

# **PSY256- ACADEMIC WRITING AND PRESENTATION**

**WEEK 3**



# Psychology as a Discipline

- Psychology is a scientific discipline that studies mental states and processes and behaviour in humans and other animals.

(<https://www.britannica.com/science/psychology>)

According to Thrass and Sanford (2000), psychology writing has three elements:

- describing,
- explaining,
- understanding concepts from a standpoint of empirical investigation.

(<https://owl.purdue.edu>)



# Principles for Writing in Psychology

- **Using plain language:** Psychology writing is formal scientific writing that is plain and straightforward. Metaphors, alliteration, or anecdotes are not appropriate for writing in psychology.
- **Conciseness and clarity of language:** The field of psychology stresses clear, concise prose. You should be able to make connections between empirical evidence, theories, and conclusions.
- **Evidence-based reasoning:** Psychology bases its arguments on empirical evidence. Personal examples, narratives, or opinions are not appropriate.
- **Use of APA format:** Psychologists use the American Psychological Association (APA) format for publications. Some instructors may provide you with specific formatting requirements that differ from APA format.



# Conventions of Writing in Psychology

- **Avoid surprises:** Be very clear about what points you're trying to make and always showing how new evidence or theories relate to the bigger point of a paper.
- **Avoid direct quotations:** Rather, distill the essence of the statements of other researchers and cite those researchers' work.
- **Use bias-free language:** Use terms that treat people with respect (“people with autism” rather than “autistics”, “gay men and lesbian women” rather than “homosexuals”).
- **Avoid jargon or overly unusual words** except when it is absolutely necessary.



# Conventions of Writing in Psychology

- **Use** the word “**participants**” rather than “subjects”.
- The word **data** is a **plural** word (e.g., The data were...).
- **Be short & clear**
- **Avoid wordiness** (full of extra words).
- **Use headings and subheadings.**
- Always **include a title** for your paper.



# Language in Writing

- Past Tense
- 3rd Person
- No contractions (don't, can't, it's – do not, cannot, it is)
- Clear and Simple
- Fact based (not opinion based)
- Avoid emotive adjectives like: tragic, amazing etc.
- Not big fancy words
- Reader needs to understand what you have written.



# Simple is the best

- Be clear with your discussion.
- Keep your sentences between 12 and 30 words. A few longer sentences are ok – but only if necessary.
- If the sentence runs over 3-4 lines, try to cut it into 2 separate sentences.
- If you do not understand the word – do not use it!
- Be short and go straight to the point.
- A 10th grade vocabulary will serve you better than trying to be a philosopher.
- Minimize your use of first-person pronouns (“I think that...”, “I believe that...”).



# Do's & Don'ts of Effective Writing

- Report information and findings in the field of psychology
- Use APA style
- Present ideas clearly, concisely and correctly
- Scholarly and objective manner
- Suitable citation of the work of others





# APA Style Errors

**1. Don't write a novel.** Don't wait until the end of the paper to give the core of your writing. Remember to avoid surprises!

**Do tell a story.** You should tell a straightforward tale of your research in an outline. You should keep it simple and direct. Make it clear from the beginning what you are arguing!

**2. Don't try to "prove" a theory.** You cannot prove a theory in science but you can form a new theory in the light of the known data.

**Example:** This proves that Bellows' (1998) theory was right.

**Do support the theory.** Even though you cannot prove a given theory, you can certainly provide support for it in the form of evidence.

**Examples:** The results of this study are consistent with Bellow's (1998) theory.



# APA Style Errors

**3. Don't overuse low-value sources of evidence.** Newspapers, popular magazines, and best-selling books are considered lower-value secondary sources. You may use them to provide examples or case studies but try not to cite these sources.

**Do use high-value journals and professional books** as your main sources of scientific evidence. The highest value sources of scientific evidence are peer-reviewed journals. Trade or professional books are also high-value sources.

**4. Don't editorialize.** Avoid evaluative terms such as “horrible,” “ridiculous,” “indefensible,” etc.

**Examples:** “This study completely failed to prove the author’s point.” “It is obvious that [this theory] is correct.”

**Do express your point of view through an objective presentation of evidence.**



# APA Style Errors

**5. Don't overuse secondary sources.** There is a risk of misinterpretation if you are using "as cited in" references. You should not cite textbooks in your paper because they are summaries and interpretations of the work of others.

**Do read the work of all authors whom you cite.** When you cite an author directly, you are expected to read the work to report it accurately.

**6. Don't overuse technical jargon.** Make your paper clear and understandable for an audience with a good general education. When you use more jargons, you narrow your audience.

**Do define key terms.** If you are using a technical term, be sure to define it.

**Example:** "Expressed emotion (EE) refers to the amount of hostility, criticism, or over involvement by family members directed toward the patient."



# APA Style Errors

**Do define key terms.** Be sure to define your specific intended usage of terms that may have multiple meanings or connotations. (The word aggression has one meaning for sports psychologists, a different meaning for psychopathologists, and still a different meaning for animal psychologists.)

## Example:

“Aggression, for the purposes of this paper, is defined as any case of unprovoked attack (hitting, biting, or kicking) upon another child.”



# APA Style Errors

7. **Don't overuse direct quotations.** The opinions of others are not considered evidence in scientific fields. Direct quotes will influence the flow of ideas and should be used in small quantities.

**Example:** Seidman et al. (1997) have stated that for ADHD “the impact on society is enormous in terms of financial cost, stress to families, disruption in schools, and its potential for leading to criminality and substance abuse” (p. 150).

*ADHD: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder*

**Do rephrase and summarize** the important points of other writers (properly cited, of course!) in your own words. Paraphrasing improves the flow of ideas.

**Example:** Seidman and his colleagues (1997) suggested that the social impact of ADHD is enormous, including financial costs, family stress, school disruption, and the potential for criminal behavior and substance abuse.



# APA Style Errors

8. **Don't use footnotes or endnotes.** It may cause distraction if you want your reader to look at the bottom of the page or the end of the paper to read a note.

**Do incorporate footnote material directly into the body of the paper.** If it is important enough to include in the paper, put it in the body of the text. If it is not important enough, delete it all together!





# APA Style Errors

9. **Don't substitute synonyms.** Using different words or phrases for the same concept will only confuse your readers.

**Example:** Extraverted children demonstrate anger when their play is interrupted, whereas, contrary to their more outgoing counterparts, youngsters with an introverted temperament, do not get mad when their activities are interrupted.

**Do attempt to use the same** words or phrases each time you express a given concept to promote clarity. Parallel sentence construction also promotes clarity.

**Example:** Extraverted children demonstrate anger when their play is interrupted, whereas, introverted children do not demonstrate anger when their play is interrupted.



# APA Style Errors

10. **Don't write in First Person.** You should avoid reporting in first person, personal anecdotes, and phrases such as “I feel...” or “I believe...”

**Examples:** “My Aunt Chloe had the same experience with depression...”

“I feel like Crespi and Cameron (1992) should have included a placebo control group in their study...”

**Do write in Third Person.**

**Examples:** “Chloe Johnson (personal communication, April 15, 1999) reported a similar experience with depression...”

“However, Crespi and Cameron (1992) did not include a placebo control group in their study...”





# APA Style Errors

## 11. Don't overuse present tense.

- Use present tense
  - ✓ when describing currently-held theories (“Terror Management Theory states that...”)
  - ✓ for general statements of fact (“Independent cultures place greater value on...”)
  - ✓ in introductory and concluding paragraphs
  - ✓ in topic and closing sentences.
- Use past tense if the work occurred in the past at a specific time.
- Use present perfect tense if the work includes several studies or several researchers.



# APA Style Errors

## Examples:

- William James, in his 1890 treatise, examines how different researchers conceptualize the unconscious.
- Carlyle revisits this question in a series of studies (1992; 1994).

**Do use past or present perfect tense.** These tenses are preferred for actions that have already occurred.

## Examples:

- William James, in his 1890 treatise, **examined** how different researchers **conceptualized** the unconscious.
- Carlyle **has revisited** this question in a series of studies (1992; 1994).



# Strategies and tips for revising and improving the quality of your paper

1. Put your writing down for "**some**» hours and then reread it. You will see many areas for improvement that were not apparent to you during the initial writing.
2. Read it out loud. It is often easier to hear (rather than see) sections that are unclear or awkwardly worded.
3. After the proofreading is done, give a copy to a friend. Don't argue if the friend finds a section that is unclear. If it is unclear to your friend, it may be unclear for your other readers as well.
4. Don't get too attached to a particular phrase, sentence, or paragraph. You have to be able to edit out anything, no matter how cleverly-worded.

