

APA HEADINGS: SEVENTH EDITION

An APA paper doesn't always have to have sections, but if it does then each heading has to follow the pattern below. 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.

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. 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 levels 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 7th edition American Psychological Association (APA, 2019) manual says explicitly that "the first paragraphs of a paper are assumed to be introductory" (p. 47). 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 is bolded.

All headings are bolded and in "title case": all major words are capitalized. The only words not capitalized are conjunctions, articles, and prepositions less than four letters long. Some teachers may ask you to put one or more paragraphs between any two different levels of heading, but this is not an APA requirement (see the sample paper on p. 62).

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. 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 a Level One section has two or more subsections, you'll use a Level Two heading for each of them. It will be left-justified on its own line, as shown here.

Level Three Heading

When a Level Two section has two or more subsections, you'll use an italicized Level Three heading for each subsection. A Level Three heading will be left-justified on its own line, just like a Level Two heading.

Level Four Heading. When a Level Three section has two or more subsections, you'll use an indented Level Four heading for each of them. Each will end with a period, and the first sentence of the subsection will begin immediately after it.

Level Five Heading. Lastly, when a Level Four section has two or more subsections, you'll use an italicized Level Five heading for each of them. Each will end with a period, and the first sentence of the subsection will begin immediately after it.

The usual rule for outlines applies. If a section of any kind has one subsection, it has to have at least two. For example, imagine that you're writing a paper on diabetes. In it, you've included a Level One "Treatment Approaches" heading. If that heading has a Level Two "Medical Approaches" subheading under it, then that section also needs at least one more Level Two subheading. "Lifestyle Approaches," maybe?

Not all your sections have to be the same, however. The next Level One section in your paper doesn't have to have any subsections at all—or it could have even more!