

## **Tips for Writing a Research Paper in APA format:**

### **Basics:**

- A research paper (especially one that requires APA style) is different than a term paper, a creative writing paper, a composition-style paper, or a thought paper.
- A research paper requires you to leave out any personal information (both as content or in your writing style – see below) and to focus on research findings that have been put forth previously (the Intro section), that you have looked at and how (the Purpose (hypothesis), and Method section), and what your findings were (the Results and Discussion section).
- Research papers although generally similar may have different requirements depending on the course (and more specifically the instructor). This is not meant to confuse or frustrate students, rather it comes out of the requirements for publication that vary among fields (e.g., the type of information and the way it is presented has different requirements for behavioral journals than for social psychology journals). Best advice is to follow your instructor's guidelines!
- APA style, although similar, may change over the course of time – information such as how to write the reference section has been changed from edition to edition in the APA Publication Manual

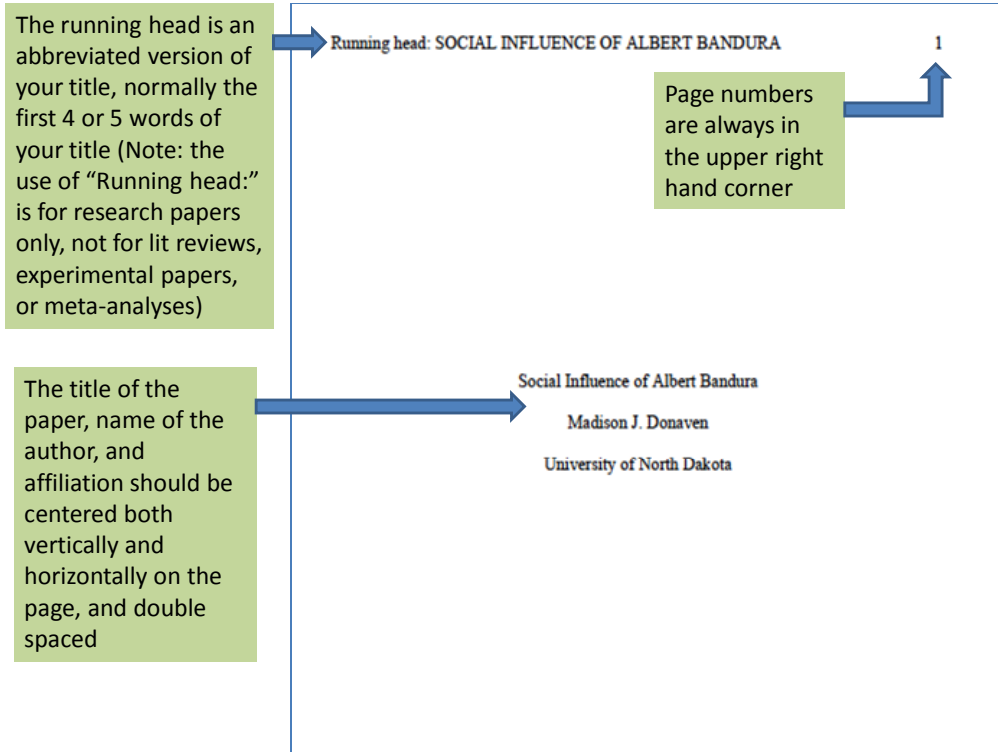
### **General Tips on Writing Style:**

- Impersonal style – as a guideline minimize using first person (e.g., “this study was conducted...” rather than “we conducted this study...”) although there are exceptions; see the APA Publication Manual for any questions about this
- Do not include any personal statements or anecdotes (e.g., “I was interested in studying eating disorders because my sister was diagnosed with...” does not belong in a research paper!)
- Verb tense – as a guideline use past tense (e.g., “the results indicated” rather than “the results indicate”) although there are exceptions; see the APA Publication Manual for any questions about this
- Contractions – do not use contractions! (e.g., “it does not follow” rather than “it doesn't follow”)
- Biased language– keep up to date with appropriate terms, especially if you are writing a paper that involves gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc. The APA Manual includes information about terms that are deemed appropriate for use in research papers
- Citations – be sure to cite your sources. Try to paraphrase as much as possible (as opposed to quoting)...a couple of ways to do this:
  1. State a fact or make a claim in the text; then cite your source in parentheses within the same sentence: “It has been demonstrated that immediate recall is extremely limited for 5-year-old children (Jones, 1998).” OR “Previous research has shown that response to an auditory stimulus is much faster than response to a visual stimulus (Smith & Jones, 2003).”
  2. Can use source as the subject of your sentence: “In a related study, Jones (2005) found that...” OR “In a similar study, Jones and Smith (1999) found that...”

Sections of an APA formatted research paper:

**Title Page**

- Should include a running head (an abbreviated title, no more than 50 characters long and is in all capital letters) and page number, title, author name(s), and affiliation – all double-spaced (should *not* include instructor’s name, name of the course, etc.)
- Title – centered about half-way down page
  - Ex: “Correctly Using APA Format in a Research Paper”
- Name – centered under titled
  - Ex: “Jane Smith”
- Affiliation – school you are attending; centered under name(s)
  - Ex: “University of North Dakota”



## Abstract

- Should include a basic description of the study in about one sentence per section of an APA paper
- Should be between 150 - 250
- Should look like:

“Running head:” is now removed for all remaining sections

GUIDE TO WRITING APA

Centered and not bold

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Abstract

The abstract is a summary of your article. The purpose of the abstract is to allow readers to quickly view the contents of the paper and is the basis for interested individuals to retrieve your article. The abstract for an empirical study should contain the problem under investigation (in one sentence, if possible), the participants, the method used in the study, basic findings, and conclusions and implications of the study. The abstract for a literature review or meta-analysis should include the problem(s) under investigation, what made studies eligible, types of participants included in the primary studies, and main results. This abstract of your paper should be a single paragraph, double-spaced, with a word limit between 150 - 250 words.

*Keywords:* abstract, summary, include problem

The abstract should be the 2<sup>nd</sup> page of your paper, and should be the only thing on that page.

Listing keywords help researchers find your article in databases.

**Introduction** – Should include:

- Clear and explicit introduction of the construct being investigated
- All constructs should be accurately and clearly defined
- Literature review conveys what is known about the construct under investigation
- Literature used in review is appropriate (i.e., from a professional journal)
- Literature used in review is accurate in ideas
- Logical presentation of ideas (i.e., no illogical jumps or omissions)
- Research proposed is discussed in the context of what is already known
- Hypotheses are stated
- Should look like:

The diagram illustrates a sample introduction page with several callouts explaining formatting rules:

- Title of your paper is centered and not bold:** Points to the title "SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF ALBERT BANDURA" centered at the top of the page.
- Sub-headings are bold and left justified:** Points to the sub-heading "Social Influence of Albert Bandura" which is bold and left-aligned.
- In-text citation: Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963):** Points to the citation "(1963)" in the text: "Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) conducted the most famous experiment that displays social learning theory."
- Another example of an in-text citation: (Bandura, 1978):** Points to the citation "(Bandura, 1978)" in the text: "The media is one of the biggest advocates for social learning theory and its use (Bandura, 1978)."

The sample page content includes:

SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF ALBERT BANDURA 3

Social Influence of Albert Bandura

"People who regard themselves as highly efficacious act, think, and feel differently from those who perceive themselves as inefficacious. They produce their own future, rather than simply foretell it." This is a quote from Albert Bandura, one of the most influential psychologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He has developed and expanded theories for more than 50 years. His two biggest contributions are his social cognitive theory (previously termed social learning theory) and self-efficacy. These two theories have propelled Bandura into the limelight of modern day psychology.

Bandura's graduate worked focused mainly on reciprocal determinism, which is the idea that there is a mutual between an agent and its environment. After receiving his Ph.D. Bandura accepted a teaching position at Stanford University. He has been a professor at Stanford University ever since, and has been awarded for his work by being named the David Starr Jordan Professor Emeritus of Social Science in Psychology.

**Social Cognitive Theory (Social Learning Theory)**

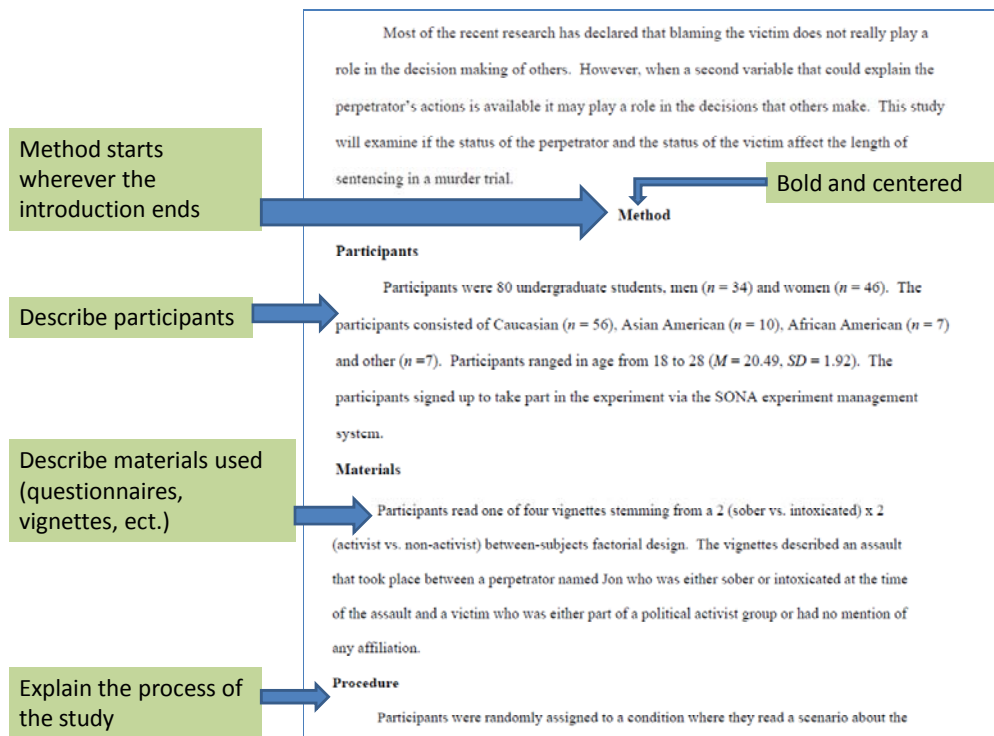
The theory that is most prominent in my mind when I think of Albert Bandura is his social cognitive theory. Social learning theory is the idea that learning takes place through imitation of behaviors, which are observed by the individual. Bandura believed that people's environments were a major factor in the way that people behaved. Bandura, Ross, and Ross (1963) conducted the most famous experiment that displays social learning theory. In this experiment Bandura had 72 participants (36 boys and 36 girls)

to as vicarious learning) goes beyond the laboratory and enters the real world in a multitude of ways. The media is one of the biggest advocates for social learning theory and its use (Bandura, 1978). For example, in commercials advertising a sports drink, it has been a rare sight to not see a professional athlete in the advertisement. It is also seen in advertisements for sports apparel, workout equipment, make-up, and in some cases even food. The hope that the advertisers have is that by getting someone recognizable to endorse the product, the consumer will attempt to imitate that personality. The reason

## Method

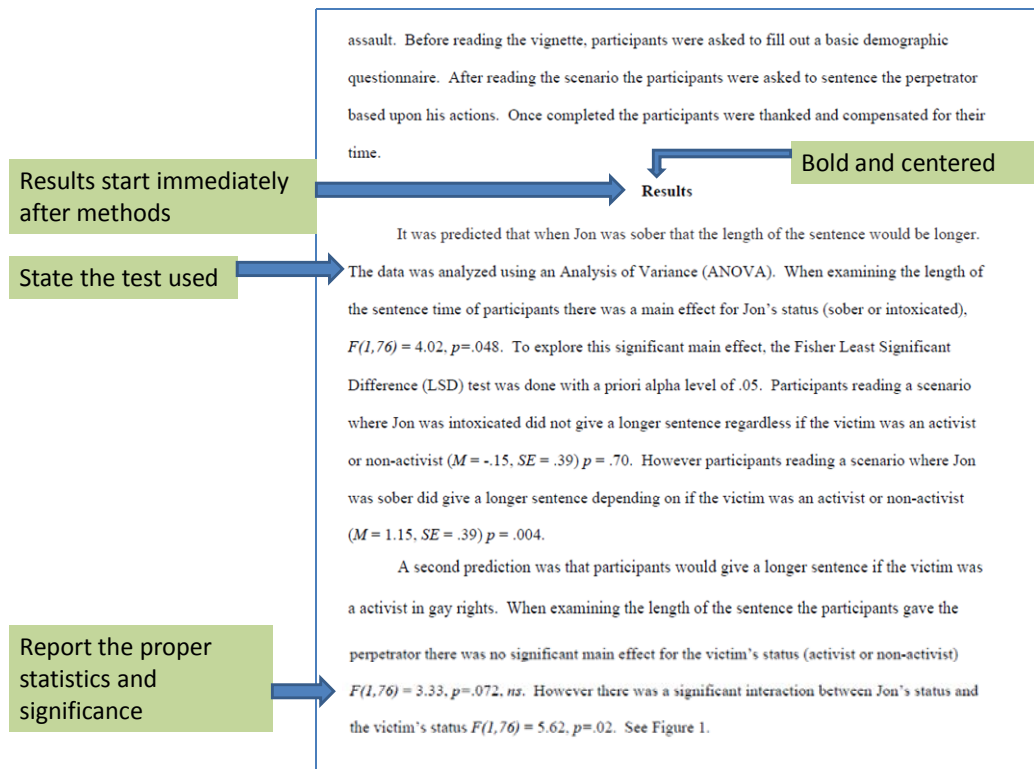
Should provide sufficient information to allow reader to easily replicate study, including:

- Participants
  - Describe how many (N=), gender, race/ethnicity, mean age, etc. (any demographic information that may be relevant to the study) as well as how participants were recruited
- Materials
  - Describe measures or apparatus used, include information about the scale of any measures as well as validity and reliability if available
- Procedure
  - Describe the process of conducting the study (e.g., signing of informed consent, the order of procedures – or questionnaires, if or how participants were compensated for their time, any debriefing procedure, etc.)
- Should look like:



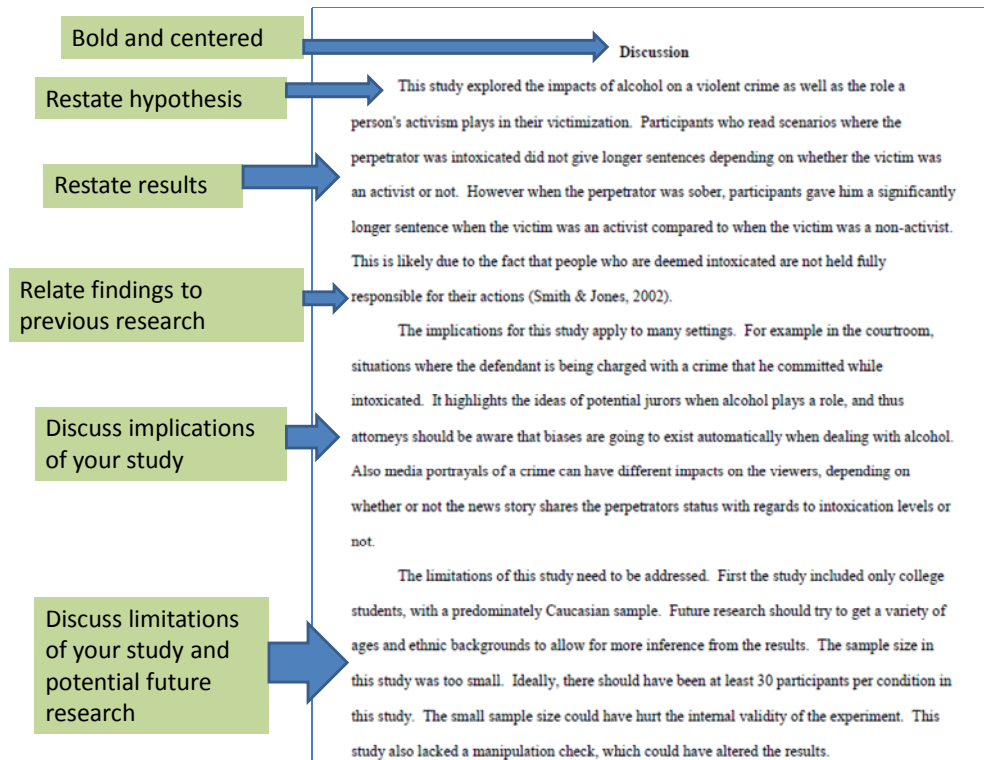
**Results** - Should include:

- Appropriate statistics
  - This will depend on the design of your study; see your instructor with questions pertaining to the appropriate statistical test to use
  - The exact value is reported, for instance  $p = .02$ , NOT  $p < .05$
- Appropriate presentation of statistics
  - An example of appropriate presentation for an ANOVA is given below; consult the APA Manual (or your instructor) regarding appropriate presentation for differing statistics (i.e., how to present a t-test vs. an ANOVA)
- Appropriate interpretation of statistics
  - Be sure you are interpreting the *meaning* of your results accurately (e.g.,  $p = .04 =$  significant result); know what the numbers mean
- Should look like:



**Discussion** – Should include:

- A clear statement of support or nonsupport of the original hypotheses
- An exploration of the similarities and differences between the present findings and the work of others, including relating findings to applicable theory
- A description of limitations and alternative explanations
- Commentary on the importance and implications of the findings
- Should look like:



## References

- Should be in alphabetical order, see examples of different forms of references below
  - The examples are of journal articles
  - Consult the APA Manual for other forms of referencing (e.g., internet sources, edited books)
- Should look like:

Starts on a new page

Alphabetical order

### References

- Martin, S.E. (2001). The links between alcohol, crime and the criminal justice system: explanations, evidence and interventions. *The American Journal on Addictions, 10*, 136-158. doi: 10.1080/105504901750227796
- Rayburn, N.R., & Davison, G.C. (2002). Articulated Thoughts About Antigay Hate Crimes. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 26*, 431-447. doi: 10.1023/A:1016214632062
- Rayburn, N.R., Mendoza, M., & Davison, G.C. (2003). Bystanders' Perceptions of Perpetrators and Victims of Hate Crime: An Investigation Using the Person Perception Paradigm. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 18*, 1055-1074. doi: 10.1177/0886260503254513
- Saucier, D. A., Brown, T. L., Mitchell, R. C., & Cawman, A. J. (2006). Effects of victims' characteristics on attitudes toward hate crime. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 21*, 809-909. doi: 10.1177/0886260506288936



## Tables/Graphs

- All tables and graphs should be labeled with a number, have a title, listed on its own page, and included in the appendices
  - The example table below is a typical “APA-style” table
  - Graphs should be appropriate to the scale being used (e.g., nominal, ordinal, interval, ratio)
  - Consult the APA Manual or your instructor for further information on other types of tables and graphs

Table number → Table 1.

Table title → *Frequency and Percent of Ethnicity*

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percent
White	56	70.0
African American	7	8.8
Asian American	10	12.5
Other	7	8.8
Total	80	100

Figure number and caption →

