APA Style Tip Sheet

I. General formatting tips

- Check the margins: Margins on all pages should be 1” on the top and bottom, left and right.

- Check indents: The first line of each paragraph should be indented ½ inch.

- Check the font: It should be Times New Roman, 12 point font throughout the document.

- Check line spacing: Double-space all lines. Position your cursor at the beginning of the page and then go to the paragraph menu.

  ![Paragraph menu](image)

  Under Line spacing, select Double.
II. Title page and abstract

- The running head should be ≤ 50 characters, including spaces. It should be written in all CAPS. Only the first page should include the words “Running head:” before the actual running head.

- Tip: Place a section break after the last line of the title page. Then, in the Header and Footer view, type the correct running head on the first page. On the second page, click the cursor in the running head and then de-select the “link to previous” option (a button on the Header and Footer menu). This will allow you to remove the words “Running head:” on the second and subsequent pages. To view a video, visit this website: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EuKhQHgQbM

- Be sure that the font of the running head and page numbers is Times New Roman, 12 point, as this is not the default in Word.

- The title should be ≤ 12 words. APA discourages authors from using a question as the title. Center the title.

- Your name and affiliation (e.g., University of St. Thomas) should be placed under the title, centered.

- The abstract (where applicable) should be ≤ 200 words and should summarize the contents of the paper.
III. Body of the paper

- The first page should have the title at the top, centered.

The importance of play in a child’s life is highlighted in Piaget’s developmental framework (as cited in Landers, Ray, & Bratton, 2009). Piaget described two stages in which most elementary-aged children function: preoperational (2–7 years) and concrete operational (8–11 years). In a typical Kindergarten classroom, the students can be expected to enter at a preoperational stage and few may progress into the concrete operational stage by the end of their first grade year. Most young children experience significant challenges during their transition from pre-Kindergarten classes to Kindergarten. During this transition, more focus is placed on academics than previously experienced by these students, which can bring about problematic changes in their external or internal behaviors in the classroom (Sink, Edwards, & Weiz, 2007).

During the preoperational stage, the stage most associated with Kindergarten students, children are acquiring essential language skills (Landers et al., 2009). This stage is often categorized as the magical thinking stage, in which children’s play behaviors are imaginary, as they attempt to explain things for which they do not have an understanding. During this stage, children lack the understanding of their own and other’s emotions and feelings. At a young age, a child’s most effective means of communication is through play, allowing for creative expression and processing. Because of the limited communicative ability during the preoperational stage, children must be given the opportunity to express themselves and their experiences in a constraint-free environment that promotes effective communication.

Current state and national standards expect children to meet or exceed necessary academic standards by the end of each grade (Blanco & Ray, 2011). The pressure placed on teachers to ensure that all students succeed inhibits the time necessary to teach social skills, allow for developmental processing time, and provide appropriate activities, such as free play.

- Organize the paper with headings and subheadings. Level 1 is the most basic heading and should be centered, Title Case, and bold.

- Example of Level 1 heading:

  Literature Review
• Ensure that there are at least two subheadings for a particular level, if you are going to use that level of subheading. For example, if you are going to use a Level 2 heading (left-justified, Title Case, bold), you must have two sections with a Level 2 heading, such as this:

**The Learning Style Controversy**

In recent years, numerous tests have been published to assist educators in assessing students’ learning styles. Some of the most popular include…

**Learning Style – Teaching Style Match**

Despite the controversy over the validity of learning style assessment, educators continue to show interest in matching their teaching style to students’ learning styles. In one study…

• Common errors with headings include starting the text of a paragraph on the next line when a Level 3 heading has been used. In this level of heading, the heading should be indented, bold, and Sentence case, and the text should start right after the heading.)

• Example of correct Level 3 heading and placement of text:

**Learning styles: Fact or fiction.** Although many instructors believe that learning styles should be assessed and instructional methods tailored to learning styles, a dearth of evidence suggests…

• Below is an illustration of sample headings in a paper. Note that Method is Level 1; Participants, Measures, Design, and Procedures are Level 2; Baseline period, Treatment period, and Posttest period are Level 3. The paper also contains additional Level 1 headings, consistent with the rule that at least two sections with a particular level of heading must be included. Levels 1 and 2 use Title Case (all main words are capitalized). Levels 3 and beyond use Sentence case (only the first word, plus any proper nouns and/or a word following a colon are capitalized):

  o Title Case: Literature Review

  o Sentence case: Learning differences in elementary students.
achieve. The behaviors were observed in this study were recognized as a decrease in motor off-task, verbal off-task, passive off-task, and out-of-seat behavior, and an increase in on-task behaviors. Students met in small groups to practice social skills through play activities. The play activities were designed to promote appropriate interactions and communication as the children injected during play. Throughout the play, the two were also given visual social skills for teachers to help them facilitate and practice appropriate social interactions during the play activities. The participants' average, in total, focused on the development of social skills, social setting, and self-efficacy.

Method

Participants

Two kindergarten classes containing 28 total boys were asked to participate in this study. The 20 consented kindergarten participants were obtained after parental permission was given for the utilization of data in the study. Parents were given seven days to return the permission form.

The participants' ages ranged from five to six years of age. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (21%), while 16% were Hispanic, 9% African American, and the remainder was defined as the parent's or child's identification with two or more races. The selected participants attended a private, Catholic boys' school with an enrollment of 2 vehicles in an urban, affluent community. The participants attended regular class, but were supplemented with a regular, guided, social skills lessons, and play activities.

It should be noted that participants' names were not used in this study. Any behavior exhibited during the study that may result in the identification of a participant has been changed to describe similar behaviors while protecting observations or other relevant information.

Group 1 and Group 4 each consisted of four six-year-olds who met on alternating Mondays. Group 2 consisted of four six-year-olds and Group 5 of five six-year-olds, both of whom met on alternating Tuesdays. Group 1 and 2 each contained a parent diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Male participants taking medications for the condition. The three six-year-olds in Group 1 met every other Wednesday during the duration of the study. All groups met at the same after-school time period, which occurred at the end of the day before dismissal. At the conclusion of the study, each group received a total of four guidance lessons and four play activity sessions that incorporated the social skills lessons.

Measures

A coded observation form (see Figure 1) was developed by the researcher to standardize the recording of indicated behaviors within the classroom. The study was conducted so that the length of observation, time of day, day of the week, and setting of observation were standardized for the duration of baseline, mid-point, and post-test periods for each participant.

Each observation lasted 30 minutes. Observations were divided into sixty 30-second intervals, in which the child's behavior was recorded as on-task, motor off-task, verbal off-task, passive off-task, or out-of-seat. The activities, independent work (I), small group activity (S), large group activity (L), or large group instruction (M), were also recorded during the observation of the child. Figure 1 provides an example of the observation sheet used to collect data. A summary form for each group and participant was generated to calculate the overall percentage of time the student was observed doing one of the identified behaviors. Standardization of the observation times and continued use of the same observer increased the inter-observer reliability for this measure. During each observation, the classroom teacher and kindergarten aide present.

Design

A one group pretest-posttest design was employed to determine the relationship between play activities and social skills lessons and students' behavioral within the classroom. The treatment for this study was the boys' participation in play activities and social skills lessons. The treatment was the number of observed occurrences of on-task (O), motor off-task (M), verbal off-task (V), passive off-task (P), or out-of-seat (S) behaviors during the baseline, mid-point, and post-test periods.

Procedure

Baseline period. The current study was approved by the Human Subjects Committee of the children's university and by the campus administration of the school. Parental consent was obtained prior to the baseline phase, and all information was kept strictly confidential throughout the study. It is noted that the parents were not required to participate in the study, as they were only notifying the use of their child's data. Throughout the 30 participants were identified. After informed consent was obtained, the children were observed in their classrooms. The completed observations and summary forms were completed in a filing cabinet for further review during the mid-point period.

During the baseline period, each participants observed his scheduled day (e.g., Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday) in increasing. The day of the week varied between groups due to their school’s schedule. Observation sessions lasted until the participants' scheduled day. Baseline observations began during the second and third week of the school year. During the baseline observations, participants were engaged in any extra behavior modifications or interventions other than standard classroom procedures. During this time, a supportive environment was provided with each group to ensure proper relationships were built and maintained.

Treatment period. The treatment consisted of social skills lessons taught during regular school instruction. The lessons were conducted as a series of group instruction, which focused on providing effective classroom behavior, especially those concerning motor off-task, verbal off-task, passive off-task, and out-of-seat behavior. The participants then attended 30 minutes per lesson session weekly, which emphasized the review of social skills in groups of five or six. This session allowed the children to direct social skills lesson to a small group. During play, the setting and social skills were promoted and encouraged when necessary. Therefore, the treatment period consisted of two components: the whole group social skills lesson and the small group play activities. This treatment took place each session before dismissal and was continued for each group throughout the duration of the treatment.

Developmentally appropriate activities were created by Richards (1996) and supplemented with activities from Wallin (1999) within the whole group guidance lessons. Each lesson lasted for thirty minutes and occurred once a week during the duration of the treatment. The treatment was observed by the researcher but was also designed to use regularly scheduled days and times within their classrooms. The absence of motor off, verbal off-task, passive off-task, and out-of-seat behaviors were recorded on the observation form for each child.

Posttreatment period. After six weeks of the intervention, posttreatment observations were taken on the 20 participants. Important for each behavior each participant was noted. In fact, this study lasted nine weeks. One week was spent gathering baseline data, six weeks were used to implement social skills lessons and play activities, one week was used to gather post-treatment data.
• Quotations vs. Paraphrasing: Although APA permits quotations, scholarly writing involves paraphrasing material in your own words as much as possible. (This demonstrates your mastery of the material, without relying too heavily on quotes.) Nonetheless, be sure to include a citation for paraphrased material. Make sure that you have paraphrased sufficiently (i.e., this involves more than just changing a few words), as plagiarism (even inadvertent plagiarism) is a serious offense. When quoting, be sure to include page numbers with the citation.

• Judicious use of first person singular (“I,” “my”) is permitted in APA and is preferable to third person (e.g., “the researcher” or “the author” when referring to oneself) or passive voice (e.g., “observations were made” instead of “I observed”). However, consider your audience; some readers feel that first person never belongs in scholarly writing, so check with your professor ahead of time. In addition, avoid using first person plural (“we,” “our”) to designate some general group (e.g., “We should be concerned about the state of education”). Also avoid second person (“you,” “your”), as this is not considered scholarly.

• Aim for a scholarly writing style. For example, rather than writing, “In 2000, Jones and Smith did a study. Their article focused on kindergarten teachers and their satisfaction with and experiences of teaching,” one might write, “Jones and Smith (2000) surveyed 100 kindergarten teachers on their satisfaction with and experiences of teaching.” Note that the year of publication is embedded in the sentence in parentheses rather than being part of a prepositional phrase. Furthermore, the “actors” are Jones and Smith (rather than their study or their article), so Jones and Smith are the subjects of the latter sentence. Finally, it is unnecessary to say that the authors did a study, wrote an article, etc.; this is implied by the inclusion of the work in the literature review.

IV. References

• All references should be listed together at the end of the paper, ordered alphabetically

• The word References should not be bold.

• Carefully follow the APA citation format. Common errors include the following:
  
  o Forgetting the comma after each author’s last name.
  o Using “and” instead of “&” between authors’ names.
  o Forgetting the period after the parenthesis mark.
  o Using Title Case instead of Sentence case for journal article titles and book titles. (Note that only journal titles use Title Case).
  o Not italicizing the journal title, book title, or journal volume number.
• Each line of a reference should be double-spaced. Do not double-double-space between references.

• The first line of each reference should be flush left. The remaining lines should use hanging indent (i.e., indented \( \frac{1}{2} \) inch from the left margin). To make hanging indents automatic, follow these steps:

  o Begin by typing the references without any indentation:

  ![Image](https://example.com/image1)

  ![Image](https://example.com/image2)

  o If the reference is two or more lines, position the cursor at the beginning of the second line:

  ![Image](https://example.com/image3)

  o Drag the bottom of the left ruler marker \( \frac{1}{2} \) inch. The second line and all other lines in that reference will now have a hanging indent:

  ![Image](https://example.com/image4)

  o If you do this for the first reference entry, all subsequent entries will use this format.
• Examples of correct reference formats:

References


• Sample reference page:
V. Grammar and Style

Although you will find a more comprehensive treatment of grammar and style in the APA Publication Manual (which is worth reading, especially if it has been a while since you have written a scholarly paper), the following list of common errors is a good place to start when editing your work. Please review your work carefully to ensure that none of the following problems appear in your work.

However, keep in mind that this list is not exhaustive, and your instructor may have additional suggestions for improving your writing. This list includes the issues that occurred most frequently in initial drafts of papers.

Furthermore, you should use spell-check and grammar-check on every draft of every chapter, but keep in mind that these functions occasionally miss problems and consider other things problematic that really aren’t.

- **Paragraph length:** When you introduce a new idea (even within the discussion of the same topic), start a new paragraph.

- Try to be **concise with words.** Delete unnecessary words or phrases (e.g., choose “now” rather than “at this point in time”; choose “because” rather than “due to the fact that”; eliminate vague modifiers such as “very,” “quite,” “somewhat,” etc.).

- When citing sources, use only the author’s last name. Omit first names, initials, “Mr.,” “Ms.,” “Dr.,” etc. Similarly, it is rare that the title of an article, book chapter, or book would be included in the text itself. Just refer to the study by the author(s) and year.

- Avoid anthropomorphizing the words “study,” “research,” “results,” “findings,” “data,” etc. These things can reveal, indicate, suggest, etc. In contrast, only people (e.g., authors or researchers) can hypothesize, conduct, conclude, state, etc. When in doubt, use the authors or the word “researcher” as the subject. Examples:

  Correct: The authors concluded that participants improved substantially during the course of the study.
  Correct: The authors stated that the findings were questionable.
  Correct: The study’s findings revealed that the treatment and control groups did not differ.
  Incorrect: The study concluded that participants improved substantially during the course of the study.

- **First, second, and third person:** First person (I, me, my, mine) is allowed in APA style, though it should be used judiciously. First person is more common in narrative writing and (at times) in persuasive writing; it is less common in expository writing, reviews of literature, etc. As a rule, the use of second person (you, your, yours) is not typical in scholarly writing, particularly to refer to the “universal” experience. Third person is typical in all types of writing, though APA discourages referring to oneself in the third
person when writing the results of one’s original research. However, some professors prefer third person to first person. If in doubt, consult with your professor.

- **Agreement of subject and verb**: Singular subjects (e.g., student, teacher, person) require singular verbs (e.g., learns, instructs, understands). As a rule, a singular verb ends in an *s*. The most common problem with lack of subject-verb agreement occurs when the subject does not immediately precede the verb. Examples:

  Correct: *The teacher with thirty rambunctious students uses several classroom management strategies.*
  Incorrect: *The teacher with thirty rambunctious students use several classroom management strategies.*

If you aren’t sure if your subject and verb agree, try reading just the subject and the verb aloud and see if the pairing sounds correct.

- **Agreement of noun and pronoun**: Singular nouns require singular pronouns (e.g., he, she, him, her, his, hers). Plural nouns (which usually end in an *s*) require plural pronouns (e.g., they, them, their, theirs). It is a common mistake to pair a singular noun of unknown gender (e.g., student, teacher) with a plural pronoun (e.g., they, their), so be careful of this error! Here are some examples of incorrect usage and improvements:

  Incorrect: *Each student will be rated on their comprehension of the material.*
  Acceptable: *Each student will be rated on his or her comprehension of the material.*
  Good: *Student comprehension of the material will be rated.*
  Better: *Students will be rated on their comprehension of the material.*
  Best: *The teacher will rate each student’s comprehension of the material.* [Note that this example also uses active voice rather than passive voice; see below.]

  Incorrect: *When a teacher experiences a simultaneous increase in workload and decrease in paycheck, they may become discouraged.*
  Acceptable: *When a teacher experiences a simultaneous increase in workload and decrease in paycheck, he or she may become discouraged.*
  Better: *When teachers experience a simultaneous increase in workload and decrease in paycheck, they may become discouraged.*
  Best: *A simultaneous increase in workload and decrease in paycheck can cause discouragement among teachers.*

You may want to run the “find” feature of Word and look for the terms “they” and “their” to ensure that you have used these pronouns correctly (i.e., only with plural nouns).

- **“Which” vs. “that”**: The pronoun “which” is used in non-restrictive clauses. A non-restrictive clause is a series of words that modifies a noun but does not restrict the meaning of the noun. For example:

  *The students took the tests, which I graded.*
In this case “which I graded” is sort of an add-on—it’s added or incidental information. Note that a non-restrictive clause is always preceded by a comma.

In contrast, a restrictive clause is a series of words that restricts the meaning of the noun. The pronoun “that” is used in restrictive clauses. For example:

*The students took the tests that were timed.*

In this example, the clause “that were timed” tells you something essential about the tests.

Notice the difference between these constructions:

*The computers, which were new to the classroom, drew students’ attention.*
*The computers that were new to the classroom drew students’ attention.*

Both sentences are correct, but the meanings are slightly different. In the first sentence, “which were new to the classroom” is incidental; it could be taken out and the meaning of the sentence wouldn’t change. The main idea is that the computers drew students’ attention. In the second sentence, “that were new to the classroom” designates the specific computers that drew students’ attention. There may have been other computers in the classroom, but the students’ attention was drawn to those that were new.

- Similarly, use “that” or “which” when referring to objects and “who” when referring to people.

*The spelling test that the students took was difficult.*
*The students who took the spelling test were frustrated.*

- **Verb tense** in the context of the literature review: A common error is the use of present tense when discussing studies that have already been conducted. Past tense is preferred. Examples:

  *The authors found...*
  *The results suggested...*
  *Genius and Brilliant (2007) hypothesized that...*

  Furthermore, scholars use **active voice (rather than passive voice)**. Example:

  Active voice: *Participants completed the survey*
  
  Passive voice: *Participants were given the survey to complete.*

- **“That” as a conjunction** is often omitted in spoken language, but it should not be left out of written phrases. Examples:
The authors suggested that the study had too many limitations to be credible. Respondents thought that there was insufficient time devoted to science instruction. Most of the participants believed that dual-language instruction was valuable. Genuis (2010) stated that the issue is severe enough to warrant attention.

But…

Genuis (2010) stated, “The problem is too big to be ignored” (p. 20).

- **Parallel construction:** When several items are in a list, they must have the same grammatical form. Example:

  *The program involves* **introducing** a self-monitoring form, **presenting** an intervention, and **tracking** change using the form.*

  In the example above, all three words in bold are gerunds.

  Another correct example:

  *Limitations include the small sample size, **lack** of randomization, and unreliable **instrumentation**.*

  In the example above, all three words in bold are nouns.

  Incorrect example:

  *Limitations include the small sample size, the authors didn't use randomization, and the instruments were not reliable.*

  In this example, the first item in the list (small sample size) is a phrase, while the other two items are entire clauses (noun + verb).

- **Lists:** At times, it is appropriate to include a list of items following a colon (:), if the phrase before the colon could be a sentence. However, all items in such a list must be the same grammatical form.

  Example:

  *Threats to internal validity are numerous: history, maturation, regression to the mean, mortality, and instrumentation.*

  In this example, the phrase before the colon could be a sentence (*Threats to internal validity are numerous.*) and the items after the colon are in the same grammatical form (all nouns).

  Incorrect example:
The measures included: STAAR test, district benchmarks, and weekly tests.

In this example, the items are in the same grammatical form, but the phrase before the colon is not a complete sentence (The measures included.). No colon is needed.

Correction:

The measures included the STAAR test, district benchmarks, and weekly tests.

Incorrect example:

Limitations of the study are: the lack of generalizability, participants were not randomly assigned to groups, and there was no pretest.

There are two problems with this example. First, “the lack of generalizability” is a phrase, while the other two list items are clauses. Second, there is no need for a colon after “are.”

- **Dangling and misplaced modifiers:** Make sure that adjectival and adverbial phrases are close to the noun or verb they modify.

Correct example:

Using the SmartBoard, the teacher demonstrated a science experiment to the students.

In this example, the teacher used the SmartBoard to demonstrate the science experiment.

Incorrect example:

The teacher demonstrated a science experiment to the students using the SmartBoard.

In this example, it is unclear whether the teacher used the SmartBoard or whether the students used the SmartBoard.

- The **semicolon (;)** should be used to join independent clauses. If a conjunctive adverb is also used, the adverb should also be followed by a comma. Example:

The study had several strengths; however, random assignment to groups was not one of them.

- On a similar note, the word “**however**” (and similar conjunctive adverbs such as “moreover,” “nonetheless,” “therefore”) is almost always followed by a comma. Example:
Therefore, we no longer have to rely on a single method for teaching students to read.

- **Commas (,):** Use commas when appropriate, but don’t use them haphazardly. See APA for excellent examples of the proper use of commas. A comma indicates a natural pause, so try reading text aloud to see where the pauses should be. Examples:

  When we have gathered enough data, we can begin to determine if there are differences between groups.

  Mediocre (2007) discounted the importance of education, whereas Brilliant (2008), whom most consider the more sophisticated theorist, stressed the necessity of education.

  In addition, APA style requires a comma after the second-to-last item in a series of three or more items (i.e., the item before “and”). Examples:

  - Participants included administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

  Note that there is a comma after “parents.”

  Educational researchers formulate hypotheses, gather data, and draw conclusions based on the data.

  Note that there is a comma after “data.”

- **Apostrophe (‘):** Be careful to use the apostrophe correctly (i.e., in contractions or with the possessive case—except for possessive pronouns), not just with any plural noun. Examples:

  - The student’s name (Singular possessive case; refers to a single student)
  - The students’ names (Plural possessive case; refers to multiple students)
  - The students exceeded expectations. (Plural, non-possessive; refers to multiple students)
  - It’s difficult to determine. (Contraction of “it is”)
  - Its value can be seen in its ability to distinguish students who need help. (Possessive pronoun)

- **Ampersand (&):** This “and” sign should only be used in parenthetical citations, not as a substitute for the word “and” in the sentence itself.

  Correct examples:

  - Smith and Jones (2009) explored the importance of mentoring for new teachers.

  In a study of mentoring programs for new teachers (Smith & Jones, 2009), participants reported that their mentors played a huge role in their socialization to the profession.

  Incorrect example:
Smith & Jones (2009) found that mentor programs were beneficial for both new teacher mentees & their experienced mentors.

In this example, both uses of “&” are incorrect.

And finally, a few random but important reminders:

- The word “data” is plural in virtually all scholarly papers. Therefore, it requires a plural verb (which usually does not end in an s). Examples:

  The data suggest...
  The data indicate...
  There are insufficient data to conclude...

  But...

  An examination of the data reveals...
  Analysis of the data demonstrates...

- Two of the most confused words are “affect” and “effect.” Part of the problem stems from the fact that both are nouns and verbs. Another problematic aspect is that the noun and the verb that essentially mean the same thing are spelled differently. Here is a quick guide:

  Affect (noun): Expression of emotion. Note that this usage is rarely used except in the mental health field. Example: The student’s affect was flat.
  Effect (noun): Outcome. Example: One effect of the intervention was improved scores.
  Affect (verb): To influence or cause. Example: The intervention positively affected scores.
  Effect (verb): To elicit or bring about. Example: One way to effect change is to be an advocate.

- Several words and phrases are commonly misused in research writing. (Thanks to Dr. Jim LeBuffe for providing some of these.)

  An example is “comprises.” The word “comprises” means “includes” or “consists of.” Thus, a class comprises twenty students, an intervention comprises multiple steps, etc. Note that it is incorrect to say “is comprised of.” The correct phrase is “is composed of” or “consists of.” For example, a sample is composed of thirty participants (or, a sample comprises 30 participants).

  Another example is the phrase “as far as.” This phrase is only correct when followed by a noun and “is/was/are/were concerned.” For example: “As far as the salary increases are concerned, we do not yet know if there is enough money in the budget for them.” It is incorrect to write, “As far as the salary increases, we do not yet know…etc.” However, it...
is correct to write “as for” followed by a noun (without “is concerned”). Example: “As for the salary increases, we do not yet know…etc.”

The correct word to refer to a group or person is “disadvantaged” (adjective), not “disadvantage” (noun).

Finally, it is acceptable to use a noun as an adjective at times (e.g., student outcomes; test results) rather than using the possessive (students’ outcomes; test’s results).