

APA Most Common Errors

American Psychological Association Citation Rules: Rationale and MCE's

By Brigit McCallum, National Faculty, Creative Arts in Learning

Rationale

While there are numerous manuals that have been created to specify proper grammar, formats, and ways of citing works used in a paper, article, or book, some are more widely used in professional circles than others. There is nothing inherently “true” or “right” about APA or any other set of citation rules. What is true is that a group of professionals has chosen to adopt a particular convention as representative of what a properly trained member of that field should use. There is no specific manual of style that is “the” manual for the field of education, broadly conceived, so when professional educators publish, they look to the style dictated by the particular publication. Since many of the publications educators approach with their work specify the use of APA style, that is the set of rules that has been chosen for Lesley student papers to follow.

Examples of correct APA citations for both hard copy sources, and online sources have been listed on Ludcke Library web pages. Toward the bottom of these pages there are various tips for correct use as well. Taking time to read these examples carefully, and in their entirety is essential. What is listed below is not intended to be an alternative to study of these online examples, but as an amendment to them.

MCE's (Most Common Errors)

Citations are of two types, depending on whether they are within the body of your text, or at the end in a bibliography.

In-text citation error:

Neglecting to include the page or paragraph number in a direct quotation.

When you use an idea found in a source, the citation needs to include author's last name and the year of publication. When you directly quote material from the source, using quotation marks, the citation must also include the page or the paragraph number if it is an online source. For example,

“This was seen as an extreme position” (Adams, 2001, p.2). or (Adams, 2001, para 2).

In addition, there is no punctuation preceding the citation, only following it.

Bibliography citation errors:

Incorrect use of Capital letters in titles:

Like it or not, APA style allows only three uses of capitals in titles as they are listed in your bibliography. Capital letters may only be used for the first word of a title,

the first word after a colon, and for proper nouns. This goes against all we've been taught about proper capitalization rules for titles, and therefore is the most common APA error.

Titles are all the more confusing because they are handled differently when mentioning a publication in the body of your paper. Here's the explanation from the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, (5th edition):

Capitalize major words in titles of books and articles within the body of the paper. Conjunctions, articles and short prepositions are not considered major words; however, capitalize all words of four letters or more.

Capitalize all verbs (including linking verbs), nouns, adjectives, adverbs and pronouns. When a capitalized word is a hyphenated compound, capitalize both words. Also, capitalize the first word after a colon or a dash in a title (APA, 2001, p. 95).

Incorrect listing of authors' names:

Authors' first and middle names are not spelled out in APA style. They are only listed as initials. When there are multiple authors, each is listed the same way – last name, initial(s).

Incorrect listing of online database names:

There is a wealth of information located in the databases that are available to registered Lesley students through the Ludcke Library website. When listing an article found in one of the databases, however, it is necessary to list the particular database the article was found in. Listing it as a Lesley Library or Ludcke Library Database, will not allow a reader to retrace your steps and find the article, which is what citations are intended to do. Naming the particular database, Academic Search Premier, Academic Search Elite, Wilson OmniFile, or Expanded Academic ASAP, etc. is the way to go. The database name usually shows on your printed article.