

Report assignments

A report presents information in a clear, easy-to-read manner by using formatting such as headings, numbering, bullet points, and graphs/ tables/ figures. Reports are a common style of workplace communication in many professions. Some types of reports include lab reports, case studies, and research reports (see our separate guides on these).

Content

Your report will be centred around your research into the topic. For example, you may be asked to research a particular issue or a specific organisation, so you will need to read about that issue/ organisation and collect relevant information that you can include in your report. You may also be asked to make recommendations, suggestions or create a plan based on your research.

Structure

Most reports need to be structured in the same way as an essay, with an introduction, a series of body paragraphs and a conclusion. The introduction should provide an overview of the topic and the key points that will be covered in the report. The sections in the body contain the supporting details related to your topic. The conclusion will include a summary of your main points and findings.

Some reports may also require a title page with the title of the report, the student's name and the institutional affiliation (ACAP). Some reports may also have an appendix with information that does not need to go in the body of the report but would be useful for the reader.



Unlike essays, reports usually have headings that relate to your particular assessment. Headings give structure to your writing by telling the reader what content to expect as well as illustrating its relative position within a hierarchy.

If you haven't been given specific headings to use in your report, you will need to create appropriate headings. One way to create headings is to follow these steps:

1. Read the task description and marking criteria carefully
2. Brainstorm what you need to include and group similar ideas together
3. See if these groups would make logical headings. If so, start writing up your ideas. If you are unsure, reread the task description - can you organise your ideas differently?

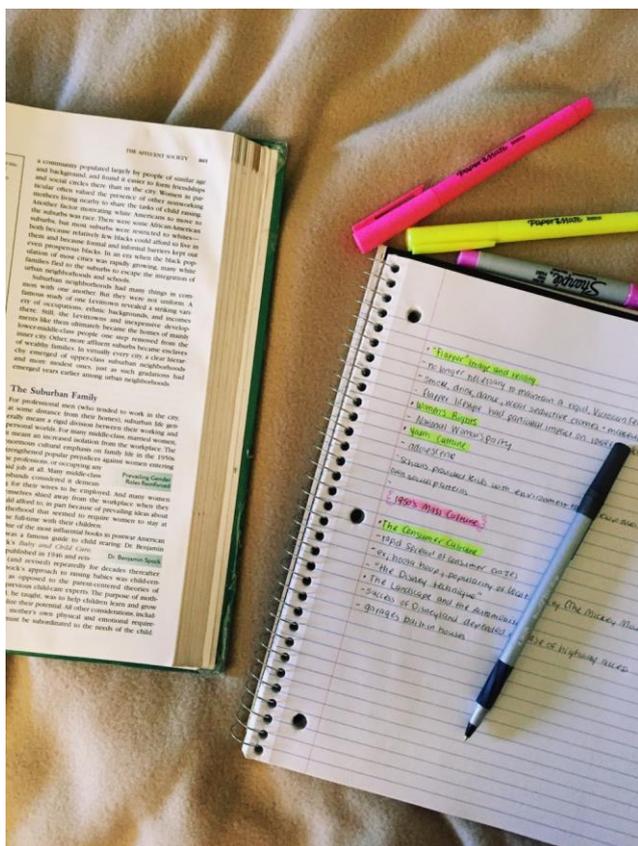
Information about formatting headings is given on the next page.

Formatting headings according to APA Style

The APA Publication Manual gives guidelines for up to five levels of heading in a paper, although most report assignments will need only two or three levels.

1. The first level should be centered and in bold. Each main word should start with a capital letter.
2. The second level should be left aligned and in bold. Each main word should start with a capital letter.
3. The third level should be indented and in bold. Only the first letter of the first word should be capitalised, as well as the first letter of the first word after a colon. The heading should end with a full stop. The paragraph begins straight after the heading (i.e. in line with the heading).

The example on the following page shows font and indentation formatting for when three levels of headings are used.



Style

Reports need to be written in a formal and clear style. Reports may present information in paragraphs, and also in bullet points and numbered lists. Check the instructions and marking criteria for your assignment as they may add specific requirements.

Bullet points and numbered lists should be used sparingly. A bullet point list needs to be introduced using part of a sentence with a colon (:) and written so that each point fits in grammatically with the introductory sentence.

Here is an example of a bullet points. Notice that there is a small lead in phrase, and each point starts with the same type of word (in this case, an "-ing word") so that it fits in grammatically from the lead in phrase.

Sample bullet point list

Being client-centred means:

- helping the client to clarify and understand how he or she feels
- matching the counselling approach with the client's needs
- ensuring the client rather than the counsellor is seen as the expert

Some information in a report might be best presented as a table or figure (graphs, charts and diagrams) and these must also be presented professionally. They need to be labelled with an identifier (e.g. Figure 1 or Table 1) and a title/caption.

Additionally, if you have used a table or figure from a source, you need to acknowledge the source below the graphic (see the Navitas Referencing Guide for information on how to do this according to APA Style).

The information in the table or figure needs to be discussed within the report, that is, you need to explain what it means in words and refer to the graphic being discussed (e.g. As shown in Figure 1, there was an increase in.....).

Example of headings formatted according to APA Style

Anxiety Made Visible: Multiple Reports of Anxiety and Rejection Sensitivity

Our study investigated anxiety and rejection sensitivity. In particular, we examined how participant self-ratings of state and trait anxiety and rejection sensitivity would differ from the ratings of others, namely, the close friends of participants.

Heading level 1 should be centered and in bold. Each main word should start with a capital letter.

Literature Overview

Anxiety and rejection sensitivity are two important facets of psychological functioning that have received much attention in the literature. For example, Ronen and Baldwin (2010) demonstrated...

Method

Heading level 2 should be left aligned and in bold. Each main word should start with a capital letter.

Participants

Participants were 80 university students (35 men, 45 women) whose mean age was 20.25 years ($SD = 1.68$). Approximately 70% of participants were European American, 15% were African American, 9% were Hispanic American, and 6% were Asian American. They received course credit for their participation.

Procedure

Heading level 3 should be indented and in bold. Only the first letter of the first word should be capitalised, as well as the first letter of the first word after a colon. The heading should end with a full stop. The paragraph begins straight after the heading (i.e. in line with the heading).

Recruitment. We placed flyers about the study on bulletin boards around campus, and the study was included on the list of open studies on the Psychology Department website. To reduce bias in the sample, we described the study as a “personality study” rather than specifically mentioning our target traits of anxiety and rejection sensitivity.

Session 1: Psychiatric diagnoses. During the initial interview session, doctoral level psychology students assessed participants for psychiatric diagnoses. Eighteen percent of the sample met the criteria for generalized anxiety disorder according to the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM–IV Axis I Disorders (First, Gibbon, Spitzer, & Williams, 1996).

Session 2: Assessments. All participants attended a follow-up session to complete assessments. Participants were instructed to bring a friend with them who would complete the other-report measures.

From: APA Style Blog. (2011). How to use five levels of heading in an APA Style paper. Retrieved from <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2011/04/how-to-use-five-levels-of-heading-in-an-apa-style-paper.html>