
Book Review

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. (6th ed.).

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(pp.xviii+272) ISBN-10: 1-4338-0562-6 (spiral bound)

Reviewed by Dexter Da Silva
Keisen University

The “bible” for writing style in the social sciences has been updated to reflect the changes that have occurred in the publication world since the 5th edition appeared in 2001. According to the American Psychological Association’s (APA) Monitor on Psychology (2009), “The style guide revision took more than three years and tapped hundreds of experts in fields including psychology, nursing, business, education and history” (p. 78). As a result, the changes are not minor, though they may seem so to writers who follow APA style purely for citation and referencing purposes. However, the manual is more than simply a manual for literature citations. Referring to the APA manual regularly in the early stages of the research and writing processes may help improve research quality as well as the research papers stemming from the research.

The changes to the APA manual can be described as both global and specific. The three global changes for the 6th edition are: 1) the re-organization of the chapters to parallel the research process, 2) changes to all chapters to reflect technological changes that have affected all areas of the research and reporting processes, and 3) expansion of examples to include those from areas such as education, social work,

and business, reflecting the broader audience of regular manual users. The specific changes are spread throughout the entire guide and cover “seven key areas: ethics, journal article reporting standards, reducing bias in language, graphics, writing style, references, and statistics” (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. xv). The pages of the manual referring to these areas have been generally expanded from the 5th edition manual; however, it may come as a surprise to find that the 6th edition is actually smaller than the 5th edition. In fact, the paperback version has been reduced from 439 to 296 pages. This has been achieved by transferring supplementary material, such as APA-specific information, to the APA website (<http://www.apastyle.org/manual/supplement/index.aspx>).

Reflecting the importance of ethical standards in publishing, the pages concerning ethical issues in social science research have been expanded and consolidated. Previously spread throughout the manual, these pages have been brought to Chapter 1, Writing for the Behavioral and Social Sciences.

Chapter 2, Manuscript Structure and Content, provides guidelines on emerging reporting standards in a variety of fields termed Journal Article Reporting Standards (JARS). These reporting standards are designed to make it easier to generalize across the disciplines that use them, such as education and the social sciences. They refer to the material that is recommended to appear in the different sections of journal articles. The chapter ends with three sample papers illustrating different types of manuscripts.

Chapter 3, Writing Clearly and Concisely, starts with a section on organization, which includes a description of the simplified rules for levels of headings. This is most welcome as I personally found the rules in the 5th edition unnecessarily obtuse. It also has a modified section on reducing bias, with three general and topic-specific guidelines. Hidden in this section is the revisiting of the “subjects” vs. “participants” issue, with the term “subjects” once again becoming acceptable. Finally, as

one would expect, there are sections on writing style, and grammar and usage.

Chapter 4, *The Mechanics of Style*, covers details such as punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations. I find one of the changes in recommendations in this part – two spaces after a period rather than one – most annoying. The transition from typewriters to personal computers brought about the change from two spaces to one, as fonts other than Courier adjusted the space that letters occupied. This reversion to two spaces seems to have been made with readers of draft manuscripts in mind.

Chapter 5, *Displaying Results*, as the title suggests, focuses on tables and figures. From my experience, this is one of the areas with which novice researchers and writers need to be more acquainted. The information in this chapter on the basic principles and guidelines for choosing, designing and constructing figures and tables helps writers decide whether tables and figures are necessary, and, if necessary, how to improve their conciseness and clarity. It also has new examples on the presentation of other forms of data, such as radiological and genetic data.

Chapter 6, *Crediting Sources*, contains all the information writers need to know about citing sources. It also contains an expanded discussion of citing electronic sources, since “electronic journal publishing has gone from being the exception to the rule” (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 187). A major change is the use of Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) to identify content on the Internet. This DOI is an attempt by publishers to resolve the problem of broken hyperlinks and URLs that don’t work because material has been moved or deleted. The manual suggests providing this DOI when it is available. In this case, no other retrieval information, such as URL or date retrieved, is necessary.

Chapter 7, *Reference Examples*, is the section with which many writers identify “APA style.” It is expanded to include referencing of

new media such as internet message boards, online discussion forums, and podcasts.

The final chapter, The Publication Process, has two sections: one on the editorial process, including a discussion of the peer review process, the other on author responsibilities. This latter section should be mandatory reading for all inexperienced writers wishing to submit articles to journals. The chapter ends with a very useful checklist for manuscript submission.

As “APA Style” is required in many Applied Linguistics journals and is the style required for JALT publications, all researchers and writers wishing to publish in these journals should own a copy of this manual. Many writers are too dependent on reviewers and editors to find and correct their mistakes in using APA Reference style. In addition, the manual is one of the best guides to the structure of a wide variety of reports or journal articles, and to following the standards expected in the reporting of empirical research and meta-analyses. Finally, referral to the manual earlier in the research process can help researchers in such areas as meeting ethical standards, accepting, assigning and managing participants, and meeting other methodological and design expectations. The manual is best used as a reference within reach of one’s workspace, to be referred to as necessary, as very few people would remember all the detailed guidelines. For novice researchers and writers a complete read from start to finish may be advisable. The main question in terms of updating to the 6th edition is “When?” rather than “Is it necessary?” The benefit in waiting is that a new printing should eliminate the mistakes with the first printing. However, corrections are available on APA’s website (<http://www.apastyle.org/>). When updating, I suggest buying the spiral bound version for easier referral while working on your computer.

Dexter Da Silva is Professor of Educational Psychology at Keisen University. He received his Ph.D. from the Self-Enhancement and Learning Facilitation (SELF) Centre, University of Western Sydney. His current research interests are motivation, trust, identity, and self-regulation.

References

- Style with substance. (2009, July/August). *Monitor on Psychology*, 40(7), 78.
- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

APA websites:

Home:

<http://www.apa.org/>

APA style:

<http://www.apastyle.org/>

Supplementary material to the 6th edition:

<http://www.apastyle.org/manual/index.aspx>

Corrections to the first printing:

<http://supp.apa.org/style/pubman-reprint-corrections-for-2e.pdf>