabetical order.

The APA’s Publication Manual and all composition handbooks offer dozens of models and examples of how to cite a variety of sources. The following examples represent commonly used sources, color coded to help you identify the pieces of information necessary for these citations.

Book with One Author For a book with one author, you need to provide the following information:

- **Author’s name**, giving last name first, then initial(s)
- **Year of publication**, in parentheses
- **Title of the book**, in italics
- **City and state of publication**
- **Name of publisher**

Example


Article in a Magazine For an article in a periodical, include the following:

- **Author’s name** (if given), giving last name first, then initial(s)
- **Date of publication**, in parentheses
- **Title of article**, with only the first word of the title and subtitle and proper nouns or adjectives or proper nouns capitalized
- **Title of periodical**, in italics
- **Page numbers**

Example


Article in a Scholarly Journal, Found in a Database For an article in a periodical found in a database, include the following:

- **Author’s name** (if given), giving last name first, then first initial(s)
- **Date of publication**, in parentheses
- **Title of article**, with only the first word of the title and the subtitle and proper nouns and proper adjectives capitalized
- **Title of periodical**, in italics
- **Volume, in italics, and issue number** (in a journal paginated by issue rather than volume)
- **Page numbers**
- **Digital Object Identifier (DOI)**

If no DOI is given, write Retrieved from, then add the URL of the homepage of the journal (not that of the database).
Example


**Work from a Website** For a work found in an online periodical, include publication information if possible. Include a DOI, if available (if not, include the URL for the periodical’s homepage). For works from a website, list the following information:

- **Author’s name**, if given
- **Date the site was published or last updated**, in parentheses
- **Title of the web article** or page
- **Title of the online periodical or website**, in italics
- **URL** (if no DOI is available) introduced by the phrase *Retrieved from*

Example


If a **DOI has been assigned to the article**, replace the URL with the DOI at the end of the entry (for example, doi:10.1037/0279-6132.23.2.225).

**Use It**

Questia School offers help creating entries for your *References* page using documentation tools. Note that with all such tools, you should never assume that a database’s help with documentation means entries are complete and fully formatted. There may be information about your source the documentation tool cannot provide accurately. Always check entries for accuracy against a current handbook or other reference guide to your documentation style.

To gain practice with APA citation style, use the topic from a current research project and conduct a search to locate two or three relevant sources in Questia School. Save these sources to a project folder devoted to the assignment. Then, within your project folder, select the sources that are most relevant, and use the bibliography tool to create a first draft of a references list for these sources. Click the “Create bibliography” button at the bottom of the project page, and choose “APA” from the list. Following is a sample from one student’s set of sources found in Questia School for a research project on the psychology of motivation.
Save the results to a new file for your word processor. Using the list of references created in Questia School as a rough draft, carefully proofread each entry and check formatting, including capitalization and italics.

Next, check for information not supplied by the bibliography tool. For example, APA requires you to cite the DOI of an article or the URL of a journal’s homepage, not the URL of the database. So for articles without DOI’s, you must take the extra step of locating the journal’s URL. Use a composition handbook or other research manual for more detailed advice about APA style, if necessary.

**Alternate activity** From the sources you have gathered for a current research assignment, choose several of your own examples that correspond to the general sources listed here and create your own citation entries for a references list. Use the information in this document as a guide, and consult a composition handbook or other research manual for more models and advice, if needed.