



SECOND EDITION

Writing With Style

APA Style Made Easy

Lenore T. Szuchman

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2nd Edition

Lenore T. Szuchman
Barry University

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In memory of my parents

Writing With Style

APA Style Made Easy

Preface

This book offers psychology students a new method for learning to write research papers in the style described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. It calls their attention to the style of writing used in actual professional journals and leads them through a process of collecting examples of words, phrases, and sentences that illustrate the essential stylistic components. They can use these examples in their own papers.

This book can be used in several types of classes. Ideally, it should be used early in the training of psychology majors, but after composition requirements are completed. It can be assigned as the first month's work in a writing-intensive course such as Research Methods or Experimental Psychology. It can also be used to *replace* writing requirements in lower-level content courses (such as Developmental Psychology). In this case, students can be instructed to use only journals related to the content area in their assignments. Those students will be less intimidated by writing papers using journal sources in subsequent courses. If a university's program permits, this book can be used by the English composition faculty in sections designed for psychology majors.

Many beginning graduate students are also in need of the training this book provides. They might use it as a supplement in their first graduate research methods classes or upon entry into the graduate program.

Why It Is Difficult for Students to Master APA Format

American Psychological Association (APA) style writing is a skill often targeted for study in research methods classes, but psychology students are usually expected to conform to APA guidelines in all of their written work. Sometimes the transition from first-year composition classes to psychology classes leaves students confused because first-year composition classes tend to be taught with emphasis on the Modern Language Association (MLA) style. In these courses students generally learn how to write a paragraph, how to write a five-paragraph essay, how to develop a “thesis statement,” and how to write a library research paper in the generic (MLA-based) style. This is a useful start, but it does not enhance students’ technical writing skills as much as psychology professors would like.

Shortly after declaring a psychology major, students must master a technical writing style that often contradicts the very “laws” they have learned in their composition classes. They must learn to write using APA style, which includes not only rules made explicit in the *Publication Manual* but also other conventions that constitute the *unwritten* rules of APA style (e.g., rather than write about what other authors *said* or *believed*, concentrate on what they *found* or *reported*; do not mention the title of someone’s article in a literature review; use the passive voice in certain circumstances).

In order to master this new style, students are usually instructed to purchase the *Publication Manual* and use it as a reference. However, it is difficult for the student new to the style to use the *Publication Manual* in that way. One reason may be that students have little experience reading material written in APA style at this point in their training. This workbook fills this gap.

Learning by Modeling

Completing the exercises in this book will familiarize students with APA style by a method that helps them begin to *read* APA publications. The exercises require them to scan APA journals for examples of particular rules and conventions. They then learn by modeling these techniques. The lists generated by completing the exercises in *Writing With Style* can be used as students write their own papers—all the words and phrases contained in the exercises exemplify not only APA style but also the research psychologist’s tone and form. Thus, students benefit

not only from the *process* of searching for examples in psychology journals but also from the *item file* they develop and can use in writing their papers and research reports.

It is daunting for the newly declared psychology major to see the *Publication Manual* and realize that all writing must conform to a style set out in what looks like a reference book rather than a style guide. In fact, the *Publication Manual* is both, but many students need help in figuring out how to use it. For example, there are some rules in the *Publication Manual* that students *must* learn, and there are others that they do not have to learn. That is, some rules must become second nature (e.g., use past tense for the method of an experiment), while others are used only occasionally and do not have to be memorized (e.g., how to abbreviate a certain measurement). I focus on the rules that should be learned, while pointing the way to types of things that should be looked up.

Throughout this book, I call attention to the need for precision in word usage. Students new to scientific writing have not always been trained to seek the type of precision required. For example, I point out that when directing readers to consult a figure or a table, it is important to think about what verbs are possible if *table* is the subject of a sentence. Likewise, students should consider what verbs are possible when an *experiment* is the subject—experiments cannot *try* to do anything, for example.

Students should not expect this book to replace the *Publication Manual*. They should be aware that this is one of several reference books that belong near them when they write. The exercises in *Writing With Style* do not cover every writing situation described in the *Publication Manual*. After all, most of the information in the *Publication Manual* is not going to be used by any one writer. There is also a suggestion in the *Publication Manual* to consult their Web site, <http://www.apastyle.org>, for the latest information. Here I provide general descriptions of the desired contents of each section of the research report, and I give primary emphasis to areas that students often find most difficult. Instructors are likely to find that many of the key points in this book remind them of errors in papers they have graded.

Writing With Style will also not replace a good grammar and punctuation reference. However, I do cover some general rules both throughout the book and especially in the chapter on “Grooming Tips,” because in my experience, students often require additional practice with certain basic grammar and punctuation rules. These include, for example, how to identify and avoid run-on sentences and how to use a colon. These exercises also require that they scan psychology journals in search of examples of accurate application of rules.

Content

After Chapter 1, which offers suggestions to students about why and how to use this book, the order of the chapters is flexible. Chapter 2 contains general conventions, such as how to refer to the work of others in the body of a paper and tips for avoiding sexist language. It is general enough to have some applicability to any section of a research report. The sections themselves are covered in Chapters 3 through 9 in the order that many people write and teach them. It would not be difficult, however, to assign these chapters in some other order. Chapter 10 contains guidance on avoiding the grammar and punctuation errors commonly found in undergraduate psychology papers. This chapter can be assigned at any point in a course, but students seem more convinced that this type of work is worthwhile after they have attempted some writing of their own. The chapter on poster presentations is last because it is likely to be assigned only if posters themselves are assigned. Many students will nevertheless benefit from having access to this material whenever they do prepare their first posters.

The Appendix, “Wrapping It Up,” contains advice on rewriting. Students often assume that proofreading and revising are the same. I make several specific suggestions here for revising. Then, I lead readers through a series of proofreading exercises directing them to rely on their word processors to spot areas of potential problems. This material is presented as an appendix to encourage instructors to assign it whenever students prepare to turn in their first papers.

Because some students may confuse modeling and plagiarism, I include an extensive discussion of plagiarism in the first chapter. In addition, after working a few of the exercises, it becomes clear to students that many authors use similar constructions; these constructions must therefore be in the public domain. In fact, the concept of plagiarism should be more clear in the student’s mind after completing this workbook than it was before.

New in the Second Edition

I have tried to keep this volume brief so that it can be used as a supplement for a variety of courses. However, as I have gained a bit of weight over the years, so has this book. In response to suggestions from readers and reviewers, I have included a few items in this volume that will make it possible for students to rely less on the *Publication Manual*. These additions include, for example, more details about creating tables and figures and more examples of referencing. There are numer-

ous smaller additions as well, such as details on hyphenation and formats for typing headers in manuscripts. I have also made the book current with the fifth edition of the *Publication Manual* (2001), including, for example, referencing electronic sources and information on reporting effect sizes and power calculations. Finally, I have added some guidance for writing a literature review paper in the chapter on “Preparing the Introduction.”

Acknowledgments

Many people participated in the process of preparing this book. Most important are my students and colleagues at Barry University. Frequent discussions among the psychology faculty about our students’ writing led me to try new ways of introducing this material to my Experimental Psychology classes. Those students, in turn, provided feedback on my exercises through their comments and their progress. Using the first edition of this book with classes provided me insight about the ways it could be improved for the current edition.

I want to thank Margie Gatz for her encouragement and kind words at the Psychology of Aging Institute in Duluth. She has been generous with guidance based on her vast experience as a journal editor.

The people at Wadsworth have been great collaborators. Vicki Knight has been so supportive from the start and continues to provide common sense when I need it. Julie Dillemath and Dan Moneypenny have been great with day-to-day issues. Miguel Ortiz provided the initial encouragement to submit the project and remains nearby.

The reviewers of the manuscript have been extremely helpful: Polemia G. Amazeen, Arizona State University; Teresa Barber, Dickenson College; and James Iaccino, Benedictine University. Their comments and suggestions were thoughtful and practical.

Finally, no professor-wife-mother manages to complete a successful manuscript without a lot of sacrifice from husband and children. Paula and Jeff, now adult writers themselves, have begun to give collegial as well as filial support for this project. Jeff, while still in college, canvassed journals with me while I was working on the first edition. He found some of the sentences that I used as examples for these exercises and then tweaked them with his wry humor. And last is Mark, my husband, best friend, and closest colleague. He reads manuscripts, patiently reads them again, and then arranges proper settings on computer programs because form and content both count.

About the Author

Lenore T. Szuchman is a developmental psychologist who received her Ph.D. from Florida International University in 1990. In her position as Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Barry University, she currently teaches several writing-intensive courses, including Experimental Psychology and Advanced Experimental Psychology. She is the author and co-author of articles and conference presentations on cognition and social cognition in older adults. She has also supervised a wide range of master's theses and senior projects which have been presented at professional and student conferences regionally and nationally.

Dr. Szuchman majored in comparative literature at Brandeis University, where she immersed herself in great novels and mastered MLA style. She has an M.A. in special education from the University of Texas at Austin. Her teaching experience is varied, from first-grade at the American School in Buenos Aires to Language Arts classes in secondary school for learning disabled students in Miami, Florida. Thus, she has had rich opportunities to shape her own and her students' writing abilities.

Students in Dr. Szuchman's Experimental Psychology classes conduct six to eight experiments, and write APA-style manuscripts focusing on all but the "Introduction" section. In Advanced Experimental Psychology, each student develops an independent research proposal and produces a complete "Introduction" and "Method" section which often results in a senior thesis. Noticing the students' difficulties

in making the transition from other types of college writing to the type required of scientific psychologists, Dr. Szuchman began to bring stacks of APA journals to class each week in her search for ways to train students to notice the differences between what they had been accustomed to reading and writing and what was now expected of them. Their valuable feedback in these classes shaped the final series of exercises produced for *Writing With Style*.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Lay People and You

You have probably enjoyed reading books found on the psychology and self-help shelves of your local bookstore. Those books may have sparked your interest in psychology and made you think you might want to study psychology in college. Those books were written to make psychology accessible to the general public. By now you should be thinking of those readers as lay people. *You are no longer among them.* You are going to become a professional. You can and should read books written for lay people, but you have to start *writing* like a psychologist. You stopped *being* one of the lay people when you finished your introductory psychology course and decided to major in psychology. You can now consider yourself a psychologist-in-training.