
Robert P. O'Shea
Wendy McKenzie

Writing for

7e

PSYCHOLOGY

Writing for



PSYCHOLOGY

To Urte Roeber, Cecilia O'Shea, Emilian O'Shea,
and Irmela O'Shea from Robert O'Shea.

To Greg, Clancy, Ted, and Martha from Wendy McKenzie.

Robert P. O'Shea
Wendy McKenzie

Writing for

7e

PSYCHOLOGY

Writing for Psychology
7th Edition
Robert P. O'Shea
Wendy McKenzie

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Brief Contents

Chapter 1 Read This First!	1
Chapter 2 Writing Research Reports	21
Chapter 3 Writing Essays	65
Chapter 4 Finding and Using References	83
Chapter 5 Thinking Critically and Developing Ideas	107
Chapter 6 Writing Correctly and With Style	126
Chapter 7 Writing for Other Forms of Assessment	148

Contents

To the Student	xii
To the Instructor	xiii
About the Authors	xvi
Acknowledgements	xvi
Guide to the text	xvii
Guide to the online resources	xix
Chapter 1 Read This First!	1
1.1 Writing for Psychology	1
1.2 Excellent Assignments	3
1.2.1 <i>Relevant Literature</i>	3
1.2.2 <i>Original Ideas</i>	3
1.2.3 <i>Logical and Empirical Defence</i>	4
1.2.4 <i>Academic Integrity</i>	4
1.2.5 <i>Acknowledgements and Avoiding Plagiarism</i>	7
1.2.6 <i>Editorial Style</i>	8
1.2.7 <i>Sources of Help</i>	8
1.3 Writing Style	9
1.3.1 <i>Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation</i>	9
1.3.2 <i>Objectivity, Formality, Impartiality, and Respect</i>	9
1.3.3 <i>Simplicity</i>	12
1.3.4 <i>Precision and Clarity</i>	13
1.3.5 <i>Conciseness</i>	13
1.3.6 <i>Interest</i>	13
1.3.7 <i>Audience</i>	13
1.4 APA Editorial Style	14
1.4.1 <i>Margins, Spacing, Font, Running Heads, and Page Numbers</i>	14
1.4.2 <i>Structure, Headings</i>	15
1.4.3 <i>Citation and References</i>	15
1.4.4 <i>Other Aspects</i>	18
1.5 Writing	18
1.5.1 <i>Plan</i>	18
1.5.2 <i>Rewrite</i>	18
1.5.3 <i>Character Limits, Word Limits, and Page Limits</i>	19
1.6 Submission	19
1.6.1 <i>Online vs Paper?</i>	19
1.6.2 <i>Deadlines</i>	19
1.7 Helpful Sources	20

Chapter 2 Writing Research Reports	21
2.1 Kinds of Research and Expectations for Research Reports	21
2.1.1 <i>Hypotheses</i>	21
2.1.2 <i>Marking Criteria</i>	23
2.2 Structure	23
2.3 Title Page	24
2.3.1 <i>Independent, Manipulated Variable</i>	24
2.3.2 <i>No Variable was Manipulated</i>	25
2.3.3 <i>Mediation or Moderation</i>	25
2.4 Abstract	25
2.5 Introduction	26
2.5.1 <i>Importance</i>	26
2.5.2 <i>Literature Review</i>	27
2.5.3 <i>Link Past and Present</i>	27
2.5.4 <i>Aim and Outline of Your Study</i>	27
2.5.5 <i>Hypotheses</i>	28
2.6 Method	28
2.6.1 <i>Participants or Subjects</i>	29
2.6.2 <i>Materials</i>	30
2.6.3 <i>Procedure</i>	31
2.6.4 <i>Design</i>	31
2.6.5 <i>Data Diagnoses and Analyses</i>	32
2.6.6 <i>Qualitative Methods</i>	34
2.7 Results	35
2.7.1 <i>Any New Variables</i>	35
2.7.2 <i>Data Summary</i>	35
2.7.3 <i>Figures</i>	36
2.7.4 <i>Tables</i>	39
2.7.5 <i>Hypothesis Tests</i>	40
2.7.6 <i>Units</i>	42
2.7.7 <i>Qualitative Data</i>	42
2.8 Discussion	42
2.8.1 <i>Summary</i>	43
2.8.2 <i>Predicted Significant Findings</i>	43
2.8.3 <i>Non-Significant Findings</i>	44
2.8.4 <i>Unexpected Significant Findings</i>	44
2.8.5 <i>Practical and Theoretical Importance</i>	44
2.8.6 <i>Limitations and Future Research</i>	45
2.8.7 <i>Conclusion</i>	45
2.9 References	45
2.10 Appendices	46

2.11	Finer Points of APA Style	46
2.11.1	<i>Personal Reference</i>	46
2.11.2	<i>Tenses</i>	47
2.11.3	<i>Numbers</i>	48
2.11.4	<i>Abbreviations</i>	48
2.11.5	<i>Footnotes</i>	49
2.11.6	<i>Lists</i>	49
2.11.7	<i>Italics</i>	49
2.12	Example Research Report	50
2.13	Helpful Sources	64
	Chapter 3 Writing Essays	65
3.1	Expectations	65
3.1.1	<i>Argument</i>	65
3.1.2	<i>Marking Criteria</i>	65
3.2	Before You Start	66
3.2.1	<i>Analysis</i>	66
3.2.2	<i>Reading</i>	67
3.2.3	<i>Draft Argument</i>	67
3.2.4	<i>Plan</i>	68
3.3	Structure	68
3.4	Title Page	69
3.5	Abstract	70
3.6	Introduction	70
3.6.1	<i>Significance</i>	70
3.6.2	<i>Controversies</i>	70
3.6.3	<i>Final Argument</i>	71
3.6.4	<i>Map of Your Essay</i>	71
3.6.5	<i>Definitions</i>	71
3.7	Body	72
3.7.1	<i>Organisation</i>	72
3.7.2	<i>Conciseness and Precision to Show Rather than to Tell</i>	72
3.8	Conclusion	73
3.9	References	73
3.10	Finer Points of APA Style	74
3.10.1	<i>Personal Reference</i>	74
3.10.2	<i>Tenses</i>	74
3.11	Example Essay	74
3.12	Helpful Sources	82

Chapter 4 Finding and Using References	83
4.1 Finding Information	83
4.1.1 <i>Scholarly Sources</i>	83
4.1.2 <i>Search Strategies</i>	84
4.2 From Reading to Writing	85
4.2.1 <i>Active Reading</i>	85
4.2.2 <i>Notes</i>	86
4.3 Citation	87
4.3.1 <i>Citation Types</i>	87
4.3.2 <i>Secondary Sources</i>	88
4.3.3 <i>Personal Communication</i>	89
4.3.4 <i>Learning Resources</i>	89
4.3.5 <i>Format</i>	90
4.3.6 <i>Quotations</i>	92
4.4 References	94
4.4.1 <i>General Principles</i>	94
4.4.2 <i>The Digital Revolution</i>	96
4.4.3 <i>Journal Articles</i>	97
4.4.4 <i>Book Chapters</i>	98
4.4.5 <i>Books</i>	99
4.4.6 <i>Other Sources</i>	99
4.5 Reference List	101
4.6 Helpful Sources	105
Chapter 5 Thinking Critically and Developing Ideas	107
5.1 Critical Thinking	107
5.2 Your Hypothesis or Argument	107
5.2.1 <i>Theories</i>	108
5.2.2 <i>Support for Theories</i>	109
5.2.3 <i>Critical Thinking About Theories</i>	109
5.2.4 <i>Integration of Theories</i>	110
5.3 Research	111
5.3.1 <i>Experiments vs. Non-Experiments</i>	111
5.3.2 <i>Causality</i>	112
5.3.3 <i>Spurious Variables</i>	113
5.3.4 <i>Confounds</i>	114
5.3.5 <i>Inadequate Measures</i>	115
5.3.6 <i>Generality</i>	116
5.4 Original Thinking	117
5.4.1 <i>Non-Obviousness</i>	117
5.4.2 <i>Alternative Explanations for Significant Findings</i>	117

5.4.3	<i>Alternative Explanations for Non-Significant Findings</i>	118
5.4.4	<i>Unexpected Findings</i>	119
5.4.5	<i>Future Research</i>	120
5.4.6	<i>Practical Implications</i>	121
5.5	Flawed Arguments	121
5.5.1	<i>Vacuous Support for Arguments</i>	122
5.5.2	<i>Vacuous Dismissal of Opposition</i>	122
5.5.3	<i>Misrepresentation of the Opposition</i>	122
5.5.4	<i>False Generalisation</i>	124
5.6	Helpful Sources	124
Chapter 6	Writing Correctly and With Style	126
6.1	The Reader's Journey	126
6.2	Parts of Speech, Combinations of Words, and Grammar	126
6.2.1	<i>Verbs</i>	126
6.2.2	<i>Nouns</i>	127
6.2.3	<i>Pronouns</i>	129
6.2.4	<i>Adjectives</i>	131
6.2.5	<i>Adverbs</i>	132
6.2.6	<i>Prepositions</i>	132
6.2.7	<i>Conjunctions</i>	133
6.2.8	<i>Determiners</i>	134
6.2.9	<i>Combinations of Words</i>	135
6.3	Punctuation	135
6.3.1	<i>End Marks (Period, Question Mark, Exclamation Mark)</i>	135
6.3.2	<i>Commas</i>	136
6.3.3	<i>Semicolons</i>	136
6.3.4	<i>Colons</i>	137
6.3.5	<i>Apostrophes</i>	137
6.3.6	<i>Parentheses</i>	137
6.3.7	<i>Em and En Dashes</i>	138
6.3.8	<i>Hyphens</i>	138
6.3.9	<i>Quotation Marks</i>	138
6.4	Style	139
6.4.1	<i>Formal and Dispassionate Writing</i>	139
6.4.2	<i>Simplicity</i>	141
6.4.3	<i>Precision and Clarity</i>	142
6.4.4	<i>Economy</i>	144
6.4.5	<i>Integration</i>	145
6.5	Finer Details	146
6.5.1	<i>Keep Infinitives Intact</i>	146
6.5.2	<i>Keep Prepositions Away from the End of a Sentence</i>	146

6.6 Your Own Style	146
6.7 Helpful Sources	147
Chapter 7 Writing for Other Forms of Assessment	148
7.1 Examinations	148
7.1.1 <i>Preparation</i>	148
7.1.2 <i>Planning During an Examination</i>	148
7.1.3 <i>Multiple-Choice Questions</i>	149
7.1.4 <i>Short-Answer Questions</i>	150
7.1.5 <i>Essay Questions</i>	150
7.1.6 <i>Helpful Sources</i>	150
7.2 Posters	151
7.2.1 <i>Content</i>	151
7.2.2 <i>Format</i>	152
7.2.3 <i>Marking Criteria</i>	153
7.2.4 <i>Helpful Sources</i>	153
7.3 Narrative Literature Reviews	154
7.3.1 <i>Content</i>	154
7.3.2 <i>Format</i>	154
7.3.3 <i>Marking Criteria</i>	155
7.3.4 <i>Helpful Sources</i>	155
7.4 Systematic Reviews	155
7.4.1 <i>Content</i>	155
7.4.2 <i>Format</i>	156
7.4.3 <i>Marking Criteria</i>	156
7.4.4 <i>Helpful Sources</i>	156
Appendix A Flawed Research Report	157
Appendix B Flawed Essay	170
Appendix C Statistical Assumptions	182
Appendix D Common Measurement Abbreviations	183
Appendix E More Plurals	185
References	188
Glossary	193
Index	197

To the Student

In your psychology course, your instructor has asked you to write an assignment and to use this book as a style guide. Why has your instructor recommended this book? It provides an introduction to the style most writers in psychology use: *APA style*. It is described in the seventh edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association, 2020), which we will call the *APA Manual*, and in the APA-style blog (<https://apastyle.apa.org/blog>). Rather than burden you with all the intricacies of APA style, your instructor has opted for this introductory version. When you proceed to advanced study of psychology or submit to an APA journal, you will replace this book with the *APA Manual*. This book is best regarded as a primer for APA style.

Some conventions of style govern most scientific writing. APA style is more than a collection of arbitrary rules about such apparently trivial issues such as where to place commas and when to use an ampersand (&). It embodies most of the features of excellent writing, such as having a clear message, respecting the reader and others, acknowledging sources, dealing with information honestly and economically, communicating persuasively, being clear and simple, and adhering to various conventions that produce a consistent look and feel.

As well, APA style is a guide to the basic structure of a scientific paper. The structure allows researchers to distinguish sections they need to read carefully from sections they can skim. This, in turn, allows them to read the articles swiftly and to compare articles.

We have tried to organise the book to be as useful as possible in the situation each of us remembers well from our own student days: An assignment is due in a week, and I have not started work. What should I do first? Read Chapter 1, helpfully entitled “Read This First!”. It outlines the hallmarks of excellent assignments. If you have time and the assignment is a research report or an essay, proceed to Chapter 2, “Writing Research reports” or to Chapter 3, “Writing Essays” respectively.

Of course, we hope you are a better organised student than we were. Your best approach is to read everything once, then return to the relevant chapters when you are preparing your next assignment.

Occasionally, however, we have had to depart from APA style, especially for formatting, mainly because our purposes, to teach, are different from yours, to write a good assignment. For example, we use numbered sections to allow you to find more information on a topic (see next sentence for an example of how we do it). You should use standard headings for your assignment (1.4.2).

To the Instructor

We thank all of you who adopted this book for your courses. We were prompted to write our new edition by the publication of the seventh edition of the *APA Manual*. But we also took the opportunity to revise generally, based on the many helpful comments on the previous edition we received from reviewers, students, and instructors. In this new edition, we have:

- updated the book to include changes in APA style and adhered closely to that style;
- transferred some of the subtle principles or advanced details to the on-line material that accompanies the book—or to the end of chapters—to ensure that students are not initially overwhelmed with complex details;
- maintained the formal set of guidelines students can follow, such as procedures to identify spurious, suppressor, and confounding variables, to enhance the depth of their discussions and explanations;
- updated the chapter on grammar to incorporate changes in the past 30 years;
- added information about qualitative research to the chapter on research report writing; and
- added systematic reviews to the chapter on writing types of assignments other than essays and research reports.

As part of reconciling the book with the seventh edition of the *APA Manual*, here we highlight the major differences between it and the sixth edition, and some aspects of the sixth that carried over into the seventh, for which our advice to students may differ. We have classified these into five broad categories.

Student Writing

The editors of the seventh edition of the *APA Manual* gave separate formatting instructions for student papers and for papers to be submitted to academic journals. Student papers provide unit information (e.g., unit code and name, instructor name, due date) on the title page and can omit the running head, the author note, and the abstract. We, however, assumed you prefer your students to master papers to be submitted to academic journals because that is what we have always done, because online lodgment of assignments is now common (obviating the necessity of a different title page), and because it is easier for you to tell your students to omit the running head, the Author Note, or the Abstract than vice versa.

Bias-Free Language

The editors also:

- Included one whole chapter on bias-free language. We distilled this into one table showing the eight categories of bias and how to avoid them (Usage Example 1.6), and a few paragraphs on sex, gender, and sexual orientation.
- Approved using the singular “they” as a way to avoid bias. We adhered to this, but emphasised the editors’ suggestion to use other means, such as pluralisation, to avoid offending those not comfortable with committing what some may regard as a grammatical error.
- Continued to allow participants to be called “subjects” or “sample”. We agreed with the editors’s recommendation by encouraging students to distinguish participants—those who gave informed consent to participate in research—from subjects—those who could not give informed consent. We did not mention calling individuals the “sample”.

Structure of a Paper and Formatting

The editors also:

- Integrated the APA's Journal Reporting Standards (American Psychological Association, 2018) into the manual. This has no relevance for students, except for how the standards affect APA style.
- Reiterated character limits for some components of manuscripts (e.g., the running heads). We gave character limits for every component of an assignment (along with word limits in parentheses) because the number of characters in a file cannot be deceived whereas the number of words can be underestimated by some unscrupulous students.
- Reiterated that the Abstract's format should be governed by the journal to which a manuscript is submitted, but added that the word limit is typically fewer than 250. To encourage conciseness, and because student assignments are usually briefer than professional papers, we opted for a limit of 975 characters (150 words).
- Moved some of data analysis, such as how authors of research reports deal with missing data, out of the Results and into the Method. We added this to our chapter on research report writing.
- Reiterated the necessity to report effect sizes and confidence intervals in the Results, including confidence intervals for effect sizes. We omitted confidence intervals for effect sizes, having never seen these in any published paper and because it is not illustrated in the *APA Manual's* sample papers.
- Simplified the running head; it now appears the same on every page of a paper.
- Allowed tables and figures to be in the main text rather than on separate pages after the references. We opted for the former, for ease of marking.
- Gave five levels of headings, formatted differently from the sixth edition. We gave only the top three: 1. Centred, bold, "title case" (i.e., with the first letter of major words capitalised); 2. Flush left, bold, title case; 3. Flush left, bold italic, title case. This is because students are unlikely to need more.
- Harmonised the formatting of numbers in all parts of a paper (i.e., same in the Abstract and main text).
- Enclosed linguistic examples in quotation marks instead of setting them in italics.
- Required all margins of 2.54 cm (implicitly with letter-sized paper). In the sixth edition, its editors said "Leave uniform margins of *at least* [emphasis added] ... 2.54 cm" (p. 229). We recommended 3.54 cm margins and required A4 paper. This brings the number of characters per line closer to the optimal of about 60 (Bringham, 1996), making students' assignments easier for markers to read.
- Allowed sans-serif and serif fonts and sizes from 10 to 12 points for the main text. In the sixth edition, its editors required Times New Roman 12 point for all text except that in figures. For simplicity and readability, we opted for Times New Roman 12 point for the main text and Calibri for tables, figures, and footnotes.
- Reiterated the restrictive conditions under which footnotes can be used in the main text. Rather than go into these, we opted to tell students not to use them at all.
- Reiterated the acceptability of numbered or bulleted lists in the main text. With the rise of PowerPoint, we accepted that students would inevitably use these. We use them ourselves.
- Reiterated the necessity to define abbreviations of statistical terms and tests the first time they are used, such as "standard error of the mean (SEM)" and "analysis of variance (ANOVA)".
- Reiterated that tables and figures in appendices are called with the appendix's letter and an ordinal number without a hyphen (e.g. Table A2, Figure B3, Figure B4).

- Changed every instance of “on-line” to “online” and every instance of “e-mail” to “email”.
- Minimised the use of “electronic”, instead referring to “ebooks” and “eLocators”.
- Eliminated the extra space after some punctuation. Hallelujah!

Structure and Formatting of Figures and Tables

The editors also:

- Structured tables and figures in the same way, with, from top to bottom: the number (boldface), title (italics), the table or figure, and any notes.
- Recommended that text in figures be in a sans-serif font and that the tables and figures be separated from the main text by one blank line above and one below. For simplicity, we suggested students use a sans-serif font for tables too.
- Allowed colour in figures.
- Reiterated the desirability of placing a graph’s legend on the body of the graph. For increased comprehensibility, we added that the legend should be segregated from the graph by being enclosed in a box, that the axes be duplicated at the top and the right of the figure, and that the ticks be inside the axes.

Citation and Referencing

The editors also:

- Simplified formatting of in-text citations, with “et al.” for all author surnames after the first when there are three or more authors, unless this would be ambiguous.
- Gave more than 100 examples of formats for references. We simplified these into four major types: books, book chapters, journal articles, and others (including theses, web pages, and websites), because students will be unlikely to read any references other than these.
- Accepted Wikipedia articles (book-chapter format) as references in papers submitted to APA journals. We told students to be cautious about using Wikipedia.
- Required issue numbers in journal-article references.
- Omitted the place of publication for references to books.
- In references to books, omitted the name of the publisher when it is the same as the author.
- Simplified DOIs and URLs so they all serve as clickable links in online papers. Restricted “Retrieved from” to references for which the retrieval date is important.
- Required that classical works (e.g., religious works such as the Bible, works of ancient Greek philosophers, Shakespeare’s works) now appear in the reference list.
- Reiterated that quotations of classical works with canonical line numbers be accompanied by those numbers (e.g., “[Act] 3.[Scene]1.[lines]56–64 for Hamlet’s famous soliloquy, “To be, or not to be ...”).
- Added the title of a website to the information in its reference.
- Omitted to illustrate the reference format for an Abstract (apparently it is now unthinkable to cite a work that is only an abstract). We retained this to emphasise to students that they need to be truthful about what they actually read.
- Illustrated how to cite learning resources obtained via learning management systems.

We hope you like our scrutiny of the changes to APA style and agree with our choices for students. Please let us know.

About the Authors

Dr Robert P. O’Shea

Robert P. O’Shea is Guest Scientist at Leipzig University where he also wrote and taught courses on scientific writing. He has conducted research and taught at Murdoch University, Southern Cross University, University of Otago, Dalhousie University, Northwestern University, Queen’s University (Canada), and the University of Queensland.

He has published extensively in major psychology and neuroscience journals. His research is mainly in cognitive neuroscience, visual perception, and history of psychology and science. He has taken study leaves at Leipzig University, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, and the University of Rochester. Dr O’Shea has been an editor of *Scholarpedia* and an associate editor of *Perception & Psychophysics*.

Dr Wendy McKenzie

Wendy McKenzie has many years of experience as an educator and researcher in psychology, teaching across undergraduate and postgraduate courses in psychology at Monash University. Her main areas of interest are human memory, teaching and learning in higher education (in particular the use of educational technology), and geropsychology.

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Guide to the text

As you read this text you will find a number of features in every chapter designed to enhance your understanding of the APA style, and what makes good writing, and help you apply these conventions and principles to your own work.

FEATURES WITHIN CHAPTERS

APA Example boxes show the text exactly as it should appear in an APA styled assignment, providing a thorough demonstration of the application of APA style guide in practice.

APA Example 2.4 Abstract

Abstract

The prevalence of violent videos has continued to soar over the last decade. To investigate whether exposure to violent videos increases mistrust of strangers, 24 psychology students rated the extent to which a stranger in a photograph seemed hostile and untrustworthy. Before they rated this person, half the participants watched a violent video; the remaining participants watched a quiz show. Participants who watched the violent program were more likely to perceive the stranger as hostile ($d = 2.26$) and somewhat untrustworthy ($d = 0.06$) than were participants who watched the quiz show. These findings suggest that depiction of violence could promote perception of strangers as hostile and untrustworthy, ultimately provoking aggression.

APA Example 2.9 Materials

Materials

Participants completed a 24-item questionnaire designed to measure perceptions of trust, comprising two subscales: hostility and trustworthiness. A sample question for hostility is, “This person might attempt to harm me”. A sample question for trustworthiness is, “I might trust this person to keep a secret”. Participants responded to each question on a 5-point scale, from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The scale exhibits excellent internal consistency based on previous research, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$ (J. Smith, personal communication, July 12, 2020).

Annotated reports and **essay examples**, featuring concise and engaging annotations and explanations, that are set out in clear APA format, so you can easily see how to do it yourself.

The image displays two annotated APA-style reports. The first report, titled "SELF-ESTEEM AND ABILITY", includes a title page with the title "The Effect of a Boost to Self-Esteem on Creative and Analytic Ability", author information for Andrea Student, and an author note. Callouts point to double-spaced text, the running head, and a personal reference. The second report, titled "ARE EXAMINATIONS UNFAIR?", includes an abstract and a main text paragraph. Callouts point to double-spaced text, the abstract's indentation, a complex sentence, and a concluding sentence.

FEATURES WITHIN CHAPTERS

A **flawed report** and **flawed essay** are included in the appendices. Footnotes in them identify errors and frequent points of difficulty, helping you to avoid common mistakes.

Self-Esteem and Ability 2

Abstract

⁵ Many individuals erroneously assume that intelligence is fixed and hence they do not engage in activities which ⁶ might refine their mental capacity.

^{7, 8} ^{9, 10} participants completed tasks that assess their capacity to propose creative suggestions as well as their ability to apply principles and algorithms to solve problems.

Before they completed these tasks, to boost their self-esteem, half ¹¹ the participants transcribed a series of favourable adjectives and preceded each term with the letter I.¹² Participants in the control group completed the same task, but preceded each term with the letter X. The hypotheses were only partly supported.¹³ The implications and limitations of these findings are discussed.¹⁴

Running head: Are examinations unfair? 1

Other work,⁴⁹ has shown that anxiety can compromise exam performance. Ciarocco, Summer, and Baumeisters^{51, 52} (2001) study showed that suppression of emotions, such as anxiety, compromises performance on a variety of tasks. Martijn, Tenbult, Merckebach, Dreezens, & de Vries (2002) also revealed that SOE^{53, 54} compromises performance.⁵⁵ In a study conducted by Schmeichel, Vohs, and Baumeister (2003), individuals watched a disturbing⁵⁶ distressing movie. The participants who were asked to pretend they were unperturbed performed less effectively than other individuals on a later set of activities that assessed their mental acuity. These observations suggest that individuals who feel anxious before an exam might occasionally strive to conceal their emotions, and this inclination might then impair their subsequent performance.

The S.O.E.⁵⁷ does not impair performance on all activities, however. It is indisputable⁵⁸ that suppression of emotions would disrupt the capacity of individuals to walk.⁵⁹ Accordingly, suppression could not compromise performance on all tasks; in other words,⁶⁰ attempts to conceal emotions do not impair performance.⁶¹

Therefore,⁶² the thoughts and concerns that coincide with anxiety, and not merely the suppression of this emotion, might also use working memory (Baddeley, 1976).^{63, 64} Consistent with this suggestion, Beilock and Carr (2005) found the capacity of individuals to recall a sequence of digits⁶⁵ purportedly a reflection of working memory (Baddeley, 1976)^{66, 67} tended to deteriorate when their levels of state anxiety were elevated.

Usage examples lead you through the process of understanding what makes superior writing. You can quickly compare examples side-by-side with explanations of what makes better writing work, enabling you to identify how to improve your own writing.

Finally, you should specify the hypothesis, or hypotheses, as clear and unambiguous statements that predict the results of your study. Hypotheses should be presented in normal prose as complete sentences. Hypotheses do not need to be presented last, but should appear somewhere within the last paragraph of the introduction (Usage Example 2.1). Qualitative research methods tend to be more exploratory and may pose research questions and aims rather than hypotheses (Levitt et al., 2018).

Usage Example 2.1
Specify Hypotheses

	Avoid	Best practice
Each conceptual hypothesis should follow logically from a theory or an argument.	Exposure to violent videos should promote mistrust towards strangers.	As predicted from active-self theory , exposure to violent videos should promote mistrust towards strangers.
Each hypothesis should indicate the direction of a relationship.	According to active-self theory exposure to violent videos should affect mistrust towards strangers.	According to active-self theory , exposure to violent videos should increase mistrust towards strangers.
Each hypothesis should use words that match how the variables will be measured in your study.	According to active-self theory , exposure to violence should promote adverse attitudes .	According to active-self theory , exposure to violent videos should promote mistrust towards strangers .
Each hypothesis should be testable—research cannot prove the absence of an effect.	According to active-self theory , exposure to violent video games should not affect mistrust towards strangers.	According to active-self theory , exposure to violent videos should be more likely than exposure to violent video games to promote mistrust towards strangers.

Exhibits contain useful information, advice and suggestions to support your learning.

Relevance

- How closely does the information relate to your topic?
- Is the depth of coverage adequate for your purpose?

Currency

- Is the source sufficiently recent for your purpose? Check online sources for a date when first published or last updated.

Credibility

- Has the information been peer reviewed?
- What are the authors' professional affiliations or credentials?
- Has the work been cited by others?
- Are there signs of author bias or conflict of interest?
- For internet sources, what are the last letters of the URL? If they are *com*, the source is published by a **commercial** organisation; if *edu*, by an **educational** institution; if *gov*, by a **government**, and if *org*, by a **not-for-profit organisation**. Information from *edu* and *gov*, and possibly from *org* sites is more reliable than *com* sources.

Exhibit 4.1
Evaluate Sources of Information

Key terms for *Writing for Psychology* are bolded in the text with **margin definitions** in clear, concise language for easy identification and understanding. These definitions also appear in the **glossary** at the end of the book.

We define essays to include essays (1.1), **literature reviews** (7.3), book reviews, and commentaries. In all of these, you need to write something useful for a reader. In the most common essay assignment, your instructor will have given you a topic, usually a question (e.g., "Does viewing violent videos lead to aggression?"), and a list of references. To write an essay, you first need to read the references, to read more widely about the topic, to understand the topic, and then to write something useful on it, usually an answer to the question in the form of an argument: a brief, clear statement of what you will show to be true about a topic (1.2.2).

Literature review (also known as a **narrative literature review**): A form of essay in which an author makes a more comprehensive review of the literature surrounding a topic than in an essay to acquaint the reader with the main issues.

Guide to the online resources

FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

Cengage is pleased to provide you with a selection of resources that will help you prepare your lectures and assessments. These teaching tools are accessible via cengage.com.au/instructors for Australia or cengage.co.nz/instructors for New Zealand.

INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL

The **Instructor's Manual** is packed with content that helps you set up and administer your class: chapter outlines, adjunct teaching tips and warmup activities, questions for review and further discussion.

WORD-BASED TEST BANK

A **bank of questions** has been developed in conjunction with the text for creating quizzes, tests and exams for your students. Deliver these through your LMS and in your classroom.

POWERPOINT™ PRESENTATIONS

Use the chapter-by-chapter **PowerPoint** slides to enhance your lecture presentations and handouts by reinforcing the key principles of writing for psychology.

ARTWORK FROM THE TEXT

Add the **digital files** of exhibits, examples, figures and tables into your learning management system, use them in student handouts, or copy them into your lecture presentations.

STUDENT DOWNLOADS: CHECKLISTS AND WRITING GUIDES

Student checklists and writing guides provide extension material for you to support your students with their writing and use of APA style.

Chapter 1

Read This First!

In this chapter, we give essential information for doing any writing for psychology.

1.1 Writing for Psychology

In your psychology course, you will need to complete two main types of assignments—**research reports** and **essays**—and other sorts of assignments you can read about in Chapter 7.

In a research report, you describe research you conducted to test a **hypothesis** (2.1.1), usually in a practical class (e.g., “The Effect of Speech Style on Witness Credibility” and “The Relationship Between Birth Order and Coping Style”). You need to specify why you did the research, what you did, what you found, what your results mean, and why your results are interesting and important. We provide the details for writing research reports in Chapter 2.

In an essay, your instructor usually presents a topic, or choice of topics, often framed as questions (e.g., “Does viewing violent videos lead to aggression?”). Your task is to review the literature on this topic and to present your answer in the form of an **argument** or **thesis statement** (3.1.1). We provide the details for writing essays in Chapter 3.

Both sorts of assignments must have a clear structure, marked by headings (1.4.2).

In most assignments, you need to use **formal writing**. It is scholarly, respectful, humane, simple, precise, concise, clear, and scrupulously grammatical—qualities that help make your work credible. Formal writing differs from informal writing found in such works as novels, newspapers, magazines, letters, emails, blogs, tweets, text messages, and some websites. We give further advice about writing formally in 1.3 and in the remaining chapters.

We illustrate some differences between informal and formal writing in **Usage Example 1.1**. If you included the first example in your assignment, there would be at least two problems. First, the words belong to their author, Shakespeare (ca. 1600); to use them you would have to show they are quoted and give the source using **citation**. Citation is how you let a reader know the source of information for something you wrote. A citation contains the surname(s) of the author(s) and the year of publication. Citations point to **references** in a reference list. A reference gives the details a reader needs to find the source, which is also called a reference. Second, the words are in the language of literature and do not fit into any psychology assignment. The good example rectifies these problems and gives a reference.

If you included the second example in **Usage Example 1.1**, from a blog by Grohol (2011), problems include that it is copied, it is written in a casual style, the citation style is not APA, and it is too long and chatty. The good example comprehensively paraphrases Grohol’s words while making it quite clear that the ideas are his. It is formal, it gives APA-style citations, it is concise, and it provides references.

Research report: A type of assignment describing research you conducted, usually in a practical class.

Essay: A type of assignment containing a review of the literature on a particular topic, structured by an argument.

Hypothesis (plural hypotheses): A testable conjecture about a cause and an effect or about a relationship between at least two variables.

Argument: An argument is a proposition you try to convince readers is true about a particular topic.

Thesis statement: An alternative (mainly American) term for an argument.

Formal writing: The language of most psychology assignments. It is scholarly, respectful, humane, simple, precise, concise, clear, and scrupulously grammatical.

Citation: A noun describing how you let a reader know the source of information for something you wrote. The verb is “cite”. A citation contains the surname(s) of the author(s) and the year of publication. A citation points the reader to its reference.



Reference: 1. The bibliographic information a reader needs to find the same information.
2. A source of written information about a topic.

Usage

Example 1.1

Use Formal Writing

Write in the language of psychology, rather than in some other language (e.g., of literature, of some other discipline, of the press, or of a blog).

Avoid 	Best practice 
<p>To be, or not to be, that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, And by opposing end them? To die, to sleep, No more; and by a sleep to say we end The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation Devoutly to be wished.</p>	<p>According to Lake (2006), Hamlet's famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be..." (Shakespeare, ca. 1600/1970, 3.1.56–64^a), shows that Hamlet was depressed and suffering from migraine headaches.</p> <p>References Lake, A. E., III. (2006). Medication overuse headache: Biobehavioral issues and solutions. <i>Headache: The Journal of Head and Face Pain</i>, 46 (Suppl. 3), S88–S97. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1526-4610.2006.00560.x Shakespeare, W. (ca. 1600/1970). <i>Hamlet</i> (A. W. Verity, Ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.201634</p>
<p>Thank goodness the <i>Wall Street Journal</i> isn't known for its outstanding health reporting.</p> <p>In a story written by Rachel Emma Silverman, she reports on some preliminary research recently presented at a management conference. Like a lot of research that gives us "surprising" results, it was done on a single group of 96 undergraduate students at a single college campus.</p> <p>And the task designed for the college laboratory setting by the researchers would be difficult to characterise as analogous to most people's work environment or jobs—it was highlighting every single letter "e" or, in the second part, "a," while reading.</p> <p>The question the researchers asked—Can surfing the internet help you to become a more productive employee?</p> <p>The answer, according to the researchers, is an overwhelming, "Yes!" And it's no wonder ...</p>	<p>Grohol (2011) criticised a study reported by Silverman (2011) claiming to show that surfing the web improves employees' productivity. Grohol pointed out that the employees were really undergraduate students, that the task (to highlight certain letters in text) did not resemble what most people do at work, and that there was no control condition in which students took a non-web-surfing break from work.</p> <p>References Grohol, J. M. (2011, August 22). <i>Web surfing at work helps you be more productive?</i> PsychCentral. https://web.archive.org/web/20111021012031/http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2011/08/22/web-surfing-at-work-helps-you-be-more-productive/ Silverman, R. E. (2011, August 22). Web surfing helps at work, study says. <i>Wall Street Journal</i>. https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424053111904070604576518261775512294</p>

^aGive the pages of a quotation (1.2.4) unless it is a religious or classical work (4.3.5), in which case give the book, chapter, and verses for religious works, and the act, scene, and lines for plays, and the section numbers for ancient Greek and Roman works.

1.2 Excellent Assignments

Below, we suggest some qualities your instructor may assess in any assignment. It is possible, however, that your instructor will assess other qualities or will omit some we mention. This means you should carefully read your instructor's requirements to understand which parts of an assignment to provide. We list all the parts in this book, but your instructor might not want them all (e.g., some instructors do not want raw data in an appendix of your research report; other instructors do not want an **abstract**—a summary—for your essay). The advice of your instructor always supersedes ours. If your instructor insists that you write an assignment with a pink font on yellow paper, follow that advice!

Abstract: A brief summary of a research report or essay.

1.2.1 Relevant Literature

To write an excellent psychology assignment, you need to be well informed by reading current, relevant, and scholarly literature on your topic. As a bare minimum, you need to read one new source for every 650 characters (100 words) of your assignment. Your instructor might give you some readings to get you started. In Chapter 4, we present strategies to help you find others. You should aim to read mostly primary research articles in psychology **journals**. A journal is a collection of articles, each written by different authors and each with its own reference list, that have been approved for publication by the journal's editor and have been published by a commercial, professional, or scholarly publisher. Useful journals include *Psychological Review* and *Psychological Science*.

Journal: A collection of articles, each written by different authors and each with its own reference list, that have been approved for publication by the journal's editor and have been published by a commercial, professional, or scholarly publisher.



You should also read some review articles in psychology journals (such as *Annual Review of Psychology* and *Psychological Bulletin*), a few book chapters in books devoted to your topic, and one or two textbooks.

1.2.2 Original Ideas

In a psychology assignment, you must establish a clear and rational position on a topic rather than merely regurgitating the information you have read. Research reports require you to develop and test one or more hypotheses. Essays require you to present and develop an argument. Usually, the hypothesis or argument will not be provided for you; you need to derive it from your own reading and thinking.

The best assignments demonstrate original thought. We give advice on this in Chapter 5; it is one of the hardest things to do. **Usage Example 1.2** gives some techniques.

Usage Example 1.2
Be Original

	Avoid 	Best practice 
Classify previous research in an original manner.	Many findings suggest that viewing violent videos provokes aggression.	Many findings indicate that viewing violent videos provokes aggression. These findings can be divided into three categories. Whether children who exhibit behavioural difficulties are more likely than are peers to watch violent videos. ...
Refer to research into new avenues.	Anderson et al. (2010) concluded that playing violent video games leads to aggression.	Anderson et al. (2010) concluded that playing violent video games leads to aggression. However, Kasumovic et al. (2015) noted the lack of research into why people like to play such games.

1.2.3 Logical and Empirical Defence

Deduction: A form of logical reasoning in which a conclusion follows from two or more premises.

Usage Example 1.3
Use Deductive Logic

You need to defend every statement you make in your assignment. Only two kinds are acceptable: logical and empirical. To show that a particular statement is true using logic, you need to use **deduction**. In deductive logic, a statement follows logically from previous premises (**Usage Example 1.3**).

Avoid 	Best practice 
If all violent videos promote aggression and if “The Wiggles” promotes aggression then “The Wiggles” is a violent video.	If all violent videos promote aggression and if “The Wiggles” is a violent video then “The Wiggles” must promote violence .

To ensure your arguments are logical, you can apply formal rules (Chalmers, 2013). Another method is simply to ask yourself whether or not an alternative to your argument could be correct. To illustrate, after you read the poor example in **Usage Example 1.3**, ask yourself whether “The Wiggles” could be a sound recording. The answer could be yes, because the first sentence does not imply that only violent videos promote aggression.

To show that a particular statement is true empirically, you need to cite a study in which someone has collected some relevant data (4.3). For example, you might write: “Coogan et al. (2012) collated data from the U.S. Census and other sources to show that children from low socioeconomic strata watch more TV than children from high socioeconomic strata”. You then need to give a reference so that a reader could find that study (4.4).

1.2.4 Academic Integrity

Being a student requires you to act according to ethical standards, demonstrating your academic integrity. The principles of academic integrity include that individuals are honest in their ideas, words, work, and actions, that individuals credit the ideas, words, work, and actions of others, and that individuals respect the rights of others (e.g., Princeton University, 2019). Breaches of any of these principles can leave you liable to serious penalties including expulsion. The principles translate into at least four rules:

1. Data are Sacred. Data must be reported honestly and exactly. To breach this rule, to **falsify data**, by altering or inventing data, is fraud. Instructors and university administrators take an extremely dim view of fraud or of any dishonest practice.

2. Your Contributions are Sacred. Your contribution to anything you write must be clear. This rule can be broken by **collusion**. It happens when a student collaborates too closely with one or more other students. It is evident when two or more students submit assignments that are identical or similar. Many universities now use text-matching software (e.g., Turnitin) to help instructors decide if a student has copied the words of someone else. If such software finds a string of words in an assignment that match another student’s, this could be evidence of collusion. If Student A were to copy Student B’s work without permission, this is a more serious offence for Student A than copying with permission. If the Student B gave permission, Student B becomes an accomplice to the offence.

Although your instructor might encourage students to work with one another, each student’s final assignment should usually be that student’s own work. If you are working on a group assignment, ensure you know your instructor’s expectations about the amount of collaboration allowed in the final work.

3. Others’ Contributions are Sacred. The ideas words, work, and actions of others must be credited. **Plagiarism** happens when a student presents the words, work, or ideas of someone else without that credit. That is, plagiarism is theft; instructors and university

Falsification of data: An extremely serious breach of academic integrity in which someone makes up data or alters data for a research report.

Collusion: A serious breach of academic integrity in which Student A copied the work of Student B, either with or without permission. If Student B gave permission, then Student B committed a breach of academic integrity too.

Plagiarism: A serious breach of academic integrity in which an author fails to cite or attribute the words, work, or ideas of others.

administrators take a very dim view of it. Text-matching software will almost certainly find any text in an assignment that matches that of another author. If the suspect text is not in quotation marks or if no author is cited, then this could be evidence of plagiarism.

To avoid plagiarism of words and ideas, you must cite the author and either place any original words in quotation marks and give information, such as a page number, to allow a reader to find them in their source, or you must **paraphrase**—put the author’s words into your own (4.3). We show an original source (**Exhibit 1.1**; James, 1890) and various forms of plagiarism and how to avoid it (**Usage Example 1.4**).

Paraphrase: Authors paraphrase when they restate another author’s words in their own.



Exhibit 1.1
Some Text from Which to Illustrate Plagiarism

Desire, wish, will, are states of mind which everyone knows, and which no definition can make plainer. We desire to feel, to have, to do, all sorts of things which at the moment are not felt, had, or done. If with the desire there goes a sense that attainment is not possible, we simply wish; but if we believe that the end is in our power, we will that the desired feeling, having, or doing shall be real; and real it presently becomes, either immediately upon the willing or after certain preliminaries have been fulfilled. (James, 1890, Vol. 2, p. 330)

Reference



James, W. (1890). *The principles of psychology* (Vol. 2). Henry Holt. <https://archive.org/details/PrinciplesOfPsychologyVol2/page/n3>

Usage Example 1.4
Avoid Plagiarism and Overuse of Quotation

	Avoid 	Best practice 
Use citation and quotation when you use the original words of an author.	Everyone knows what desires , wishes , and will are, that they are states of mind . We desire to feel things we are missing, to have things we do not have, to do things we have not done. If with desire we sense that attainment is not possible , our desires are wishes ; if with desire we feel that attainment is possible we can fulfil our desires by exercising our will (James, 1890).	James (1890) said: Desire, wish, will, are states of mind which everyone knows, and which no definition can make plainer [give the rest of this block quotation (4.3.6) here] (Vol 2, p. 330).
Paraphrase an author’s words comprehensively, rather than overusing quotation.	James (1890) said that everyone knows what desires, wishes, and will are, that they “are states of mind” (p. 330). He added that “we desire to feel [the thing we are missing]” (p. 330), to have the thing we do not have, to do things we have not done and that “if with desire [we] . . . sense that attainment is not possible” (p. 330), our desires are wishes; if with desire we feel that attainment is possible we can fulfil our desires by exercising our will.	James (1890) said that there is no need to define “desire, wishes, [and] will” (Vol 2., p. 330), because everyone knows these mental states. He explained that desires arise when we want what we do not have, that desires become wishes when we cannot get what we want, and that desires turn into will when we realise we can get what we want.

(Continued)

(Continued)

	Avoid 	Best practice 
Cite an author's ideas carefully and completely.	There is no need to define mental states such as desire, wishes, and will, because everyone knows what they are (James, 1890). Desires arise when we want what we do not have, desires become wishes when we cannot get what we want, and desires turn into will when we realise we can get what we want.	James (1890) said there is no need to define mental states such as desire, wishes, and will, because everyone knows them. He explained that desires arise when we want what we do not have, desires become wishes when we cannot get what we want, and desires turn into will when we realise we can get what we want.

A student who handed in the first example in **Usage Example 1.4** would have committed plagiarism of the words in boldface on the left: they are identical with James's (1890) words and they are consecutive. Moreover, the ideas belong to James. Although the student has cited James at the end of the last sentence, it still contains plagiarism; the other sentences are the graver crime because there is no citation for them.

A student who handed in the second example in **Usage Example 1.4** would have honoured the letter of the law, because all James's words and the student's identical words are enclosed in quotation marks. But in this case, the student has too much quotation. Your instructor wants you to put the words of other authors into your own, to paraphrase or to **summarise** (4.2.2). The corrected example, of paraphrasing, is well cited with James's name in the first sentence and with the pronoun "he" in the second. It shows James's important words in quotation marks and gives the page number.

Summarise: Authors summarise when they use their own words to give only the relevant ideas of another author.

A student who handed in the third example in **Usage Example 1.4** would have paraphrased and cited the first sentence correctly, but committed plagiarism of ideas in the second sentence. This is because the parenthetical citation at the end of the first sentence does not apply to the second. Moreover, the two sentences together represent plagiarism of ideas because the structure of (the order of) this information is the same as that of James's original. The corrected example is well paraphrased and well cited, with James's name in the first sentence and with the pronoun "he" in the second.

It might seem instructors are lying in wait for an unwary student to blunder into the plagiarism trap, whereupon they pounce and impose a terrible punishment. But this is exactly the opposite of our intentions and those of other instructors we know. It breaks our hearts when we discover evidence of plagiarism in a student's assignment. Instructors are keen to teach students how to communicate their own words and ideas and the words and ideas of others.

If your instructor allows, we recommend you use text-matching software to review your assignment before submission. That way, you can see what the instructor would see if you had submitted that version, and you can do something about it. The best approach if text-matching software shows that some of your words match those in its database is to go back to the paragraph containing those words in your assignment and rewrite it completely in your own words. Then you can put the assignment through the text-matching software again to see if you were successful.

A much worse approach would be to (use software to) rearrange the words until the text-matching software no longer yields a match. Originally you might have plagiarised unintentionally, but taking this approach means you are trying to fool the marker. This is a dishonest practice—a form of fraud.

The worst approach would be to see the match and to do nothing about it before submitting—to hope that the marker will not notice or will not care. Your markers *will* notice and they *do* care.

We should mention that getting a clean report from text-matching software does not mean your assignment is free from plagiarism. You might have copied words from a source not in the text-matching software’s database, you might have paraphrased well but omitted the citation, or you might have rearranged original words sufficiently to avoid the software’s criteria.

4. Scholarship is Sacred. A pervasive form of deception some students (and admittedly some researchers) practise is citing studies they have not read in full, to increase the length of their reference lists and to give their assignments spurious credibility. Such students may have read only a few sentences another author wrote about a study or have read only its abstract. The rule is: “You must sight whatever you cite”.

Of course, it is not necessary to read a whole book to cite it, but you must read enough of it to meet the rule, such as reading all of a chapter or section about a particular topic. In that case, you cite the chapter or section you did read; in all other cases, use secondary citation, in which you cite the authors you did read (4.3.2).

Text-matching software will likely fail to detect citations that have not been read in full. But markers might know by various means, such as seeing a citation from a source the library does not hold or from a source in a foreign language.

1.2.5 Acknowledgements and Avoiding Plagiarism

You should acknowledge anyone who helped you with your assignment for no particular reward, for example, by discussing it with you or by commenting on drafts. You do not need to thank your tutor or instructor, but you might need to thank your study partner with whom you shared literature for your assignment. You include these people in the **Author Note** section on the title page of your assignment.

Some instructors require students, when submitting an assignment, to sign a statement along these lines: “I understand what plagiarism is and I state that my assignment contains no examples of plagiarism”. In any case, that sort of statement is implicit when you submit. Here are some tips on how to have a clear conscience on signing such a statement and how to avoid plagiarism:

- Make sure that if you copy the words of others, you *always* enclose all of the copy in quotation marks, record the page number, and record the full reference. This is true whether you copy by hand or copy from an electronic source.
- Try to get the topic and what you have read into your own head, to think about it. Before you begin writing a particular section of your assignment, consider putting all your written notes and electronic notes away and writing down what you want to tell your reader in your own words. Imagine your reader to be a well-meaning, interested, high-school student wanting to study psychology (1.3.7)—this will force you to use your own words because most of what you have read will be for professional psychology researchers.
- As far as possible, avoid paraphrasing. Although this might seem to contradict what we have said earlier, instructors rarely want paraphrasing in an assignment. They want you to summarise and integrate information (6.4.5), to take your own perspective.
- Be humble and realistic. The authors you read have spent the best part of their lifetimes honing their abilities to write. Your instructors do not expect you to have attained this standard, although they do expect you to aspire to it over the years of

your psychology course. If you are realistic about your own abilities, you might not try to exceed them by copying the styles, ideas, or words of the people you read.

- Being humble and realistic also includes realising that if you come up with an idea in the few days or weeks you might spend on an assignment, it is quite likely that someone among all the psychologists who have contributed to that topic during its history has also come up with the idea. For example, your instructor is not going to be impressed if you concluded your research report's introduction with the hypothesis that there is a magic number seven that affects human memory if you did not credit Miller (1956) with originating this hypothesis. For another example, your instructor is not going to be impressed if you argued in your essay that how one identifies with various social groups affects attitudes to people in and out of those groups if you did not credit Tajfel and Turner (1979) with originating this argument. That is, you should make a reasonable search for whoever originated any idea you come up with and cite that person in your assignment if your search is successful.
- A poor approach to avoiding plagiarism would be to submit an assignment containing mainly long quotations. Markers will often regard assignments that include more than 325 characters (50 words) of quotes for every 6,500 characters (1,000 words) as unoriginal. Nevertheless, the penalties for plagiarism are usually much more severe than the marks you would lose for having too much quotation.

We give further guidelines on summarising, paraphrasing, and quoting sources in 4.3.5.

1.2.6 Editorial Style

Part of studying psychology is learning its writing conventions. Indeed, part of studying at university is to learn about various conventions in different disciplines and professions. We, as academic psychologists, follow many conventions including the National Health and Medical Research Council's (2009) precepts for treating human research participants, the code of ethics of the American Psychological Association (2017), our own universities' codes of ethics, and this book's publisher's style guide. Other professionals have their own conventions to follow.

Psychologists use a writing style called *APA style*, from the American Psychological Association. It is a set of conventions for written communication of complex scientific ideas and findings in psychology, using a standard structure (1.4.2). APA style is also widely used in related disciplines. These conventions are described in detail in the seventh edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (2020) (*APA Manual*).

Some of the requirements of APA style apply to most forms of writing in psychology (1.4). Other requirements are more specific to certain types of writing, such as research reports (Chapter 2) and essays (Chapter 3). Unless your instructors tell you otherwise, they will assess your use of APA style.

1.2.7 Sources of Help

If you are starting out in psychology, you may need help with your first or later assignments. Your instructors will recognise this and will help you in various ways. For example, your first assignments might be relatively short, focusing on just one or two aspects of writing, such as finding literature or citing and paraphrasing. Your instructors may also give you classroom or online writing instruction—make sure you take these opportunities. You may have access to tutors who can answer your questions, to librarians who can help you with finding material, to dedicated teaching-and-learning staff members

who can help with grammar and writing style, and to counsellors who can help if you get stuck with issues such as procrastination or writer's block. Make sure you get help from all these people if you need it; you will find them only too happy to provide it.



There are some things the people we have mentioned are unlikely to do. For example, your instructors or tutors will not read a draft of your assignment, especially if they will also mark it (this is an issue of equity). Your librarian will probably be unlikely to download papers for you. But you can get help with such things by setting up your own support networks. Consider forming a study group so you can share resources and recruiting a trusted person to read your drafts.

Above all, read, read, read! Read articles in good psychology journals, books in the library, and your textbooks. Read great novels too. The more you read the better your writing will become through a psychological process called incidental learning. Exploit it.

1.3 Writing Style

1.3.1 Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation

In your assignments, your grammar, spelling, and punctuation must be correct. These goals are not as easy to accomplish as they are to say (**Usage Example 1.5**). We give the principles of grammar and punctuation in Chapter 6.

Avoid 	Best practice 
Either lollies or smiling promote happiness.	Either lollies or smiling promotes happiness.
The man who Smith examined felt happy after smiling.	The man whom Smith examined felt happy after smiling.
A child will feel happier if they are asked to smile.	Children will feel happier if they are asked to smile.
Smiling promotes happiness, and also fosters hope.	Smiling promotes happiness and also fosters hope.

Usage Example 1.5
Use Correct Grammar and Punctuation

Use the recognised arbiter of spelling for your area. In the United States use *Webster*, for Canada use *Gage*, for Australia use *Macquarie*, and elsewhere use the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Use an electronic dictionary (e.g., OneLook dictionary search, n.d.) for internet- and web-specific words.

If your word processor includes spelling and grammar checkers, use them once immediately before you submit your assignment. However, be aware that even the best spelling checkers will sometimes overlook errors (e.g., “there” for “their”, “right” for “write”) and report false errors (e.g., names, technical terms, and local spellings such as “colour” for “color”). Grammar checkers are also fallible—missing errors and identifying correct grammar as incorrect. Be sure you understand why your grammar checker has identified an error before changing your text.

1.3.2 Objectivity, Formality, Impartiality, and Respect

In your assignments, you must write objectively, formally, impartially, and respectfully. Avoid clichés and colloquialisms as well as casual, pretentious, and emotional words. For example, a