

Top 10 Little-Known APA Rules

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First, remember that your university rules trump APA rules.

Second, read on, and perhaps forward these little-known rules to your professor or reader. These are not all the rules (duh, the APA guide is 400+ pages), just the ones I most frequently have to explain.

1. Numerals

The following are APA rules regarding numerals ([APA 5th ed., Sec. 4.42, pp. 122-125](#)).

Numerals (rather than spelled-out numbers) are used for the following:

1. “All numbers 10 and above”
2. “All numbers below 10 that are grouped for comparison with numbers 10 and above (and that appear in the same paragraph)”
3. “Numbers that represent time; dates; ages; sample, subsample, or population size; specific numbers of subjects or participants in an experiment; [and] scores and points on a scale”
4. “All numbers in the abstract of a paper”
5. Numbers that denote a sample or chapter, etc., following the noun (e.g., chapter 4, Sample 1, Grade 8).
6. “Numbers that represent statistical...functions, fractional or decimal quantities, percentages, [and] ratios” (e.g., 3 times as many, 5%. However, “common fractions” such as “one fifth of the class” are spelled out.)
7. Rounded large numbers are expressed as 3 million, \$2.5 billion.

However, numerals are never used at the very beginning of a sentence. Also, the numbers 0 and 1 can be spelled out if it helps comprehension.

2. Numerals regarding school grades

It's Grade 8 but eighth grade. It's eighth-grade teacher but eighth grader. Grades 2–5.

3. Hyphens

No hyphen with a lot of prefixes, including re, pre, post, multi, non, over, under, etc. Rules are complex, though. For instance, if it's broken up, it's “pre- and posttest.” See [APA pp. 90-94, including the table on p. 92](#).

4. Little-known reference rule:

Use first initials in text citations to distinguish between two different refs in text where first authors have same last name (e.g., L. W. Howard, 2000; R. Howard & Jones, 2006). See [APA 5th ed., p. 211, Section 3.98: Authors With the Same Surname](#): “If a reference list includes publications by two or more primary authors with the same surname, include the first author's initials in all text citations, even if the year of publication differs”

5. Another little-known reference rule:

“Within a paragraph, you need not include the year in subsequent references to a study as long as the study cannot be confused with other studies cited in the article” (APA p. 208).

6. Spacing

Most universities prefer you to single-space all block quotations. This is also an APA preference specific to dissertations (see APA 5th ed. p. 326).

7. Abbreviations

Don't use an abbreviation/acronym unless you're going to use it 4+ times in the doc. And use it exclusively after explaining it the first time; do not explain it again (exception: tables/figures, which are supposed to “stand alone”).

“To maximize clarity, APA prefers that authors use abbreviations sparingly....excessive use of abbreviations...can hinder reading comprehension. Conversely, abbreviations introduced on first mention of a term and used fewer than three times thereafter may be difficult for a reader to remember, and you probably serve the reader best if you write them out each time” (i.e., don't use the abbreviation). APA 5th ed., p. 104

In all circumstances, other than in the reference list...you must decide (a) whether to spell out a given expression every time it is used in an article or (b) whether to spell it out initially and abbreviate it thereafter. APA p. 104

8. Abbreviation of U.S.

Note that United States is abbreviated as “U.S.” only when used as an adjective: “U.S. Navy,” but “in the United States.” APA p. 110 plus *Chicago Manual of Style*.

9. Paragraphs in a series

Separate paragraphs in a series, such as itemized conclusions or steps in a procedure, are identified by an arabic numeral followed by a period. Subsequent lines of each item are flush left; the first line of each item is indented .5 inches. APA pp. 116-117, 292. Note that your university rules may differ.

10. Italics

Use italics (note quotes) to cite a letter, word, phrase, or sentence as a linguistic example. APA pp. 83, 100

Use italics (not quotes) to introduce a technical or key term. APA pp. 83, 100

Use italics for scales in a Likert scale (*strongly agree, agree, etc.*)