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Psychology and Counselling: UWTSD House Rules

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Report writing in psychology

Just because you can run does not necessarily make you a good runner, but with practice and guidance you can improve and take on others in competition. Writing is exactly the same; it is a skill, and practice and training can help you to become a better writer. We have written this document as part of your training, but it is up to you to use the guidance within it and practice.

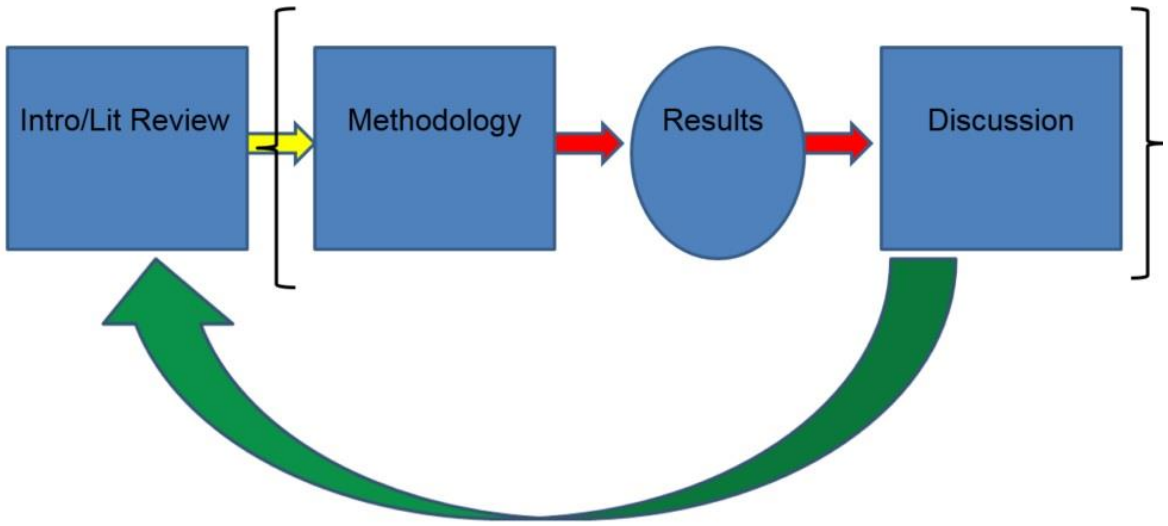
There is a lot of information available in books and on the internet about writing psychology reports. Often this material is broadly similar (writing for Psychology generally uses the standards of the American Psychological Society [APA]) but there are instances where there are differences; the layout of sub-sections in the methodology for instance, or whether sections should be started on a new page. We have put this document together as a brief set of 'house rules' for writing psychology reports. It is not exhaustive, and does not cover everything that you need to know regarding layout and academic writing style – there are plenty of books in your reading lists that will help you with that. However, it should provide you with a general overview that will help you on your way to writing in Psychology. We have written it to provide you with the basic principles needed to write a report in psychology (quantitative or qualitative)[1]. This relates to research involving a single testable hypothesis or research question but the general principles can be easily applied to experiments and reports involving multiple experiments.

What is a research report?

A research report (sometimes referred to as a 'lab report') is a document that presents a particular research problem and incorporates an element of research within it. It differs from an essay in two key ways: first, it is likely to be much more focused on a specific area that does not allow for the more general overview that an essay may take; second, it will include your own research which must be described clearly. The reports that we ask you to write may vary in length, from 1,500 word reports up to the 8,000 word dissertation thesis, but the structure is always the same (see Figure 1).

[1] Some of the ideas for guidance in this document are taken from Beech, J. R. (2009). *How to write in psychology: A student guide*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. We encourage you to read this as a source as it contains far more information than we can fit into this document.

Figure 1
The Psychology Research Report Structure.

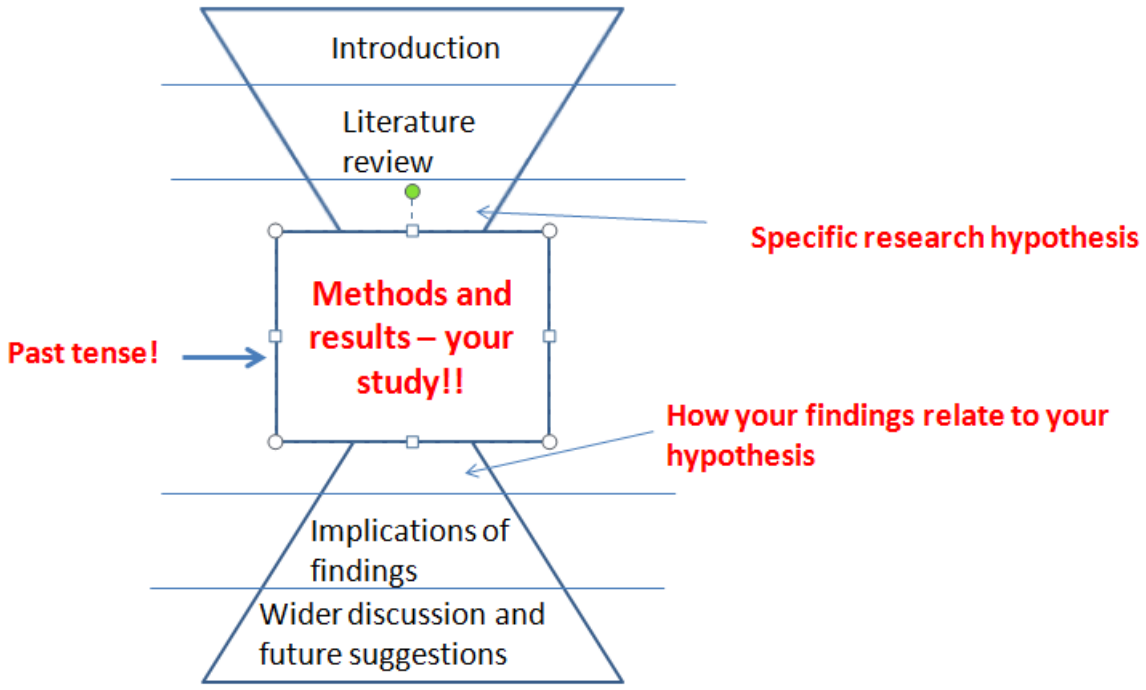


So, why the brackets and arrows in the Figure above? This is because a good research report is not simply the linear reporting of your study from the Introduction to Discussion, there are some important elements to consider. First of all, we need to consider the importance of the Introduction; it must have enough information in it to be able to justify your hypothesis and the reason for you to carry out your research study. However, it differs from the next three sections in one huge way (hence the reason why the other three sections are in their own bracket). If it was unclear on what you had written in the introduction I could at least go to other sources (hopefully that you have provided but, if not, I could find them myself) to find out about the topic area. However, I cannot do that for the other sections because the Method, Results and Discussion are all unique to your specific study; I have no other sources to refer to except the information that you provide me – and that means if you do not explain it well enough, there is no way for me to understand it. Therefore, this has to link to what you covered in the Introduction. This is important to highlight because a research report is not a linear piece of work that flows from beginning to end; you will constantly be going backwards and forwards, considering whether something identified in your Discussion needs to be included in your in your Introduction, making sure that you have addressed in your Discussion the studies that you have covered in your Introduction. Writing a research report is about crafting a factual story of your research, and this takes **time and effort.**

We suggest that you follow the 'cone' model of report writing (see Figure 2). You move from the general to the specific in your Introduction and Literature Review, cover your own study in the Method and Results, and then from the specific to the general in the Discussion.

A final thing to consider is this: a simple rule for writing a research report is *remember the reader.* Your intended audience will see the title first, then perhaps read the abstract, and will only then decide if they want to read the read of the report based on whether the title and abstract has caught their attention, so these parts are as important as the main body of a research report.

Figure 2
The 'Cone' Model of Report Writing.



General format of a research report:

Headings and subheadings are always used to identify the parts of a research report. It is important that you follow the structure set out in Figure 3 (Quantitative studies) and Figure 4 (Qualitative studies) for your Psychology lab reports across all three years of

your degree. Additional information about each heading and subheading are provided below.

Some important things to bear in mind before starting a research report:

1) The introduction and discussion are generally written in the present tense, but the abstract, method and results sections are written in the past tense. The past tense is used in the discussion when referring to the method employed in the research that you are reporting, or to the results that were gathered.
2) Before you begin writing your research report you must have a topic to research! There are three essential elements that must be clearly determined and understood. These are:
    - The research problem
    - The research design
    - The research question and/or the hypothesis that is/was tested
3) APA guidelines advise and encourage the use of active voice over passive voice, where appropriate. This means that writing in the first-person is allowed in APA papers when the writers are providing information on what **they** did (e.g., in setting up methodology, conducting interviews, testing hypotheses, etc). If you have been provided with data and/or information regarding the collection of data for an assessment, then you should not write in the first-person as you have **not** collected the data or conducted the study.
4) Quantitative results are ‘significant’ or ‘non-significant’: They are **never** ‘insignificant’.
5) You will find that there are often exceptions to rules. It is a common rule of style that we write numbers below ten (so it is ‘nine’, not ‘9’); however, take a look through this document and you will see that we refer to ‘Figure 1’, ‘Figure 2’, etc. The reason for this is that *Section 4.31* of the APA Manual states that numbers should be used to refer to parts of books and tables. Learning these nuances takes time, and it is why there are so many books written about writing style. If we could explain it all simply to you we would, as it would make our lives easier too – but good writing comes with lots of practice and engaging with these style and writing books. So remember, the guiding principles of your report writing are contained within two documents – this handbook and the APA Manual.

Figure 3
Required Structure for Quantitative Reports

Title page
Contents page
Abstract
Introduction/Literature Review
Method
    Participants
    Design
    Materials
    Procedure
Results
Discussion
Reference List
Appendices

Figure 4
Required Structure for Qualitative Reports

Title page
Contents page
Abstract
Introduction/Literature Review
Method
    Participants
    Data Collection
    Data Analysis
Results
Discussion
Reference List
Appendices

Title

The title should summarise the main idea of the research in no more than about 15 words. A title should be concisely written but convey the relevant amount of essential information. For example,

An Experimental Investigation of the Effects of Practice in a Visual Aiming Task in a Sample of Human Participants

is slightly long. This can be more concisely written in the following way:

Practice Effects in a Visual Aiming Task.

The title should be presented on the first page (title page) and should be on a separate page from the rest of the report.

Abstract

An abstract is a single paragraph containing approximately 120-150 words that summarises your entire research report. The abstract is important as it creates an initial impression of the content of the paper. You should include the most important information from the report which includes what the research problem was, what was done to test your

hypothesis, what was found, and what this means. The abstract should be centre-justified and single spaced, and presented on a separate page from the rest of the report.

Remember: the abstract comes first but is written LAST. It should be in the third person and should concisely describe the research.

Introduction/Literature review

The introduction does just that; it *introduces* the area of research. You need to provide sufficient information so that the reader knows what the subject of your report is, and can understand what you mean by any terms that you will subsequently use that might otherwise be unclear. The point of an introduction and literature review is to convince the reader of the validity and value of your research question at the end. To do this, you must present evidence to support your argument using relevant empirical literature. A point to note here: make sure that the material in the introduction is relevant to your study. Giving lots of details about studies that are not directly relevant to your study only adds confusion to the purpose of the report, and weakens the focus of the study. From the literature presented, it should be clear to the reader how your research question(s) and/or hypothesis have been developed.

Ensure your introduction is logical, and try to make sure that each sentence follows on from the previous one so a logical thread of argument is present. Hopping around from point to point makes it difficult for a reader to make sense of what you are trying to say.

To summarise:

1) Introduce the research problem .
2) Review the literature – create a balanced argument of why you are conducting this research and support these arguments with appropriate literature (citations)
3) Conclusion of the literature plus specific research question(s) (and hypothesis/hypotheses if quantitative element to the study).

Method

Your method will describe who took part in your study, what was used to collect data, what analysis will be conducted, what participants did in what order, and what ethical issues were considered. This section should be written as briefly and concisely as possible, but it must provide sufficient detail so that the reader can evaluate the validity of the method

used. We need to follow conventions to ensure that the writer and the reader know what to be saying and looking for.

Tip: Try to think about writing a method as a 'step-by-step' guide to replication – other people should be able to replicate your study exactly as you carried it out purely from the information you provide in this section.

As noted in Figures 3 and 4, there are slightly different sub-headings to include within a method section that will depend upon whether you are conducting a quantitative research study or a qualitative research study. It is also important to note here that the order and/or section headings we ask you to include may differ from what you read in other sources, but these are our 'house rules' and so it is expected that you follow these conventions for all your written research reports.

Outlined below are **all** sections, but please only refer to/use the sections that you require for your research report. If you are conducting a mixed methods study whereby you have a quantitative and a qualitative element, ensure you liaise with your supervisor regarding the structure to follow or the combination of headings to include.

Participants

The people involved in your study should always be referred to as 'participants'. Details put in to this section can vary but will typically include how the participants were recruited, their age (mean and standard deviation or range) and gender. Any other **relevant** information about your participants that is specific to your research can be included. (e.g., if any participants were excluded for any reason, it should be clearly explained here).

Design (Quantitative research)

The design is a description of the structure of the study/experiment. You should clearly define your independent and dependent variables (if using an experimental design), or variables that will be measured (correlational design), or predictor and criterion variables (regression design), and state how each of these were being measured/scored. If you are categorising participants, then you should explain what the independent conditions were and how participants were categorised into these conditions. You should explain whether

each independent variable is a between or within subjects variable and, if within subjects variables are included, what explain the order in which conditions were presented and whether counterbalancing or randomisation occurred. Describe what participants had to do (i.e., their task) in relation to the groups they were categorised into and identify any extraneous variables that you had to make an attempt to control. End this section with an indication of the analysis that you will be conducting.

Materials (Quantitative research)

The purpose of this section of the method is to describe what has been used to **collect data** within the study. The materials section should be as detailed as possible: the overall purpose of the method section is to allow for replication, so you need to give as much information here as you can so that someone can use exactly the same materials in the same way. This should include everything you used and/or created for the study.

If you have used a validated questionnaire it should be introduced and referenced correctly, with the number of questions/items stated, examples given of the types of questions being asked and if any reverse coding is needed prior to statistical analysis taking place. Methods of scoring should also be included (5-point Likert scale, yes/no, etc.) and also what the final scores mean (if applicable).

If you construct materials yourself for an experiment you should include sufficient detail about how you created them and why. For example, if you have a list of words, you should explain important relevant features (word length, frequency within the English language, syllables, etc), or if you are using an experimental task where you are displaying information or stimuli to participants, you again need to consider the important relevant features (the stimuli used, the length of time this is presented on the screen, number of trials, how a participant responds, etc). If you have used an instrument such as a computer program, this again should be introduced and referenced correctly and an explanation should be given as to what the program seeks to do.

Remember: Copies of your questionnaire/materials etc., will be included in the appendices at the back of the report, so it is important to make reference to this within the materials section; (see Appendix A), for example. However, including them in the appendices does not mean that this is a substitute for describing the materials

in the main body of this section, so ensure you include sufficient detail for each tool you are using to collect data.

Procedure (Quantitative research)

Describe the precise procedure your participants went through when participating in your research study i.e., exactly what they did and in what order. Any researcher should be able to replicate exactly what you did from the information presented in this section. The procedure should start from the moment participants are recruited for the study and ends at the point of being given a debrief form or debrief information. Ethical considerations (according to BPS guidelines) should be considered in this section, including informed consent and debrief (copies of which should be included in the appendix).

Note: For more complex experiments, procedure sections can be quite long and complex themselves!

Data Collection (Qualitative research)

This section should outline the process that has been followed to gather or collect data. It is useful to explain who has collected the data, what data was collected, how data was collected (e.g., interviews, focus groups, walk and talk, etc). The development of the interview schedule / questions or any other materials should be explained in detail. Essentially, the origin of what you are using should be explained in enough detail for the reader to understand where your images, blogs, questions, etc have come from. State how long data collection periods lasted (e.g., interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes with each participant or the average interview time was 40 minutes). Information on the recording device and storage of the collected data is required.

Remember: Copies of any materials you use must be included in the appendices at the back of the report, so it is important to make reference to this within the data collection section; (see Appendix A), for example. However, including them in the appendices does not mean that this is a substitute for describing the materials in the main body of this section, so ensure you include sufficient detail for each tool you are using to collect data.

Data Analysis (Qualitative research)

The specific type of qualitative analysis that has been conducted must be described in enough detail so that it makes sense to the reader. If you have used thematic analysis, for example, explain the stages of the framework that you went through to analyse the data appropriately. Briefly justify the chosen analysis (this is largely based upon the purpose or aim of your study). Indicate software that has been used to analyse data if this has been used.

Results

(Quantitative research studies)

Results must be presented as simply, concisely, and clearly as possible. It may be helpful to think of the results section as including three things; descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and figures and tables. Note that the headings below are for information purposes only and these **do not** belong in your written report as separate headings.

Descriptive statistics:

- Must include a measure of central tendency (average) and distribution – this can include the mean, (or median if applicable), range and/or standard deviation of participant scores on a questionnaire, for example. These can be presented in tables (with an appropriate title labelled according to APA conventions) and briefly summarised, or a longer explanation can be given if not using a table or graph. The descriptive statistics for both the IV and DV should be included where possible.

Inferential statistics:

- These should include; the statistical test that was carried out (in some cases a justification can be included, for example with the use of a non-parametric test) plus all the relevant information taken from the SPSS output*. In most cases this will include a critical value of the test, degrees of freedom and significance level

(whether the test is significant or non-significant – **never insignificant**). State the outcomes of the test in terms of how this relates to your hypothesis, i.e., accept or reject.

** Raw SPSS outputs must be included in your appendices*

Figures and tables:

- These should only be used if they achieve some purpose within your results section. If your descriptives, for example, are better presented in a table then use one; but do not then also include a paragraph explaining the descriptives. Figures and tables must also be correctly labelled according to APA style (see Pages 19 – 20 in this document or consult the APA manual for more information).

Results / Findings
(Qualitative research studies)

As above, results must be presented as simply, concisely and clearly as possible. For a qualitative research study, your data will come from the words/narrative from the participant(s). As a general rule of thumb, there is no single correct way to present qualitative interpretations; the researcher must choose which story to tell and how best to tell it using the data that they have obtained. For our 'house rules', however, please use the guidance below for general structure.

1. Always start by indicating what the primary aim of the research was, what form of analysis was used to explore the specific research question, and how many themes emerged from the transcripts/data (where applicable).
2. Introduce the main themes followed by the sub-themes within each theme in brief detail. For this part, it is sometimes advisable to use a table or diagram format. A table of your themes and sub-themes (plus supporting quotes as evidence) must be included in the appendices of the report, but we recommend that you also include this within your results section (you may choose to include a shortened version of your table if the table is particularly large, and refer the reader to the appendix to view the full table of themes).

3. Provide a general description of Theme 1 and a justification/explanation of why this is/was considered to be a main theme.
4. Introduce each sub-theme of this theme in turn along with an explanation of how this became a subtheme. At this point you need to make use of supporting quotes from the data to support the subtheme. Offer an interpretation of the findings/data and link to the next point or quote.
    a. Note: deal with each theme/subtheme in the order in which you have stated they will be presented.
5. Summarise at the end of each subtheme/theme to tie up before moving on to the next.
6. Repeat steps 3 to 6 until all themes/subthemes have been explained and interpreted.
7. Provide a summary at the end of the results chapter.
    a. E.g., what threads have been the most strong/dominant throughout the interviews/focus groups?

Reporting of quotes:

Quotes from participants that are less than 40 words long must be contained within the text, encased in “quotation marks”, and accompanied by a page/line number (along with any other information that may need to be included, e.g., gender/age). Any quotes that are more than 40 words long should be set as an extract in itself and indented to the left. Quotation marks are not required, but page/line numbers (identifiers) are.

Discussion

The discussion should theoretically flow on smoothly from the introduction, which ends with a clear research question to be explored (qualitative) or a hypothesis to be tested (quantitative). If conducting a quantitative study it, therefore, it makes sense that the discussion should begin with some comment on whether or not the hypothesis was supported. If you are reporting on a qualitative study, you should begin the discussion with a reiteration of the aim/purpose of the study, and then summarise the main findings. The main purpose of the discussion is to address what your findings *mean*.

A helpful structure to a basic discussion is outlined below:

1) Describe the outcome of the research – accept or reject hypothesis / summary of main findings.
2) Discuss how your findings relate to the research problem you outlined in the introduction/literature review (interpreting and comparing findings).
3) Discuss any other implications of the findings.
4) Indicate any flaws or weaknesses of the present study; this can include information relating to participants, design of the study, materials used, etc., plus potential alternatives. Note here that these suggestions **must be supported** with evidence. If your opinion is that you 'need' more participants, it doesn't hold much weight to the argument. If the majority of the research you have used to draw ideas/your hypotheses from have used many more participants and relate this to power and/or effect sizes, then explain this clearly, and add reference(s) to make this a supported claim.
5) Suggest the next step required to investigate the research problem. What can be changed or adapted to further study this area of research and how could it be done?
6) End with an overall conclusion summing up the findings of the research and what these findings suggest.

Remember: A discussion should not be a complete list of why your study was flawed. Whilst it is imperative to acknowledge the weaknesses in your study, do not write a lengthy, in-depth criticism of it. You must also remember to relate your findings back to the relevant literature and introduce potential developments of the study.

Reference list

The reference list should start on a brand new page of your work, and must list of all the material (i.e., studies from books, journal articles, etc.) that you have referred to in the entirety of your report. References need to adhere to APA 7th edition guidelines (see the information provided later in this document for the basics of APA citations and creating reference lists, and the full referencing handbook that is available via the library system for more information).

Appendices

This should include any materials you have outlined and used in your study (questionnaires, consent forms, debrief forms, interview schedules, etc.) plus any raw SPSS output data (quantitative) or interview/focus group transcripts that you have conducted analysis on (qualitative).

Additional Conventions

1. **Levels of headings within research report**

Each main heading within a research report (Abstract, Introduction/Literature Review, Method, Discussion, References, Appendices) are **Level 1 Headings**

The sub-sections of the method are **Level 2 Headings**

You may also use **Level 3 or Level 4 Headings** within a qualitative results section where you refer to themes and sub-themes.

Level 1	**Bold, Title Case, Centre Justified** Text begins as a new paragraph.
Level 2	**Bold, Title Case, Left Justified** Text begins as a new paragraph.
Level 3	***Bold, Italic, Title Case, Left Justified*** Text begins as a new paragraph.
Level 4	**Bold, Title Case, Indented one inch, Ends with a period.** Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.
Level 5	***Bold, Italic, Title Case, Indented one inch, Ends with a period.*** Text begins on the same line and continues as a regular paragraph.

APA 7th Edition Guidance: The Basics

1. Citations within the text

Citation type	Format	Example
One author	Surname followed by date of publication	Jones (2009) (Jones, 2009)
Two authors	Both surnames followed by date of publication for all uses of citation	Griffiths and Hammond (2015) (Griffiths & Hammond, 2015)
Three to 20 authors	First authors surname followed by 'et al.' for all uses of citation, even the first use	Watson et al. (2019) (Watson et al., 2019)
Using 'et al.' when first authors have the same surname	To avoid ambiguity, as many names should be listed as needed to differentiate between the papers, and then followed with 'et al.'	1. Fannon, Chan, Ramirez, Johnson and Grimsdottir (2019) 2. Fannon, Chan, Montego, Daniels and Miller (2019) 1. Fannon, Chan, Ramirez, et al. (2019) 2. Fannon, Chan, Montego, et al. (2019)
Citing multiple works in the same sentence	Order citations within the same parentheses alphabetically (including citations shortened to et al.) and separate these with semicolons.	Several studies (Eysenck & Keane, 1980; Morris, 2009; Thomas, 1999) have suggested that……
Secondary citations	Include the original work and date, as well as the *citation for the source where you found the information*	Seidenburg and McClelland (1990, *as cited in Coltheart et al., 1993*) demonstrated that…
Group (corporate) author with abbreviation	**First citation**: use full name **Subsequent:** use abbreviation if one is available. If not, use full name throughout.	The National Health Service [NHS], (2020)… According to the NHS (2020)…
Author of a chapter in an edited book	Same rules for number of authors apply as above. Reference list entry will be different.	Lawrence and Dodds (2003)
Quotations	Authors as above, plus date and page number	**Up to 40 words long:** Contain within "quotation marks" It is suggested that "quotations are effective in research papers when used selectively" (Gibaldi, 2003, p. 109) **More than 40 words long:** Omit quotations marks, set quote as an extract and indent ½ inch to the left.

2. Reference list

General conventions

- Start reference list on a brand new page
- Arrange reference list in alphabetical order by first authors surnames
- All references should be double spaced and have a hanging indent
- An ampersand (&) goes between the last two surnames of a reference at all times (not 'and')
- Titles of books, names of journals and volume numbers should be *italicised*
- Titles of journal articles and issue numbers should **not** be italicised
- Dates are contained within parentheses, as are edition numbers of books (if available)

Reference type	Format	Example
Book or ebook with DOI	Authors surname, initial(s). (publication year). *Book title* (edition). Publisher. DOI or URL	Brace, N., Kemp, R., & Snelgar, R. (2012). *SPSS for psychologists* (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.xxxxx
Book without DOI	Authors surname, initial(s). (publication year). *Book title* (edition). Publisher.	Brace, N., Kemp, R., & Snelgar, R. (2012). *SPSS for psychologists* (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
Journal article	Authors surname, initial(s). (publication year). Title of article. *Title of Journal (using capitals for main words), volume*(issue), page range. DOI	Honsi, A., Mentzoni, R. A., Molde, H., & Pallesen, S. (2013). Attentional bias in problem gambling: A systematic review. *Journal of Gambling Studies, 29,* 359-375. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-012-9315-z
Chapter within an edited book (DOI to be included if available)	Surname, initial(s). (publication year). Title of chapter. In authors initial(s), surname (Eds.), *Book title* (edition number., page range). Publisher	Dillard, J. P. (2020). Currents in the study of persuasion. In M. B. Oliver, A. A. Raney, & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (4th ed., pp. 115–129). Routledge.
Webpages Note: website name gets omitted if author and site name are the same.	Authors surname, initial(s) OR organisation/agency name. (publication year, month day – if available). *Title of page.* Website name. URL	Mayo Clinic. (2017, March 8). *Nutrition and healthy eating.* https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/caffeine/art-20045678?p=1
Secondary sources	Only include the reference of the source you have read / located the information from. Format dependent upon type of reference as above. e.g., in the citation example, we would only include Coltheart et al. (1993) in the reference list.	Coltheart, M., Curtis, B. Atkins, P., & Haller, M. (1993). Models of reading aloud: Dual-route and parallel-distributed-processing approaches. *Psychological Review, 100,* 589–608. https://doi.org/xxxxx

3. Tables and Figures

Tables

- Number all tables with Arabic numerals (Table 1, Table 2,) sequentially. Suffix letters should not be used (e.g., Table 1a). ‘Table X’ should be in bold font above the table.
- Tables must have a clear and concise title. Titles should be italicised and written below the table number, with a blank line between the number and the title (or one ‘enter’ if work is already double spaced). Titles should be written above the table and in title case.
- All columns within a table must have a heading. These should be written in sentence case. See the full APA Publication manual for different types of headings.
- The main body of the table should be centre aligned (unless left alignment is required for longer entries).
- Not all tables have to include notes underneath, but if these are being used then they should be placed below the table, double-spaced and flush left. See the full APA publication manual for different types of notes.
- Vertical borders should not be included, neither should borders around each cell; tables should only include borders and lines that are needed for clarity.

e.g.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and One-Way ANOVA results: Police Officers

Measure	Females		Males		*F*(1, 234)	η^2
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		
Self-esteem	2.91	0.49	3.35	0.35	68.87*	.19
Social support	4.22	1.50	5.56	1.20	62.60*	.17
Cognitive appraisals						
Threat	2.78	0.87	1.99	0.88	56.35*	.20
Challenge	2.48	0.88	2.83	1.20	7.87*	.03
Self-efficacy	2.65	0.79	3.53	0.92	56.35*	.16

*$p < .001$

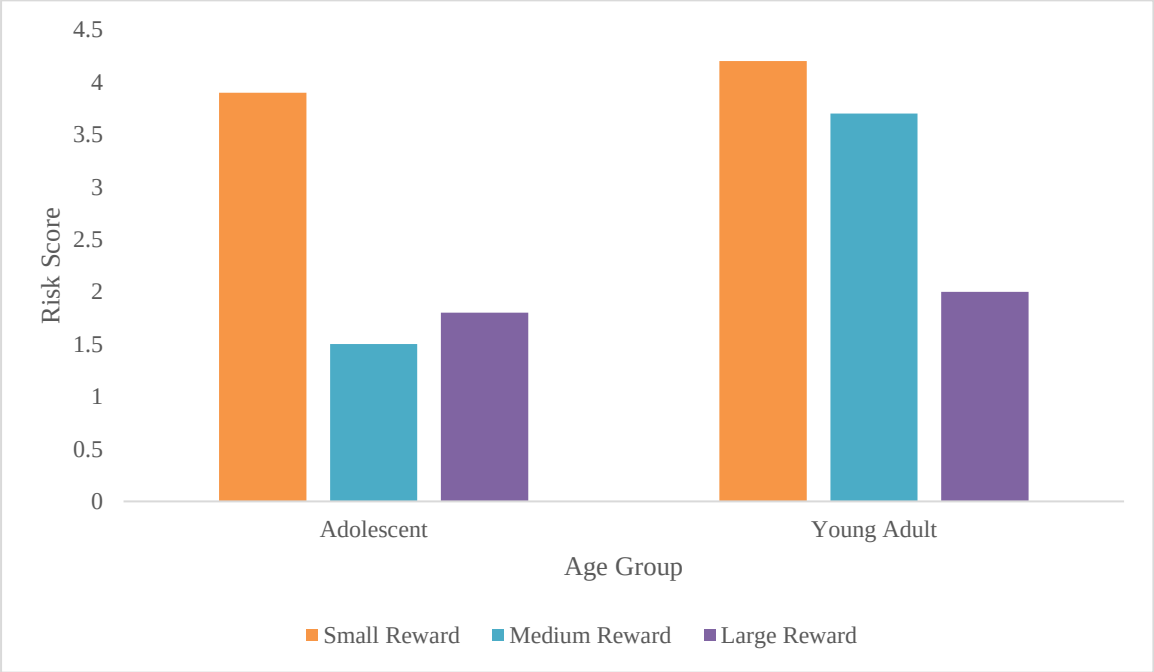
Figures

- All figures that are part of the main text require a number using Arabic numerals (Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.). Numbers are assigned based on the order in which figures appear in the text and should be in bold and left aligned above the figure.
- Titles of figures should be italicised and written below the figure number, with a blank line between the number and the title (or one 'enter' if work is already double spaced). Titles should be written above the figure and in title case.
- Images used in figures (charts, scatterplots, pictures, etc.) should be legible in both size and resolution.
- Title case should be used for axis labels and other headings; descriptions within figures should be in sentence case.
- Not all figures require a legend but if one is used then these should go within or underneath the image rather than to the side, and words should be in title case.
- Gridlines should be removed from figures.

e.g.

Figure 1

Risk Scores for Different Reward Sizes in a Simulated Gambling Task



4. Numbers and Statistics

The APA provide specific guidance on the reporting of numbers and statistics. The most relevant of these have been summarised below (please see the document linked here for the full guidance).

Numbers

Use **words** for:

- Numbers zero through nine
- Numbers beginning a sentence, heading or title
- Universally accepted phrases (e.g., Twelve Apostles)

Use **numerals** (1, 2, 3, etc) for:

- Numbers 10 and above
- Numbers used in statistics (e.g., 2 x 3 design)
- Numbers used with units of measurement (e.g., inches, CM), time, age, and dates (e.g, March 3)
- Scores and points on a scale (e.g., 5-point Likert scale)
- Table and figure numbers

Combine words and numerals for any back-to-back numeral modifiers (e.g., fifteen 5-point scales were used, there were 2 two-way interactions)

Decimals

- Put a zero before the decimal point when a number is less than 1 but that statistic **can** exceed 1 (e.g., values for *t*, *F*, etc)
- Do not use a zero before a decimal when the statistic **cannot** be greater than 1 (e.g., p-values [$p < .05$], *r* values,, etc)
- Reports means and standard deviations to two decimal places.
- Report exact p-values to two or three decimals (e.g., $p = .06$, $p = .005$)
- Report all p-values less than .001 as $p < .001$

Statistics

- Do not repeat statistics both in text and within a table or figure.
- Always use the symbol or abbreviation for statistics with a mathematical operator (e.g., use *M* for mean, *SD* for standard deviation, etc), unless writing within the text then use the term (e.g., the means show)
- Always italicise statistical symbols or algebraic variables but use standard type for Greek letters.

Writing Style: First- or Third-Person?

First-person voice: written from the writer's perspective and shares emotion, thought processes, personal experiences and reflection. First-person writing uses pronouns such as *I* and *me.*

Third-person voice: objective writing designed to present information, or communicate ideas, without obvious bias or emotion. The author's personal perspective is removed and, therefore, points and ideas made within the writing need to be more carefully defined and supported with evidence.

There is also the temptation to write in second-person voice; making use of the personal pronoun *you.* This is strongly discouraged in formal and academic writing.

APA encourages the use of **active voice** rather than passive voice, where appropriate. This means that first-person writing is allowed in APA papers when the writers are providing information on what **they did** (e.g., in setting up methodology, conducting interviews, testing hypotheses, etc).

However, **third-person is preferred** when authors are required to remain objective, as in a literature review or when sharing background information and supporting evidence.

For most student research papers (assessments) that you will write during your time with us, **we prefer that third-person voice is used**, as well as in submitted essays (an exception to this may be your final year Psychology Empirical Project, in which it may be necessary to report what you have designed and conducted within the first-person). A combination of first- and third-person should be used in reflective work.