



Writing in the Disciplines: Psychology

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Types of Writing in Psychology

([printable version here](#))

Psychology classes will require a number of different types of writing from you in order to gauge your ability to summarize information accurately, synthesize information from a number of different sources, interpret the validity of views between sources, and present your own findings in a research article similar to those found in scholarly journals. Here are a few different types of writing you may encounter in your psychology classes (based on the types of writing explained in the [Allegheny College Writing Psychology Webpage](#)):



Report

A report presents information from a single source in a comprehensive and concise manner. The purpose of a report is not to interpret the information, but rather to summarize what the author has said. A report does not have to follow the five-paragraph rule that you may have learned in high school, but it should follow a logical progression from an introduction which explains your topic generally, to the body which presents the arguments of the source you are analyzing, and a conclusion which should link the author's argument to other related areas, bring up questions concerning the information you have researched, or explain how this source ties in to the "real world."

Review

A review analyzes and critiques the arguments presented in a single source. Generally you will agree or disagree with the author's overall argument. The introduction and thesis introduces the author's argument and your position on its validity. The body paragraphs then present the author's argument and evidence supporting or refuting his/her claims. The conclusion, as with most papers in psychology, offers suggestions on further research and puts the topic in a larger perspective.

Literature Review

This paper presents arguments and theories from a number of different articles or published works concerning a specific topic; it utilizes elements of both the report and the review in that it provides an analysis of the subject using reputable sources, but also regards variations between the conclusions and arguments of these researchers. Your job is to evaluate the research done in the topic you have chosen and examine areas of dissociation between them.

In an APA-style research proposal or empirical journal article, a literature review of the topic you are experimenting or doing research on yourself will comprise the introduction to your article, so learning how to analyze previous studies and compare them effectively is essential to your studies of psychological research.

Lab Report/ Empirical Journal Article

A lab report presents the hypothesis, method, and result of your own experimental research; an empirical journal article has the same format as a lab report, but is more in-depth—they are the research articles you can see published in scholarly journal publications like *Psychology Bulletin*. Lab reports have a specific APA format, but your professor may relax these guidelines somewhat depending on their preference. Gottfried, Vosmik, and Johnson's rubric "Evaluating a Psychology Research Project" specifies how an APA - style lab report or empirical journal article should be formatted.

1. Title page

The title page should include your paper's title, your name, and your affiliation centered on the page. A running header of the title should be at the top of the page, with the first two or three words of your title next to the page number at the top right-hand corner of the page.

2. Abstract

The abstract is a concise summary of the report, including hypothesis, methods, results, and discussion. APA format requires abstracts to be 120 words or less.

3. Introduction

The introduction provides an explanation of the problem which your study is investigating. The part of the introduction is a literature review of research pertaining to your topic of study. Your introduction should note how research on your topic has progressed in recent years, similarities and incongruities between authors, and gaps in current research which your study should attempt to fill in. Your introduction should also reference specific variables, populations, and methods used in your study. Your hypothesis should come at the end of the introduction and make clear what experimental groups will be and what will be measured.

4. Methods

The methods section explains how you conducted the experiment, who it was conducted upon, and with what materials. All of these explanations should be straightforward and concise without mentioning the results of your study. Participant description should include the subject's binomial nomenclature if non-human subjects were used, and any specific recruitment criteria or special arrangements like compensation if participants are human. The testing procedure and materials should be explained in such a way that a reader could replicate your study. All statistical measures used to interpret your data should be specified.

5. Results

The results section gives the specific data resulting from your study. Your statistics should, if relevant to the type of data you are evaluating (for instance, if you are only comparing two groups, you should be using a student t-test, not an ANOVA). If you use tables or figures in your data, you must cite them accordingly, and they should be organized by relevant variables. Any inferential statistics should be appropriate for your hypothesis, and should be stated directly and concisely.

6. Discussion

This section provides discussion of your data and a restatement of your findings. You should identify patterns in the data and relationships among the variables you researched and discuss any conclusions which may arise from your data, but make sure you do not make any conclusions unsupported by your data. Remember that you cannot "prove" your hypothesis was correct, but there might always be some underlying cause to your results other than the variable you tested.

Discuss how your conclusions relate to the research you examined in your introduction, and what could be taken to improve your study if there were any confounding variables, and what may have contributed to any discrepancies between your expected results and the actual results. Consider what extent your results are conclusive and can be generalized to the entire population, and state the "take-home" message of your study's findings at the end.

7. References

Include all cited articles in standard APA format; your sources should all be scholarly and peer-reviewed (since works like review articles or textbooks are not peer-reviewed, they are not subject to the same scholastic scrutiny as research articles). Although your sources should generally be recent, you may cite classic studies if they are applicable.

All sources cited should be from the original work if possible— that is to say, if you reference information pertaining to a study done in 1953 through a reference in a 1990 article, you must cite the original source for documentation. If the original source is unavailable, make sure when referencing that study in your literature review to make clear that it was cited in a different article, and cite that article in your references section.