

# APA Thesis Format

---

Below we've provided some helpful guidance on things you need to know to style your thesis to APA format. But keep in mind each university often has its own styling overrides for the title page, front matter, margins, tables of contents and running headers. You need to keep these overrides in mind as well to ensure your thesis is compliant.

## The APA formatting rules

### Page Layout

Ensure every page in your document is US Letter size 8.5" x 11" with margins of at least 1" on all sides. Most dissertations require a larger binding margin, this is not specified by APA but will often be part of specific University Guidelines. Other than the title page and copyright, all pages of the thesis should be numbered right the way through to any appendices at the back.

### Text

All text should have flush left justification so text has a ragged, unjustified right edge. The first line of all paragraphs should be indented by 0.5". The only exception is the first paragraph of the abstract.

Pages should be balanced to avoid windows and orphans. This means no single line of text should appear alone at the top or bottom of a page. The thesis should be double spaced throughout, even in block quotes, footnotes and references.

No words should be hyphenated and there should be two spaces after end-of-sentence punctuation. Italics should never be used for emphasis.

Lists should be separate sentences identified by an Arabic numeral followed by a period. The first word is capitalized, and the sentence ends with a period. If bullets are used then these should be small squares or circles. Commas should separate each item in a series, even before the conjunction *and*, i.e. the serial, or Oxford, comma is required.

### Headers

The header is located within, not below, the margin. There is no need to set the header at a specific distance from the top of the page.

APA guidelines then specify that the title page should have a running header of:

Running head: TITLE OF PAPER 1

The next pages then follow with a running header of:

TITLE OF PAPER 2

However, your University Guidelines may override this instruction instead requesting roman numerals in the front matter and removing the words “Running head”.

## Preliminary Pages

Typically the title and copyright pages are counted but not numbered. The remaining preliminary pages are then all paginated with lower case roman numerals. It is very common for each University to have their own format for the title page and copyright pages so we would recommend checking these carefully and ideally finding examples from other thesis to compare to.

If you include an abstract then the first paragraph is the only one that is not first line indented.

The table of contents can be tricky to get right. Consistent levels of heading must be included although levels as low as 4 or 5 will typically be omitted. Headings longer than one line must have a second line indent of 3 spaces, but not 5 spaces or this will appear as the next level of heading. Every level should use leader tabs and dots.

## Headings

The first page of the first chapter should not repeat the dissertation title. To improve readability, it is then acceptable to triple or quadruple spaces before major heading levels 1 and 2. All headings must then be formatted according to five possible formatting arrangements:

Heading 1: **Centered, Boldface, Title case**

Heading 2: **Flush Left, Boldface, Titlecase**

Heading 3: **Indented, boldface, lowercase, ending with a period.**

Heading 4: **Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase, ending with a period.**

Heading 5: **Indented, italicized, lowercase, ending with a period.**

## Tables

Table captions are italicized, single spaced and major words capitalized. Each must be labeled with a consecutive table number. The page number, table number and table title must then be included in a List of Tables at the front of the thesis. Any table in the thesis must be referred to in the text but only by their number never by “table below” or “table above”.

When styling a table keep in mind that every column must have a heading and it is typically acceptable to single space text or numbers within cells.

Wherever possible you should keep the whole of a table on one page. For tables continued onto the next page, use a line for lower border and place under the line a note in parentheses as follow (table continues) at bottom right. The column headings but not the table title must be repeated with continued table. Table notes should not be repeated but should appear at the end of the last page of table.

Table notes begin with a superscripted letter and are separated by periods. They are styled with italics followed by two spaces and then the note itself which should not be italicized. General points like copyright attribution will end with a period whereas explanations of abbreviations or symbols will be separated by a semi-colon. Specific notes about an individual row, column or cell are then indicated by superscript lowercase letters.

## Figures

Figure captions are italicized and should end with a period. Each must be labeled with the correct consecutive figure number. The caption label and text should be on the same line as each other. The page number, table number and table title must then be included in a List of Figures at the front of the thesis. Any figure in the thesis must be referred to in the text but only by their number never by “figure below” or “figure above”.

## Quotations

Any direct quote of 40 words or more must be styled in block format and indented half an inch. If there are additional paragraphs in a single quote then the first line of the second paragraph should be indented an extra half an inch.

All quotes must end with a period before the citation in parentheses and should be preceded by a colon.

## References

The references section of an APA thesis must start on a new page with the word *References* in uppercase and lowercase letters, centered. Every reference entry should then be double-spaced and use hanging indent format, so that the first line of each reference is flush left and subsequent lines are indented.

## Footnotes

All footnotes should be numbered consecutively with Arabic numerals in the order they appear in the text. A superscript reference number can be placed anywhere other than in a heading and can follow any punctuation mark, except a dash.

## Appendices

If there is only one appendix, label it *Appendix*; if there are more label each with a capital letter (*Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.*). Every appendix must have a title and begin on a separate page with the the word *Appendix* and the identifying capital letters at the top of the page.

An appendix can include its own headings and subheadings as well as tables, figures, and displayed equations. Every table, figure and equation in an appendix must be numbered to include the letter of the appendix, such as Table B1. If there is only one appendix then just use the letter A, such as Table A1, to distinguish from those in the main text. If one table fills a whole appendix, the table does not require separate labeling.