A review of the "Publication manual of the American Psychological Association"
6th edition 2009
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The manual has two associated books with it:
* *Mastering APA style - Student's workbook and training guide*
* *The instructor's resource guide*, which contains many mastery tests. The recommended passmark is set at 90%. Provided students are not allowed to keep the tests, the tests can be re-used.

In both books, photocopiable question paper sheets are given, with an answer key and a link beside each question to the relevant section of the guide. Obviously it is up to the supervisor to inform students which questions to ignore in the light of the differences mentioned below.

In this review I will comment on how the manual can be used in the context of MA and PhD **linguistics theses**. The style guide is often referred to as the guide to follow. I will explain what I think is useful and that which is less relevant to us. Some disagreements will also be noted.

A. **Prior considerations of context**
    1. **The guide is not primarily designed for theses**
        The guide concentrates on research papers and articles. Our interest is for MA and PhD **theses**. This has significant implications for layout, headings, etc, which will be explained later. The publication process (chapter 8) is also largely irrelevant, and having read it, I would much prefer my students to read RA Day 1994 "How to write and publish a scientific paper" 4th edition or higher.

    2. **The guide is for mainly for psychology**
        Linguistics has many similarities, but also some differences. In particular, it is unlikely that the detail given for statistics will be useful.

    3. **The guide is for America**
        This means the sections related to reducing bias of gender, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity etc are largely irrelevant, and will only be relevant when students go on to publish their work.

B. Detailed commentary
Chapter 1: Writing for the behavioural and social sciences.
This chapter describes types of article, and mentions some ethical points. The types of articles would be useful for our students to understand.

Chapter 2: Manuscript structure and content
The focus is on the article, not the thesis. There is an extremely useful mention of Journal Article Reporting Standards (JARS). In particular, Table 1 on pages 247-248 is detailed, and highly relevant. It gives a list of features of each part of an article in a very helpful way which could easily be adapted for theses. The other material in tables 2-4 pages 249 onwards goes into too much detail about subjects rarely needed in linguistics. My own article on this site: www.scientificlanguage.com/methodology/thesiscriteria3.pdf covers similar ground in more detail.

p25-36 describes the abstract, methods [the guide is American and simply has "method" instead of the preferable "methods"] results, and discussion. These are extremely useful, and should be read with the relevant sections of Lowe 2007.

There is one difference. In an article, raw data is made available on the internet as supplementary material. In a thesis, raw data belongs to an appendix.

Section 2.10 Meta-Analyses. This is not relevant: it is highly unlikely that any student of ours will do this kind of high level work.

Section 2:12 Footnotes. This is extremely brief. For more information see www.scientificlanguage.com/provocative/footnotes.pdf in which the use of footnotes is defended and clearly explained.

Section 2:13. Appendices. In an article they are rare and short. In a thesis they are to be used frequently, and can be long. For instance, in a thesis an appendix is the place for an extended footnote and for the raw data.

Chapter 3: Writing clearly and concisely
3.03. Headings.
The system for articles is completely different to those recommended for a thesis.
The style I like for theses and routine work and is the one I use most of the time:

Chapter heading 26 point
A. Main heading 20 point
1. Second level 18 point
b. Third level 16 point
1) Fourth level 14 point
a) Fifth level 12 point

The alternative style for theses:

Chapter heading 26 point
1.0 Main heading 20 point
1.1. Second level 18 point
1.1.1. Third level 16 point
1.1.1.1. Fourth level 14 point

The APA journal articles headings system would look something like this:

> **Centred Main Heading**
> **Flush Left Second Level Heading**
> **Indented third level heading.**
> ***Indented fourth level heading.***
> *Indented fifth level heading.*

Note 1. There are complicated rules for capitalisation - or lack of it - and the use of the full stop. In the other systems it is much simpler: the headings are capitalised as in a normal sentence, and there is no final full stop.
Note 2. The headings in the APA journal style are all in the usual 12 point size of font.

3.04 Seriation

This basically means a list. The APA guide provides for a numbered system or a bulleted system. Bulleted lists have the advantage that there is no implication that order is significant. Numbered lists make it easier for cross referencing (a point not made in the manual).

In a thesis seriation is taken care of by the normal heading system. Sometimes however, students may wish to use bulleted lists, and this should be permitted. In a thesis cross referencing is a very important part of the cohesion. Clear numbered headings are easy to cross reference, and they are independent of the page number which easily changes as a thesis grows.

3.06 Smoothness of expression

Advice is given on how to re-write noun strings by the method of moving the last word to the beginning and filling in the phrase is surely incorrect.

Disliked	Approved	My comment
early childhood thought disorder misdiagnosis (p66)	misdiagnosis of thought disorders in early childhood	But in this case there is a change of meaning. An object is transformed into an action.

3.08 Avoiding wordiness

I disagree with many of the examples given.

The guide says that in the following phrases the words in *italics* are redundant and should be omitted.	Commentary
four *different* groups	Since it is possible that the groups were identical, it is important to explain that they were different
instructions, which were *exactly* the same as those used	Often instructions are only similar, therefore it is an important point of precision to insist that the instructions were repeated in an exact way
absolutely essential	Since there are degrees of 'essential' it is simply not true that "essential = absolutely essential" therefore qualification is important.
small *in size*	The person or object could be small in height, weight etc therefore explanation is warranted.

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in *close* proximity	Just as there are degrees of 'essential' it is simply not true that "proximity always and only means close proximity". Therefore use of qualifiers is important.

Pages 70-77 Reducing bias in language
Here I find that the manual is usually far too fussy. Despite the current mood in some circles there is nothing linguistically wrong with using the convention that'man' refers to 'men and women' and there is nothing inherently wrong with the generic 'he'. The only time linguistically, that the generic language needs modifying is when there is potential confusion between the generic and the actual people being described. I have provided examples of how to avoid these generic terms in my manual (2007: see chapter 17) but they are mainly relevant when a student seeks publication.

I am puzzled why there is so much recent attention to the language of disabilities, age, and historical and interpretive inaccuracies. Provided reasonable attention is given to politeness and accuracy, then these sections should be unnecessary.

Pages 77-86 Grammar and usage
Most of the material was excellent, but:

1.   **The passive voice**
     I disagree that the active voice should be preferred to the passive voice unless there is a good reason to the contrary. This is making a dogmatic rule when there is no clear consensus that the active voice is actually always clearer than the passive voice. I find it reprehensible when dogmatic wide sweeping statements in a guide are neither defended nor referenced.

     The guide allows the passive only as an 'exception', such as when there is a need to focus on the object of the action. The passive arguably can sometimes be clearer than the active voice, and can be the voice of choice. I teach, for instance, in the methods chapter, that the chapter should answer two questions:
     a.   A review of the methods used - usually in the passive voice
     b.   An explanation of what you did - in the active voice.
     In other words, the voice is determined by the content: it is not a pre-set choice like the margins on a page, with exceptions that have to be justified.

2.   **Use of the subjunctive**
     The following sentence is presented as correct:
          If the experiment were not designed this way, the results could not be interpreted properly.

The correct sentence in my view is:

> If the experiment had not been designed this way, the results could not have been interpreted properly.

3. Dangling modifiers

I question why the following sentences are judged to be incorrect. Probably they are disliked because of the bias against the passive voice.

> "The participants were tested using this procedure"
>
> "Congruent with other studies, Mulhouse and Williams (2000) found that this group performed better."

Chapter 4: the mechanics of style

	APA example	Preferred	Commentary
Punctuating names Punctuating abbreviations	J. R. Smith a.m. i.e.	JR Smith am ie	Modern trend to reduce superfluous punctuation
Semicolons	Explains correct use	Avoid completely	Rarely necessary. Hard to get right.
Double and single quotation marks	double marks for both quotations and other purposes	Maintain the distinction: double for quotations, single for emphasis	The distinction is important and needs maintaining

APA	Preferred
parentheses	round brackets
brackets	square brackets
To me, the term 'brackets' when unqualified can refer to any kind of bracket, round, square or curly.	

New advice on units

Page 96 gives a new way of joining together units. I agree that nmol/hr/mg is poor writing. The usual alternative is nmol hr^{-1} mg^{-1} and is to be replaced by centred dots: nmol · hr^{-1} · mg^{-1}

Hyphenation
The guide (p97) distinguishes between four different types of dash. I find this to be needlessly elaborate and fussy. The four types are the hyphen, the em dash, the en dash, and the minus sign.

The basic advice is to find a good dictionary and stick to it. My impression is that American dictionaries hyphenate more than the British dictionaries do. It is also tiresome to keep looking up these words. Therefore I advise students that unless there is a question of meaning, this is a matter of personal style. Students must decide, case by case, which terms to hyphenate. They should keep a list of the style decisions they have made, and stick to their list.

More helpful I think is the three very useful tables on pages 98 -100. Most people have problems with hyphenation, and overall I think the guide has made things less clear than before.

In the realm of terminology used in science, I have noticed a trend to delete hyphens. I regard this as regrettable, since with long words, hyphens help reading recognition by speeding up the breaking down into meaningful units.

Capitalisation in headings
For articles, major words in heading level 1 and heading level 2 are capitalised. They are also used when titles of books and articles are referred to within the body of a paper, even though they are not capitalised in the references.

My advice to students is: even for headings, avoid capitalisation. For books and articles in the body of a paper, choose one style and stick to it, and never capitalise in the references section. **The aim is to reduce work and uncertainty while maintaining clarity.**

Page 116: numbers, graphs, and tables
My experience is that students are often unsure how to present data. The advice given here therefore is excellent. When the result are:
      * three or fewer numbers - include in a normal sentence in the text
      * 4-20 numbers use a simple table
      * 20 or more numbers, consider using a graph.

Chapter 5: displaying results
APA style, along with many other guides, distinguishes between Tables and Figures. Sometimes it is not easy to decide if something is a table or a figure, and guidance is given. I find it acceptable in a thesis to merge the two categories, and refer to them all as a 'figure'.

Students all too easily are tempted to experiment with complicated designs. Therefore the APA guide is commendable in presenting a very simple format for tables. Table 5.2 (p130) for instance is a good example of a simple style which can be created either in a table maker, or manually using tabs and horizontal lines.

I agree strongly with the advice on page 130 that every table needs referring to in the text, and the interesting material highlighted and discussed.

Chapter 6: crediting sources

1.   Quotations

This chapter begins by giving the standard advice for short and long quotations. It is not made clear when to quote and when to paraphrase, which is a pity. Students frequently over-quote and need reminding that quotations are only to be used when the actual wording is as important as the content itself, and possibly when what the author says is so surprising that there is doubt in the reader's mind the author really did say what he did. I think students like to quote, to say to the examiner 'I really have read this article' while in actual fact, quotations should be rare - extremely rare - in articles and in theses.

2.   Antique units

A small niggle which I feel strongly about is the way on page 171 the guide uses antique units of measurement that are not in current use in the scientific world even in America, and which the rest of the world has little knowledge of such as the inch. On page 171 the quotation block is to be indented "about a half inch". This is 1.25cm.

3.   Reference with page numbering for paraphrases

I greatly appreciate the emphasis that a writer should provide page numbers even for paraphrases when this is possible. Guidance is given page 172 on providing information when the page numbers are not obvious - as for instance in documents from the internet. In this case, we are told to cite the heading and the following paragraph number.

4.   Sources with no name

Many internet resources do not have an author and this seems to confuse students. In fact, even print sources sometimes have this problem and the advice changes little for internet material since the principles are clear enough. So on page 176 section 6.15 students are advised to choose a few key words from the title, and use that in place of the author.

5.   Referencing sources referred to in the source available to the writer - the 'cited in...'

Given the difficulty of obtaining sources, sometimes students have to use a "cited in..." reference, and the question arises should they also give the full reference to the secondary source. The guide starts from the viewpoint that "citation of an article implies that you have personally read the cited work" (p169). While this viewpoint is defendable, I do not think it is the best. One of the most important principles of referencing is that a reader is guided to the sources, and is provided with full information. This over-arching principle must take precedence. It is far more important to provide a reader with all the sources of information and should provide as much information as possible. It could be that the reader has access to the primary source and not to the secondary source, therefore in providing only the information about the secondary source the writer is making it harder for the reader.

Any writer referencing in full the source they have and the referred to source is not violating the principle that "citation of an article implies that you have personally read the cited work" (p169). Such an implication can only come by reading the references without reading the text. It is irrelevant anyway, because there is an easy way of showing the reader that the secondary text has not been read. If the reader wishes to reference the APA manual and has only read this article, all they need write, in the text is "APA guide (2009) and in the references:

> APA guide 2009. *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association.* USA: American Psychological Association. [add page number here if possible] cited in: Lowe I 2010 Review.
> www.scientificlanguage.com/reviews/apa-publication-manual.pdf accessed 5 July 2010

Therefore, I advise my students that they should give both references for any 'cited in..' following the above style.

6. The DOI system is introduced

This is not needed for theses at the present time, though may be needed for articles. It is likely to be a growing problem in the future when publishing. I do view DOI as a problem. The DOI is often a horrendously long number which is not even hyphenated, therefore the only sure way to type it is to cut and paste it. This requires establishing and maintaining an electronic database of resources. Programs for this are hard to find or are expensive, and the one I tried did not work well. In addition, much of the material I use is in printed form, and the long number string is almost impossible to correctly copy. It would have been far better if most of the components of the DOI had been reduced to words.

7. Referencing the internet

The material in the book on referencing the internet is quite thin: less than one page, followed by examples in the next chapter. The page (p192) does not even have a clear header to it, but is the tail end of the discussion of the DOI. This is disappointing since students often want clarification of this area.

Advice is given NOT to give the retrieval date unless the source material is known to change over time. This is a ridiculous statement - it places the burden on the writer to decide if the material is of the type that changes or not. In practice this is frequently not an easy decision to make. Even academic sources are not always very clear on when changes were made. In addition, material on the web can be changed without warning, with no indication that the material has been modified.

Therefore I will be insisting that my students ALWAYS and routinely provide the accessed date when citing internet sources.

Chapter 7: Reference examples
This chapter provides many examples of referencing.

Chapter 8: **the publication process**
Again this is aimed towards publishing articles. It seems that **indented paragraphs** are required. I advise students NOT to indent paragraphs because when mixed with indented headings this just leads to confusion. Instead, a line between paragraphs is much clearer.

Concluding thoughts
There are many other sources of information out there on the web. One of the most useful is the 41 page summary by Purdue university http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/07/

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References

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Day RA 1994 *How to write and publish a scientific paper* 4th edition. CUP.

Lowe I 2007. *Textbook of research, thesis writeup and statistics*. Centre de Publication Universitaire, Tunis.