

# APA HEADINGS: SIXTH EDITION

The American Psychological Association moved to the seventh edition of its style guidelines in October 2019, so **the guidelines in this handout are no longer current**. Some courses are still using the 6th edition guidelines, however, so if you need them... here they are!

An APA paper doesn't always have to have sections, but if it does then each heading has to follow a specific pattern. APA headings work like an outline, so an experienced reader can see how your points relate to each other just by looking at your headings. There are five kinds of headings: if you have only one level of heading in your paper, then you'll use Level One headings only. If you have sections and sub-sections but no sub-sub-sections, then you'll use Level One and Two headings only. Here's how to format whatever headings you want to use:

## Title of Paper

The first main page of your paper begins with your introductory paragraph. It does not have an "Introduction" heading: the 6<sup>th</sup> edition American Psychological Association (APA) manual says explicitly that "the first part of a manuscript is assumed to be the introduction" (p. 63). However, some teachers do expect an "Introduction" heading, so check your teacher's preference! The title of the paper is centered at the top of the first real page of your paper (even though it's already on the title page), and it is not bolded (p. 42).

## Level One Heading

If you have only one kind of heading in your paper (e.g. sections on Methods, Results, and Conclusions), then you should use the centered Level One headings only (pp. 62-63). Yes, some people prefer to use left-justified Level Two headings for this purpose. Yes, some teachers are fine with that. We're just telling you what the manual says.

## Level Two Heading

When one of your Level One sections has two or more subsections, you'll use a Level Two heading for each of them. Like Level One headings, they'll be bolded and all major words will be capitalized. The only words that won't be capitalized, in

fact, are “conjunctions, articles, and prepositions” of three letters or less (APA, 2010, p. 101). The manual doesn’t require you to put at least a single paragraph between any two different levels of heading (see the sample paper on p. 44), but some teachers may want one.

**Level three heading.** When one of your Level Two sections has two or more subsections, you’ll use an indented Level Three heading for each subsection. Your Level Three headings will be bolded, but they’ll be capitalized just like regular sentences. Each will have a period after it, and the first sentence of the subsection will begin immediately on the same line. The instructions on p. 62 don’t make that clear, but the examples on p. 58 do.

**Level four heading.** When one of your Level Three sections has two or more subsections, you’ll use an italicized Level Four heading for each of them. Your Level Four headings will be bolded, and they’ll be capitalized like regular sentences. Each ends with a period, and the first sentence of the subsection begins immediately after it.

**Level five heading.** Lastly, when one of your Level Four sections has two or more subsections, you’ll use an italicized, unbolded, Level Five heading for each of them. Level Five headings are capitalized just like regular sentences. Each will end with a period, and the first sentence of the subsection will begin immediately after it.

The usual rule for writing outlines applies: if you have one heading of any kind you have to have at least two of that kind in the same section (*APA Manual*, p. 62). For example, if you have a Level Two “Medical Approaches” subheading under a Level One “Treatment Approaches” heading, then you also need at least one more Level Two subheading in that section. Not all your sections have to be the same, though: you could have subsections in some parts of your paper but not others.