OU Writing Center APA Style Guide

Based on APA 7th edition

APA Style was first established in 1929 as a set of procedures and guidelines for scientific writing by a group of psychologists, anthropologists, and business managers. Since that time, it has been updated to include information about organizing papers' content, citing references, and preparing manuscripts for print or digital publishing. It is most often used in the social, behavioral, and natural sciences, as well as in health care and the humanities. In any field, the purpose of writing in style is the same--to emphasize the content of a document over its formatting and to consistently identify important information, findings, and sources.

When most people think of writing in a particular style, the first thing that comes to mind are citations and references. While those are both addressed in this guide, there is much more to writing in APA Style than the way you cite outside resources. First, there is information about how to consistently format your paper's text, paragraphs, and pages so that your writing is easy to read and understand. Next, the different elements of papers in APA Style, such as the title page, citations, references, tables, and figures, are described in detail. The final section of this guide is concerned with writing in APA Style so that your paper's text is free of bias and accessible to all readers.

Formatting Your Paper in APA Style

Paper formatting takes place on three levels: the text (typeface and type size), the paragraph (line spacing, text alignment, and section headings), and the page (margins and headers). Using a consistent format for these elements of your paper will make your writing more accessible to readers in physical or digital formats and clearly demonstrate your paper's structure and organization.

Text Formatting

When selecting a typeface for your paper, it's important to consider the font's legibility, availability, and versatility. A legible font is one without distracting stylistic qualities, like calligraphic or novelty fonts might have, typically serif or sans serif. These two font styles make up the majority of word processing programs' default typefaces. Custom or third-party fonts might not be available to a wide selection of your audience, nor are they typically as versatile as the more developed standard font families, which include special characters and symbols beyond the Latin alphabet. The APA Publication Manual recommends six fonts in particular with type sizes ranging from 10- to 12-point.

Recommended Typefaces and Type Sizes

Sans Serif Fonts	Serif Fonts
• Calibri (11-point) • Arial (11-point) • Lucida Sans Unicode (10-point)	• Times New Roman (12-point) • Georgia (11-point) • Computer Modern (10-point)

There are a couple of exceptions to these recommendations, relating to the text's function within a paper. In figures, for example, a sans serif font should always be used to increase the text's legibility against a background. If your paper includes computer code, this text should use a monospace font, such as Lucida Console (10-point) or Courier New (10-point). When creating footnotes, the APA Publication Manual recommends using your word processing program's default settings, even if this results in a smaller font size and reduced line spacing.

Paragraph Formatting

Spacing

The general rule of thumb in APA style is to double-space all text in a document, with some particular exceptions addressed below. Double-spacing the text in your paper will increase its legibility in both physical and digital formats by emphasizing the spaces between lines of text and providing the eye a guide as it moves from one line to the next. When beginning a new paragraph, you won't need to add any extra space between the last line of the preceding paragraph and the first line of the paragraph following, since double-spaced text already provides adequate spacing in these cases. Notable exceptions to these recommendations include title pages, tables and figures, footnotes, and equations.

Line and Paragraph Spacing Rules and Exceptions

General Text	● Double-spaced ● No extra space between paragraphs
Title Page	● Double-spaced ● A blank line should be inserted between the paper's title and author.
Tables and Figures	● Table/Figure Number, Title, and Notes are double-spaced. ● The table body or text within a figure may be single-spaced, one-and-a-half spaced, or double-spaced.
Footnotes	● Typically single-spaced (Note: The APA Publication Manual recommends using your word processing program's default settings for formatting footnotes.)
Equations	● Double-spaced ● A triple- or quadruple-spaced blank line is allowed before and after displayed equations.

Alignment

Another rule of thumb to keep in mind when formatting your paragraphs is that your paper's text should generally be left-aligned, but not justified. The result of this formatting is that the left margin of your text should form a straight line, while the right margin has an uneven edge. The first line of each paragraph in the body of your paper should be indented .5", accomplished in most word processing programs by pressing the

"Tab" button on your keyboard before you begin typing a new paragraph. There are, again, some notable exceptions from the APA Publication Manual to keep in mind when formatting your paragraph alignment and indentation.

Alignment and Indentation Rules and Exceptions

General Text	• Left-aligned • First line of paragraph indented .5"
Title Page	• Centered • No indentation for new lines
Abstract	• Left-aligned • No indentation for first line of first paragraph
Section Labels and Headings	• Centered or left-aligned • Sometimes indented (Note: The following section on Heading Levels addresses these in particular.)
Block Quotations	• Left-aligned • Entire paragraph indented .5" (Note: If a block quote spans multiple paragraphs, the first line of each new paragraph after the first should be indented a further .5".)
References List Entries	• Left-aligned • Hanging indent of .5" (Note: For more information on creating a hanging indent in Microsoft Word or Google Docs, see this page from the CCSU Elihu Burritt Library.)
Appendices	• Table/Figure labels and titles centered

Section Heading Levels

Section headings are used to divide your paper's content into meaningful groupings of information. When writing a section heading, keep in mind that these should be both descriptive and concise. The goal of a well-constructed heading is to guide your reader between the different topics covered in your paper in a way that's easy to understand and logically organized.

In the table below, you will find the format of APA's five heading levels, as outlined by the APA Style website.

Heading Level Formats

Heading Level	Alignment	Font Style	Text Style	Text Begins
Level 1	Centered	Bold	Title Case	As new paragraph
Level 2	Left-Aligned	Bold	Title Case	As new paragraph
Level 3	Left-Aligned	Bold Italic	Title Case	As new paragraph
Level 4	Left-Aligned, Indented .5”	Bold	Title Case; Period at end	Directly following heading
Level 5	Left-Aligned, Indented .5”	Bold Italic	Title Case; Period at end	Directly following heading

Depending on your paper’s length and complexity, you might use a single level of heading throughout the document or all five. The levels of headings are not consecutive; rather, they represent smaller divisions of subtopics within a larger topic. If your paper is divided into major sections, for example, you might use only Level 1 Headings to mark these sections as distinct but equal in importance. If any of those sections, however, included multiple topics within the section that need to be labeled, you would use Level 1 Headings for the main sections, and Level 2 Headings for any subsections included in them. Here is an example of the five levels of heading being used in a text:

> **Level 1 Heading**
>
> The first line of body text begins as a new paragraph.
>
> **Level 2 Heading**
>
> The first line of body text begins as a new paragraph.
>
> ***Level 3 Heading***
>
> The first line of body text begins as a new paragraph.
>
> **Level 4 Heading.** The first line of body text begins on the same line as the section heading.

> ***Level 5 Heading.*** The first line of body text begins on the same line as the section heading.

One important heading to keep in mind will be at the top of your paper's first page. In APA Style, the introduction is not labeled with a section heading. Instead, the paper's title is formatted as a Level 1 Heading, and the introduction's text begins on the line directly following. If your introduction includes multiple topics that need to be labeled as subsections, use Level 2 Headings.

Instead of formatting each heading individually, using your word processing program's style function will increase your document's accessibility for readers using assistive technology to access digital text. More information on this topic can be found in the "Writing in APA Style" section under the heading "Accessibility."

Page Formatting

In addition to your paper's text and paragraph formatting, APA Style also includes guidance for formatting the pages of your document. One universal rule on page formatting in APA Style is that all page margins, left and right, as well as top and bottom, should be 1". The only exception is if you have specific instructions from your professor or institution to increase or decrease the margins' size.

The page header for student papers should include the page number only. Past editions of the APA Publication Manual required both student and professional papers to include a running head, but this is no longer required for student papers unless your professor specifically requests it. When inserting page numbers, use your word processing program's page-numbering function to align the corresponding number to the top right corner of the page. Your numbering should begin at 1 on the title page of your paper.

Elements of Papers in APA Style

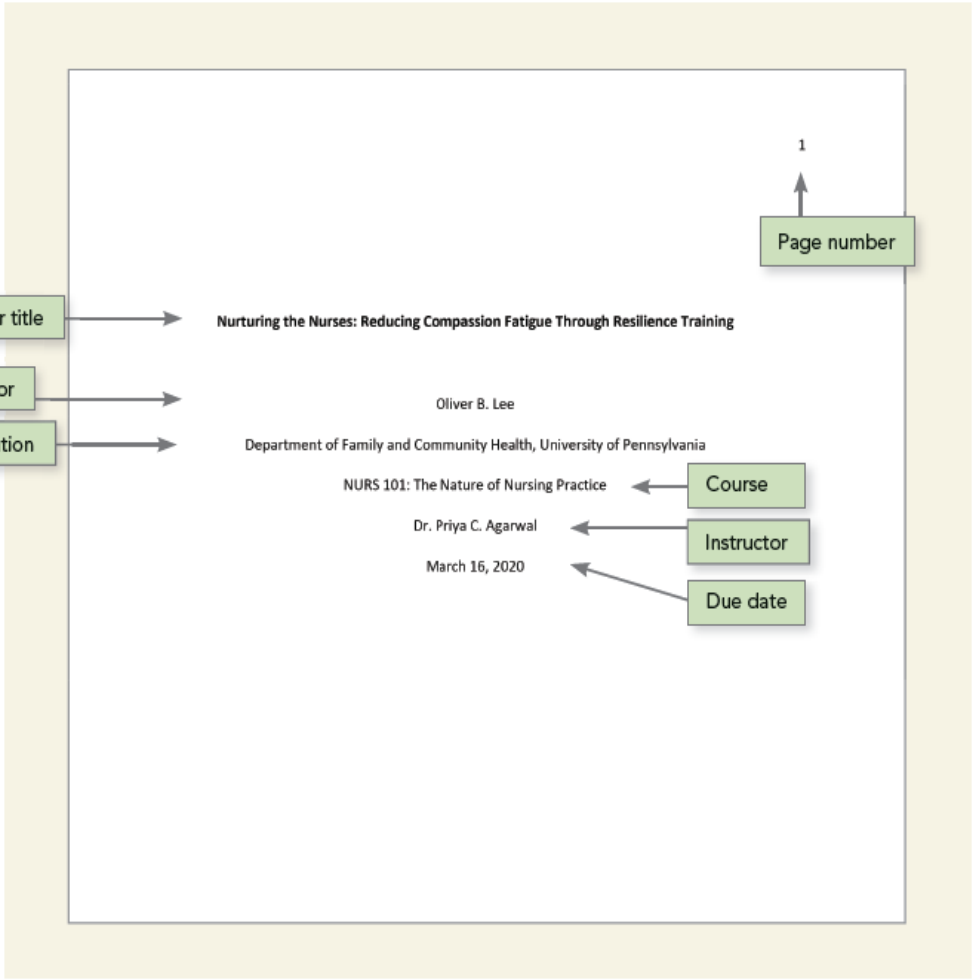
Student papers in APA Style need a title page, text, and references at a minimum. In addition to these three essential elements, a paper might include others such as an abstract, footnotes, tables, figures, or appendices. These elements of papers are not required unless your professor specifically requests them. When included, they should be presented in this order, with each section beginning on a new page:

1. Title Page
2. Abstract
3. Text
4. References
5. Footnotes
6. Tables
7. Figures
8. Appendices

When a paper's footnotes, tables, or figures are compiled into their own sections, they should appear in the order given above. However, these three elements can also be embedded into the paper's text. Footnotes should appear at the bottom of the page on which they are referenced. Tables and figures should be embedded into the text of the page on which they are first mentioned. Large tables and figures which take up a whole page should directly follow their first reference in the text.

Student Title Page

Although all papers in APA Style require a Title Page, there are different requirements for student papers and professional papers. The following example from the APA Publication Manual labels all the necessary components of a student title page.



Source: APA.org

There are some particular notes on content and formatting to keep in mind when creating your title page. All of these components are centered, with the exception of the header. The page number should be placed in the top right corner of every page in your paper, including the title page. The following table provides specific guidance for the components listed in the example above.

Formatting Elements of a Student Title Page in APA Style

Paper Title	• Bold and title case • Three to four lines below top of page • Separate line for subtitle, if necessary

Author Name(s)	• First-last name format • One blank line between Paper Title and Name(s) • Multiple authors should be listed on the same line, separated with “and” for two authors or using list format for three or more authors.
Author Affiliation(s)	• Title case • Department or college listed first, followed by a comma before the university’s name (Note: For a list of departments and colleges at the University of Oklahoma, see this page)
Course Number and Name	• Title case • Course number should be separated from course name using a colon (“:”) • Course numbers typically include a four-letter department code in capital letters followed by a four-digit course number. (Note: Course number and name should match class materials such as the syllabus, section listing, or enrollment documents.)
Instructor Name	• First-last name format • Use the title and full name your professor uses on instructional documents like the syllabus or other class handouts.
Assignment Due Date	• The date can be formatted in a day-month-year or month-day-year format, but in both cases, the month should be spelled out (e.g., 25 June 2021 or June 25, 2021).

Abstract

The purpose of an abstract is to provide an overview of your paper’s contents. Most student papers do not require an abstract. If your instructor specifically requests that you include one with your paper, however, here are a couple key elements to keep in mind. An effective abstract will let your reader know what your paper is about and how you gathered the information presented.

Your abstract should start on a new page, with the title “Abstract” formatted as a Level 1 Heading. The first line should not be indented, beginning on the page’s left edge. This section should be composed of a single paragraph, which is double-spaced and composed of less than 250 words. The goal of an abstract is to provide a summary of your paper’s key points, such as the research topic or question, methods, results and analysis, as well as conclusions. To help others find your paper when searching in a

database, you might also include a list of keywords in a new, indented paragraph following this first summary paragraph.

Citations and References

In the APA Publication Manual's author-date system of citation, a brief in-text citation directs the reader to a full reference list entry, found at the end of the paper's text. Any outside source used in a paper should include both a citation and a reference list entry. When drawing from outside sources to paraphrase, quote, reprint, or adapt another author's work, you'll need to include a citation to help your reader identify where you found the information.

The number of citations and references you use in a paper will depend on the type of assignment and the scope of the paper. You should make sure you use a citation and reference any time you bring in information from an outside resource, to avoid plagiarism. However, if you are using the same source across multiple sentences in a paragraph, you only need to cite the first sentence which uses this source, as long as it is clear that you are working from the same source material in the following sentences. You can find more information about using the appropriate level of citation on the APA website.

In-Text Citations

To avoid plagiarism when writing your paper, you'll need to include a citation any time you quote or paraphrase an outside source. Two forms of citations are acceptable in APA style: parenthetical citations, which include the author's name and the date of publication in parentheses at the end of a sentence, and narrative citations, which integrate these elements into the sentence.

If you are citing a specific part of a source, provide the appropriate details a reader would need to locate the source material. This should be provided after the year of publication in the citation, separated by a comma. The APA Style website provides specific formats for citing pages, chapters, data, and many more elements of outside sources.

Parenthetical Citations. These types of citations most often appear at the end of a sentence, inside the final punctuation. They can also be used within a sentence to distinguish material from multiple sources or your own analysis.

In a parenthetical citation, you must include the author's last name(s) and the publication date, separated by a comma. A source with two authors will include both authors' names, separated by an ampersand ("&"). If there are three or more authors, you should give the first author's name, followed by the abbreviation "et al.", a comma, and the year of publication.

Parenthetical Citation Examples

One author	Two authors	Three or more authors
(Surname, 2021)	(Surname & Surname, 2021)	(Surname et al., 2021)

Citation at the end of a sentence

In-text citations allow the reader to identify the source of outside claims or evidence used in your paper (Surname et al., 2021).

Citation within a sentence

As readers use citations to discern between outside material and an author's original ideas (Surname et al., 2021), effective writers should clearly distinguish material from outside sources.

Narrative Citations. If you include the author's last name or authoring organization in the text of a sentence, you can use a narrative citation instead of a parenthetical one. You'll need to include the year of publication in parentheses directly following the author's name. If the text of your sentence also includes the year of publication, then no parentheses are required.

Example narrative citation using author's name

Surname and Surname (2021) first introduced the concept in their study on the practical uses and applications of in-text citations.

(Note: While parenthetical citations use the ampersand to connect two authors' names, narrative citations will spell out the word "and."

Example narrative citation using author's name and year of publication

Surname et al. introduced this concept in their 2021 study on the practical uses and applications of in-text citations.

References

Your paper's references will be located after the text of your paper, in a section titled "References" with a Level 1 Heading format. Any outside work that you've cited in your paper will need a full reference, which includes four key elements: the author or authors, the date of publication, the title of the work, and the publication source. These four elements work together to help your reader find the original documents you used while writing your paper. Each of these elements should end with a period before the next element is introduced. If any of these elements have multiple parts to them, they should be separated by a comma. Different types of sources will require more or less information for these elements. You can find additional resources on particular types of reference list entries on the APA Style website.

Elements of References

Author(s)	● This might be the name of an individual author, multiple authors, a group or institution, or a combination of people and groups. ● Names of people should give the author's surname first, followed by a comma and their initials. ● For multiple authors, each name should be separated by a comma, with an ampersand ("&") before the final author's name. ● Format authors' names exactly as they are found in the published work. ● The name of group authors, such as organizations, agencies, or institutions, should be spelled out, with no abbreviations.
Date	● The publication date should be as specific as possible. At a minimum, this should include the year, but could also include the month, day, season, or span of time. ● The date element should be in parentheses and followed by a period (e.g., "(2021).") To include additional information, insert a comma directly after the year, then provide the rest of the date (e.g., "(2021, July 16).") ● If no date of publication is available, use (n.d.) in place of this element.
Title	● For works that stand alone, such as books, reports, videos, etc., you will need to italicize this element, capitalizing only the first letter of the first word and the first letter of the first word following a colon. ● For works that are part of a larger source, such as articles or edited chapters of a book, you won't need to italicize the title, but capitalize it the same as a work that stands alone. ● This reference entry element should end with a period. If the title

	itself ends with a question or exclamation mark, however, that symbol will replace the period.
Source	● For works that stand alone, the source will include the publisher, database, or website, as well as a link to the appropriate URL or DOI, if available. ● For works that are part of a larger source, you'll need to include the reference information for the original source. If the source is a journal, you should italicize the name and volume number of the journal.

Tables and Figures

If your paper includes tables or figures, there are two options for where they can be located. The first option is to insert the table or figure directly in the paper's text, following the first time the element is mentioned. Large elements which take up an entire page can be inserted on the page directly following the first time they are mentioned. The second option is to group all of your tables and figures into an appendix after the References list. Either of these options are available to you, depending on your preference, unless your professor provides explicit instructions one way or the other.

The tables below provide some important details to keep in mind when creating a table or figure, as outlined by the APA Publication Manual. The first table addresses elements that are common to both tables and figures. The second one addresses elements that are particular to each.

Elements of Tables and Figures

Number	● Positioned above the title, bolded ● Numbered in order of appearance in the paper ● Tables and figures numbered separately (i.e., Figure 1, Figure 2, Table 1, Figure 3, Table 2, etc.)
Title	● One double-spaced line below the number, italicized, Title Case ● Brief and descriptive
Note	● Below the table or figure, only included as needed ● General, specific, or probabilistic notes provide information that isn't apparent from the table or figure

Table-Specific Elements

Headings	● Centered, first letter of first word capitalized ● Each column, including the leftmost column, should have a descriptive heading which explains the table's body
Body	● Centered, except for the leftmost column of cells, which is left-aligned ● Single, One-and-a-half, or double-spaced

Figure-Specific Elements

Image	● Graph, chart, photograph, drawing, or illustration ● Text in the image should use a sans serif font, between 8- and 14-point
Legend	● Sans serif font, between 8- and 14-point, Title Case ● Positioned within the border of the figure, the legend explains any symbols or abbreviations used in the image

Footnotes

The most common use of footnotes is to provide additional information which enhances the reader's understanding of the text. Information that is pertinent or essential to your paper's ideas should be situated within the text, rather than in footnotes. The text of a footnote should be focused and direct, addressing a single issue as briefly as possible.

Like tables and figures, any footnotes used in your paper can appear either at the bottom of the page where they are first mentioned in your paper's text or all together at the end in a section of their own. Both of these options are available to you in APA Style, unless your professor requests a specific format for your paper's footnotes.

Your footnotes should be numbered in the order they appear in your paper's text. In the text of your paper, they will appear as a superscript number directly following the punctuation mark of the sentence or phrase. Use your word processing program's footnote function to insert this number and the text below. In the text of the footnote, you should insert a space between the corresponding number and the note's text.

Bias-Free Language

In addition to formatting your paper and its elements in APA Style, it is also important to consider APA's guidelines on writing inclusively about people with the respect they deserve. The APA Publication Manual provides two guiding principles for reducing bias in your writing and avoiding prejudice, or otherwise demeaning attitudes, when describing people's characteristics, history, or social standing.

Appropriate Level of Specificity

The first guideline is to use the appropriate level of specificity when describing people or groups of people. This means first and foremost, making sure that you focus your writing on characteristics that are relevant to your discussion. While you might have access to information about an individual's age, disability, gender identity, participation in research, racial and ethnic identity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status, all of these things don't need to be included by default. Consider what characteristics are most relevant to your discussion, and present that information in a bias-free way, using the links above as references.

Writing without bias does not mean ignoring the differences between individuals, both within a group and across groups. By acknowledging the relevant differences between individuals, writers can provide a fuller and more accurate representation of the people they write about. When discussing differences in characteristics, ensure that you are comparing the individual to the target population being discussed, as opposed to comparing them to the dominant or majority group. In a study on LGBTQIA+ students at OU, for example, the results might be compared to LGBTQIA+ students nationwide or to all OU students, but they should not be compared to heterosexual students at OU or nationwide.

After you have established which characteristics are relevant to your discussion of an individual or group of individuals, as well as what relevant or meaningful differences exist in relation to the target population, you'll want to ensure that you are specific and direct in your language. Including specific details about the individuals you are writing about will allow your reader to understand if your findings can be generalized to other populations or if they are specific to the population you studied.

Sensitivity to Labels

The second guideline provided by the APA Publication Manual is to remain aware of the labels individuals use to describe themselves and how those labels are received by members within a community and outside of it. *Whenever possible, use the same language to describe an individual that they use to describe themselves.* If an individual uses a slur or stigmatizing language to describe themselves, consult with them personally or with advocacy groups to determine what language is most appropriate for non-members of that group to use. Keep in mind that language is dynamic and not all terminology is equally accepted or used by the members of a particular group. There are a number of strategies you can use to avoid dehumanizing labels or stigmatizing language when discussing individuals' or groups' characteristics.

The first of these strategies is to center the humanity of the individual, rather than their characteristics. When you use an adjective as a noun to describe a group, such as saying "the Blacks" or "the mentally ill," you center that group's characteristics instead of their humanity. By using specific adjectives and nouns, you can speak more directly to individuals' humanity while providing important nuance to your discussion (e.g., "Black Oklahomans" or "adults with a mental illness").

Including definitions or parameters explaining the labels you use to describe individuals or groups in your writing will make your choices clearer and give your reader important background information. This can also help you avoid making biased judgments about the groups you are discussing, particularly in terms of holding one group, often the majority or dominant group, as the standard to which others are compared. By clearly defining the groups or individuals being discussed as subsections of a larger population, sometimes even overlapping, you can avoid presenting one group as "normal" and others as "abnormal."

Accessibility

Publishing your paper in print or online means a wider audience will have access to your writing. It is important to keep in mind any barriers to access that might exist as a result of your paper's format. People using screen reader technology to access digital documents benefit greatly from well-formatted writing. In this section, you'll learn about how to ensure your writing is easily understood by readers of all levels of visual and reading ability. Writing accessible papers in APA Style involves using particular types or

methods of typography, styles of heading, descriptive text for URLs, and color in figures or graphs.

Typography

Using APA's suggested fonts and font sizes will help with visual accessibility. Physical copies of your paper should have appropriately sized, legible type. Another consideration to keep in mind, however, is your text's legibility for individuals using screen readers. Screen readers are used by people who are blind or visually impaired to read text aloud from digital documents. The font of your paper won't affect how the words are read aloud, but other factors may, such as using all capital letters, straight quotes, and extra spaces after a period. By considering the different ways readers may access your writing, you can account for differing levels of reading and visual ability by formatting your paper's text according to APA's suggested guidelines for accessibility.

Headings

Your paper's headings should clearly explain the contents of each section. While levels of headings demonstrate the structure of a paper, section titles in APA Style should clearly identify the topic or purpose of a section. This will help readers quickly find particular elements of your paper. To ensure your paper is accessible to people using screen reader technology, you should use your word processing program's style tool to format these headings. This will ensure that headings are read aloud in a way that clearly defines the content and level of heading. Microsoft Word and Pages both have built in style features that you can customize to replicate APA headings.

URLs

In APA Style, URLs are included in full instead of using hyperlinks embedded in descriptive text. Often, works for online publication will use descriptive text that gives the reader an idea of the topic or source of the attached hyperlink. This practice makes hyperlinks more accessible to people who use screen reading technology to access digital documents. Student papers in APA Style should only include URLs in the References section. Since this section is meant to be referenced in case a reader needs more detail, the link is presented in full, without descriptive text.

Color

Figures in APA Style may use color to communicate relationships between the image and legend. When creating a figure, it is important to make sure that the image's colors have enough contrast to be understood in grayscale or by people with a color-vision deficiency. The APA Publication Manual provides a number of ways to ensure your figures' colors are accessible and understandable to all readers, such as using tools to measure color contrast, combining patterns with colors, or directly labeling image elements instead of using a legend.

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