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Five Essential Tips for APA Style Headings



by Chelsea Lee

The 6th edition of the Publication Manual brings an important and exciting change: a new way of doing headings. The updated headings style should make headings easier to understand, implement, and see in your finished paper. Here are five essential things you need to know:

1. APA has designed a five-level heading structure (we numbered them to talk about them, but you won't actually number your headings in your paper). Click the image below to get a close-up view of the new heading style.

APA Style Headings: 6th Edition

Level	Format
1	Centered, Boldface, Uppercase and Lowercase Heading Then your paragraph begins below, indented like a regular paragraph.
2	Flush Left, Boldface, Uppercase, and Lowercase Heading Then your paragraph begins below, indented like a regular paragraph.
3	Indented, boldface, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period. Your paragraph begins right here, in line with the heading. ^a
4	Indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period. Your paragraph begins right here, in line with the heading.
5	Indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading ending with a period. Your paragraph begins right here, in line with the heading.

^aFor headings at Levels 3–5, the first letter of the first word in the heading is uppercase, and the remaining words are lowercase (except for proper nouns and the first word to follow a colon).

2. Proceed through the levels numerically, starting with Level 1, without skipping over levels (this is in contrast to the 5th edition heading style, which involved skipping levels depending on the total number of levels you had—how complicated!).
3. That first heading won't be called "Introduction" or be the title of your paper; these are common mistakes. Actually, the first heading will likely be somewhere in the body of your paper. In an experimental study, for example, often the first real heading is the Method section, and it would thus go at Level 1.
4. Use as many levels as necessary to convey your meaning. Many student papers and published articles utilize two or three levels. Longer works like dissertations may demand four or five.
5. Need more guidance? Consult the Publication Manual (Chapter 3, Section 3.03) for more examples and explanation. Also look at published APA articles to see how it's done—APA plans to fully implement the new heading style in its journals by January 2010.

How do you like the new heading style? Do you have any questions or comments about it? Please share!

Posted by Chelsea Lee at 09:18:34 AM in [Headings](#), [How-to](#), [Style rules](#)