

Academic Writing in the StFX Faculty of Education

StFX's Faculty of Education Graduate Studies program uses the American Psychological Association's (APA's) general style for communicative writing. The APA manual (5th ed.) and its November 2007 updates contain general information on preferred writing style for academic communications in the social sciences as well as specific guidelines for presentation and referencing details. Passages in the APA manual that may be useful during your coursework are listed in Table 1.

For example, favour active voice over passive voice. Short, declarative sentences, few acronyms, and minimal jargon are hallmarks of effective academic writing. Complex ideas sometimes require complex sentences, but often two simpler sentences convey the idea more clearly. Contractions are best avoided except in direct quotations. Use imperatives (e.g., must, should) cautiously, when mandatory, or in a recommendation.

Remember the basics. Keep a clear focus on the topic; make sure the narrative flows smoothly and is easy to understand by someone not already steeped in the topic at hand. As you write, keep in mind a reader of your basic situation who is not already familiar with your work details or literature readings. Rather than thinking of your advisor as reader, write for the naïve reader. Introduce the topic in general terms—in your own voice—before getting into the details of the paper. An introduction should concisely explain why the paper was written or why the topic is important, and it should set up the subtopics as a framework for the reader.

Use headings that tell the story (key features) for the busy reader who may skim before deciding whether to read it. Headings serve as signposts for the reader. They also help you, as writer, ensure that the paper is organized logically and the points are easy to follow. Develop an effective title, one that catches the content and direction of the paper.

Document carefully all information sources. The reader should be able to identify easily the source for all parts of the information. Direct quotations should illustrate the ideas rather than do the work of making the point. They add voice and a sense of authenticity for the ideas. As you do the literature research, remember to keep track of all sources in your notes, including page numbers for direct extracts. RefWorks can be very valuable here. You can access Refworks via the [Library Web site](#).

A summary briefly restates the main points already made in text, for reinforcement. A conclusion, when used, captures your “so what” spin to the information already presented. Do not introduce new information in your conclusion; new ideas or quotations should be placed in the main body of the document.

Remember that the content is the most important part of the paper. When writing your initial draft, let the content ideas flow as they may. Revise and edit the narrative flow and APA format once the main ideas have been laid out in a preliminary draft. Provide transitions between sections. Good writing comes through a process of rewriting and revision, as the main ideas become more clearly identified and expressed.

The Six Cs of Informative Writing

- Concise** Do you stay on topic without uneconomical wording, elaboration, repetition, or interesting but tangential diversions?
- Complete** Do you say everything you need to say in order for the reader to understand your points and perspectives?
- Consistent** Do you maintain consistent wording choices, from sentence to sentence, page to page, and throughout the paper?
- Clear** Are the sentences direct, short, or have complex ideas organized more like groups in a parade than a football skirmish (use more than one sentence to describe the action in a football-skirmish-type idea); are the verbs active; is the vocabulary understandable by your target readers without more than occasional reference to a dictionary; are technical terms explained when first introduced; do you avoid jargon and frequent use of acronyms; and is passive voice used sparingly?
- Coherent** Do you use headings like signposts, to let a busy reader skim the headings and get a sense of what is in the paper? Do you maintain a logical development or flow of ideas; do you let the reader know in advance where you are going with the paper and how it is organized; do you use explicit transitional sentences or paragraphs where the focus shifts from one topic to another; and do you bring closure to a topic before shifting, and to the paper at the end?
- Correct** Do you clarify for the reader what is your idea, and what is your source for ideas you obtained from elsewhere; are your citations from other sources accurate and not misleading; and do you say what you mean (i.e., will the reader likely perceive your intended meaning)?

APA Style

American Psychological Association Style Guide (APA, 5th ed., plus Updates, 2007)

The samples outlined below are by no means exhaustive; they merely represent the most common references used by Master of Education students. Always refer to the complete APA Style Guide (5th ed.) and its updates (2007). Also, check out the resources available on the StFX Writing Centre's Web site at: <http://www.stfx.ca/resources/writingcentre/Documenting.htm>

As well, check out the resources Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier (the MEd Thesis Copy Editor) has on her Web site (<http://www.stfx.ca/people/wkraglun>). Remember that as you move through the program, reference rules may have changed after the printing of this document. Follow the most current version. Check with Wendy if you have any questions or concerns.

For **students writing in French**, specific guidelines with respect to punctuation and capitalization exist. You are expected to follow the APA guidelines below, supplemented by the APA referencing resource *MEd APA Guidelines for French Cohort*, created by Professor Anne Curry and Wendy Kraglund-Gauthier. It is available on Wendy's Web site at <http://people.stfx.ca/wkraglun/Writing%20and%20Referencing%20Resources.htm>

Faculty of Education Exceptions to APA Style

The following exceptions apply to theses only:

- **Bold font** is used in MEd “sign-off pages” (see [Thesis Acceptance](#) and [Library Release](#) forms in this document).
- Quotations longer than 40 words are single-spaced.
- References are single-spaced, with double-spacing in between each reference.

APA Style Rules for Punctuation

APA 5th edition outlines specific rules of style for punctuation (See pp. 77–111). However many people are often confused by the various lengths, names, and spacing of ellipses, dashes, and hyphens. This page can help clarify their uses and typography.

The **ellipsis** is used in direct quotations to indicate that intervening text (one word to several sentences or even more) in the original was left out: “Older learners take longer ... to learn a second language” (Smith, 1998, p. 23). Note that a space precedes and follows an ellipsis.

An ellipsis can be typed by using Ctrl + Alt + . where . is the period key, or from the special character symbols under the insert menu.

An **en dash** is mid-size and is used to replace “to” in a range, or for parallel adjectives: like 1952–1953; 27–33 year range; student–teacher relationships. Do not forget en-dashes in your references containing page ranges (i.e., a chapter in a book would appear as pp. 5–12; a journal article page range would appear as 5–12).

An en dash can be typed by using Ctrl + - where - is the minus key on the far upper-right corner of the numeric part of the keypad. (Push both keys at the same time.)

An **em dash** is used for asides, etc., and looks long—like this.

In MS Word the shortcut for typing a full-size em dash is: Ctrl + Alt + - where - is the minus key on the far upper-right corner of the numeric part of the keypad. (Push all 3 keys at the same time.)

Another option, the menu sequence, using the mouse to insert an em or en dash is: Insert; symbol; special characters (at top above the matrix); em dash or en dash.

Some publishers add spaces around an en dash and use it in lieu of an em dash – like this – but APA does not.

A **hyphen** is short and is used when one adjective modifies another adjective, like in a three-horse

carriage, etc.

Other Punctuation

There is only one space after a period (.), colon (:), or semicolon (;)

APA employs the “serial comma” rule between elements (i.e., the height, width, or depth ...)
See APA pp. 78–80 for specific comma rules for clauses.

Useful Passages in the APA manual (5th ed.)

Topic	Pages
APA’s general view on writing style	
Smoothness of expression	32–34
Economy of expression	34–36
Precision and clarity, word choice	36–37
Editorial we, use of first or third person, anthropomorphism	37–40
Subject/verb, pronoun/noun agreement	44–50
Misplaced or dangling modifiers; use of adverbs	50–54
Parallel construction	57–60
Linguistic devices, metaphors	61
Verbs for voice	41–44
Words used with caution (would, since, while)	44, 56–57
Reducing bias in language	62–69
Commas before and	78
Quotation marks for other than direct quotes	82–83
Abbreviations; when to use them	103–106
Headings	113–115
Seriation (a, b, c; 1, 2, 3)	115–117
Quotations; use of ellipses	117–120
Numbers, written as numerals or spelled out	122–130
Reference citations in text	207–214
Ampersand (& used in parentheses; in reference list)	209
Personal communications	214
Cities and state abbreviations in reference list	217–218
Order of references in reference list	219–221
What to do if you cannot find a comparable reference example	232
Periodicals	240–246
Secondary source	247
Books	248–251
Chapters in an edited book	252–254
Reports, papers at conferences and meetings, theses	255–262

Unpublished manuscripts and publications of limited circulation	263–264
Audiovisual media (films, TV programs, music)	266–268

What is a DOI?¹

Internet content can be moved, redesigned, or removed, resulting in broken hyperlinks and incorrect URLs in your reference list. In a move to address this issue, many scholarly publishers now assign a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) to journal articles and other documents.

The DOI System is used to identify digital intellectual property, identifying where they (or information about them) can be found on the Internet. “Information about a digital object may change over time, including where to find it, but its DOI name will not change” (DOI.org, 2008). A DOI name differs from commonly used Internet pointers to material such as the URL because it identifies an object, not just its current Internet address.

Sometimes DOIs are hard to find or simply have not been assigned. The DOI resolver provided by CrossRef.org, a registration agency for scholarly and professional publications, is one way to try to find a DOI if it is not prominently displayed in the journal article. When a DOI is available, include the DOI instead of the URL in the reference.

APA Referenced Examples

Amis, J. M., & Silk, M. L. (2008). The philosophy and politics of quality in qualitative organizational research. *Organizational Research Methods, 11*(3), 456–480. doi: 10.1177/1094428107300341

Stultz, J. (2006). Integrating exposure therapy and analytic therapy in trauma treatment. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 76*(4), 482–488. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.76.4.482

Note the 9432 refers to the journal, the 76 is the volume, the 4 is the issue, and the 482 is the start of the page range; however, not all DOI numbers are this transparent.

Other Examples of DOIs

doi:10.1000/1047935X

doi:10.1000/ISSN1047-935X

doi:10.2345/S1384107697000225

doi:10.4567/0361-9230(1997)42:<OaEoSR>2.0.TX;2-B

doi:10.6789/WendysPaper13

Note:

A DOI is not the same as the Document ID number, which is often used by journal databases such as ProQuest.

¹ Modified from the updated *APA guide to electronic resources* (2007) and from <http://www.doi.org>

Examples of Some Quotations

Direct Quotation, Reference in Text, Ellipses

She stated, “The ‘placebo effect’ . . . disappeared when behaviors were studied in this manner” (Miele, 1993, p. 276), but she did not clarify which behaviours were studied. [See APA, 2005, p. 118]

Quotation Marks within Quotation Marks, Inserted Text

Miele (1993) found that “the ‘placebo effect,’ which had been verified in previous studies, disappeared when [only the first group’s] behaviors were studied in this manner” (p. 26). [See APA, 2005, p. 118]

Block Quotation, Reference in Text

As Stringer (2007) notes:

Much research is confounded by the lack of interest of the participants, but the collaborative processes of action research are designed to promote high levels of enthusiasm and active participation. Enthusiasm and interest, however, should not be mistaken for sound research processes. (p. 57) [See APA, 2005, p. 118]

Multiple References in Text, Summary of Authors’ Point

Newell, Shaw, and Simon (1980) have examined many aspects of computer studies. One example of computer simulation of human problem-solving performance is the General Problem-Solver (Newell et al.; Newell & Simon, 1961, 1972). [See APA, 2005, pp. 208, 212]

Secondary Citation

In a discussion on electronic communication as a tool to improve mentoring, Bierema and Merriam assert “Successful mentoring involves frequent and regular interaction . . . [but] barriers such as time, work responsibilities, geographic distance, and lack of trust often reduce, if not halt, interaction” (as cited in Penny & Bolton, 2009, p. 24). [See APA, 2005, p. 247]

Examples of Some Reference List Items

[See APA, 2005, pp. 274–281 and APA, 2007, pp. 15–16, 21, 23–24]

Reference to Entire Books [Book, two authors, third edition]

Mitchell, T. R., & Larson, J. R. (1987). *People in organizations: An introduction to organizational behavior* (3rd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. [See APA, 2005, p. 248]

Chapter in Edited Book

Dewey, J. (1938). Expectations of students. In S. J. Morey (Ed.), *Education for life* (pp. 35–39). Mobile, AL: Preston Press. [See APA, 2005, p. 249]

ERIC Documents

Bangser, M. (2008). *Preparing high school students for successful transitions to postsecondary education and employment. Issue brief*. Washington, DC: National High School Center. Retrieved May 19, 2009, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/3f/62/07.pdf (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED502596)

Skelton, C. (2009). Failing to get men into primary teaching: A feminist critique. *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(1), 39–54. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ826691) [See APA, 2005, pp. 231, 257]

Conference Proceedings

Proulx, J. (2008). Secondary mathematics teacher education: Seeing school mathematics as a key to the rejuvenation of teachers' professional ways of knowing and practicing mathematics. In Canadian Society for the Study of Education (Eds.), *Proceedings of the CSSE Congress 2008*. Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: University of British Columbia. Available from the CSSE Conference Web site: <http://ocs.sfu.ca/fedcan/index.php/csse/csse2008/schedConf/presentations>

<p>Note the use of “Available from” instead of “Retrieved from” when the URL leads to information on how to obtain the cited material rather than the material itself. (See APA, 2005, pp. 259, 275)</p>

Journal Article, Two Authors, Journal Paginated by Issue

Klimoski, R. S., & Palmer, S. (1993). The ADA and the hiring process in organizations. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 45(2), 10–36. [See APA, 2005, p. 240]

Journals with a DOI

Henze, I., van Driel, J. H., & Verloop, N. (2009). Experienced science teachers' learning in the context of educational innovation. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(2), 184–199. 10.1177/0022487108329275 [See APA, 2007 p. 7]

Journal Article without a DOI

Byrnes, J., & Wasik, B. (2009). Picture this: Using photography as a learning tool in early childhood classrooms. *Childhood Education*, 85(4), 243–248. [See APA, 2007, p. 8]

Journal Article without a DOI, Found Online

Schwean, V. L., Saklofske, D. H., Widdifield-Konkin, L., Parker, J. D. A., & Kloosterman, P. (2006). Emotional intelligence and gifted children. *E-Journal of Applied Psychology: Emotional Intelligence*, 2(2), 30–37. Retrieved from <http://ojs.lib.swin.edu.au/index.php/ejap/article/view/70/99> [See APA, 2007, p. 8]

Web Sites and Other Electronic Sources

Corporate Web Site

Nova Scotia Teachers Union. (n.d.). *Nova Scotia Teachers Union home page*. Retrieved May 12, 2009, from <http://www.nstu.ca/app?service=page/Home>

Curriculum Document Available Online

Nova Scotia Department of Education. (2001). *Physical education safety guidelines: Grades primary–12*. Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada: Author. Retrieved May 19, 2009, from <http://www.ednet.ns.ca/pdfdocs/curriculum/Physed-Safety-Web.pdf>

Message Posted to a Newsgroup, Online Forum, or Discussion Group

Chalmers, D. (2000, November 17). Seeing with sound [Msg 1]. Message posted to news://sci.psychology.consciousness, archived at <http://groups.google.com/group/sci.psychology.consciousness/>

White Paper, Available Online

Furst, M., & DeMillo, R. A. (2006). Creating symphonic-thinking computer science graduates for an increasingly competitive global environment [White paper]. Retrieved from Georgia Tech College of Computing: http://www.cc.gatech.edu/images/pdfs/threads_whitepaper.pdf

Online Encyclopedia

Graham, G. (2005). Behaviorism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Retrieved January 28, 2007, from <http://plato.stanford.edu>

Newspaper Article

Prial, F. J. (2002, February 20). The ratings game gets simpler. *New York Times*. Retrieved February 21, 2002, from <http://www.nytimes.com>

Message Posted to an Electronic Mailing List

Smith, S. (2006, January 5). Re: Disputed estimates of IQ [Msg 670]. Message posted to ForensicNetwork electronic mailing list, archived at <http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/ForensicNetwork/message/670>

Writing Checklist

Before submitting **any assignment**, take time to review these important questions.

Formatting

- Did you use Times New Roman 12pt font?
- Is your document double-spaced, except for quotations longer than 40 words?
- Are your margins 1" (2.54 cm) on each side?
- Did you left-justify your margins (i.e., not full-justify)?
- Did you indent the first line of every paragraph (excluding headings and block quotes) by 0.5" (1.27cm)?
- Did you begin page numbering with page 1 on the first page after your title page in the top right header, and continue consecutively numbering every page including the reference list and appendices?
- Did you check each page for widows and orphans, and re-format if necessary?
- Are footnotes used sparingly, if any (see APA 5th ed., p. 202)?

Headings and Paragraphs

- Did you avoid stacking headings one after another, without intervening text?
- Do all headings of the same level appear in the same format (see APA, pp. 114–115)?
- Did you use at least two headings, or none, for each level?
- Is each paragraph longer than one sentence?

Verb Tense and Voice

- Did you write in the present tense or present perfect tense? (i.e., Other authors, including Kraglund-Gauthier (2009) and Curry (2008) have noted the importance of ...)
- Did you use past tense when reporting results?
- Did you write in the active voice throughout the document (e.g., "I ordered the books," not "the books were ordered")?
- Did you vary your verbs to introduce quotations, (e.g., asserts, emphasizes, maintains, observes)?

Capitalization

- Did you write grade 1, page 12, chapter 2, in lower case?
- Did you capitalize other nouns followed by numerals: Phase 1, Day 2, Session 3, and Table 4?
- Did you capitalize proper nouns (the Master of Education program at StFX; the course, Biology of Northern Lakes), but use lowercase for generic terms (2 participants had a master's degree in education; she is a biology teacher; I used action research; the theory of lost domino pieces)?

Wording

- Did you consistently use one term to refer to your work (e.g., study, course, program)?
- Did you use a consistent term to refer to your participants (e.g., students, participants, co-workers, colleagues)?
- Did you use abbreviations and acronyms sparingly (APA pp. 103–104) or provide a list of acronyms if you use more than five?
- Did you avoid using contractions? (e.g., can't, we'd)—except in verbatim narrative and direct quotations?
- Did you hyphenate compound adjectives when used to qualify a noun, (e.g., "university-level program" but "a program at university level")?

- Did you avoid plural pronouns for singular antecedents (i.e., a participant ... they ...)?
- Did you avoid using gender-specific pronouns when discussing authors or when presenting research in which gender was not a variable? (APA, pp. 34, 43)

Numbers

- Did you write numbers 10 or greater as figures, and numbers less than 10 as words?
- Did you write numbers for time as figures (e.g., 6 years, 4-month course)?
- Did you write numbers grouped together with numbers 10 or greater, as figures (e.g., "I noticed that 4 of the 15 participants were writing," but "two of the five pages were blank")?

Punctuation

- Did you use only one space after punctuation, including author initials on the References page, except for the (n.d.) used when no date is given on a publication (see APA, p. 290–291)?
- Did you use commas for two or more items in a list (e.g., "David, Mary, and I went.")?
- Did you put commas and periods inside quotation marks (e.g., He said, "I went there.")?
- Did you use (a), (b), and (c) for lists within a paragraph?
- Did you use 1., 2., and 3. to number each paragraph in a serial list (see APA, p. 116–117)?
- Did you reserve quotation marks primarily for use around direct quotations? APA uses quotation marks sparingly otherwise (for irony, slang, and coined words).
- Did you use the en-dash (–) to separate numbered items (e.g., numbered page ranges 23–34 in your References pages) and em-dashes (—) for "asides" (see APA, p. 291)

Bolding and Italics

- Is there no bolded text in your document, other than the exceptions in the MEd document forms required for theses?
- Did you use italics (rather than quotation marks) for emphasis, technical or key terms, linguistic examples, and for Level 3 and Level 4 headings?

Tables and Figures

- Did you include copies of all tables and figures cited, if any?
- Are all tables and figures cited in the text, numbered in the order cited, and provided with captions?
- Did you present tables (pp. 162–169) and figures (pp. 181–187) in APA style?
- Did you obtain written permission from the copyright holder to use any previously published tables, figures, poetry, etc. (see APA pp. 174–175)?

Quotations

- Did you block left indent by 0.5" (1.27cm) and single-space all quotations of 40 or more words?
- Did you avoid using quotation marks around blocked quotations?
- Did you give page numbers for all direct quotations?

Confidentiality

- Did you ensure people and institutions are anonymous (e.g., fictitious names are not transparent) unless permission for identifying the persons and places has been granted?

- Did you include only personal data for which you received informed consent (such as audio-taped interviews), not from informal conversations for which consent was not specifically extended?

References in Text

- Did you eliminate the repetition of the date, in subsequent references to the same author/date in the same paragraph? (e.g., Brookfield (1996) in the first reference, but Brookfield only in subsequent references in the same paragraph)?
- Did you use et al. only after the first citation for references with three to five authors?
- Did you alphabetize multiple references within parentheses (e.g., Apps, 1999; Conte, 1998)?
- Did you separate multiple references in parentheses with a semi-colon?
- Did you use the ampersand (&) only in parentheses and the reference list?
- Did you cite multiple references illustratively—for example: I hold with proponents of experiential learning (e.g., Boud & Miller, 1996; Lindeman, 1926), rather than exhaustively listing all experiential proponents you have reviewed (see APA, p. 28)?
- Did you avoid appropriating a reference's voice or actions for your own—for example: I asked the teachers to reflect on their activities in their journal (similar to Jones' procedures, 2003, p. 27); not, I asked the teachers "to reflect in a journal on what you have done" (Jones, 2003, p. 27); also use "see" to reference background information on a concept in your actions (I investigated the concept of emotional intelligence (see Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Reference List

- Did you cite every reference in the text with exactly the same spelling, name(s), and date as those in the reference list?
- Did you match every reference in the reference list with those in the text?
- Did you follow APA style (5th edition and updates, i.e. DOI numbers) in your reference list?
- Did you use lower case titles for articles and books in the reference list?
- Did you use upper and lower case titles for journals in the reference list?
- Did you use hanging indent paragraphs?
- Did you order references from the same author and different years from oldest to newest (e.g., Doe, J. (2000), then Doe, J. (2003)?
- Did you distinguish between two references with identical authors and date by assigning "a" and "b" in date by title alphabetization—for example: Doe, J. (2001a). *Doing it right*; Doe, J. (2001b). *Making do with what you have*—regardless of which you cited first in text?

Appendices

- Are the appendices labelled A, B, C, in order of citation, and are the pages numbered consecutively with the rest of the document?
- Do all appendices conform to requirements for margins and APA style?
- Did you use original text (i.e., retyped for the thesis) rather than photocopies for appendices?

Proofreading

- Have you made use of the services of the StFX Writing Centre to identify and revise patterns of error, learn self-editing practices, and hone writing and documenting styles?
- Did you have a second reader proofread the document for typographic errors and sentence clarity?
- Did you set your word processor's spell-check to English-Canada?