APA 7th Referencing Guide for Psychology Dissertations

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This APA 7th referencing guide walks psychology dissertation writers through the citation rules you'll actually use, from your first in text citation to the final entry in your reference list. Psychology leans on journal articles more than most subjects, so getting those entries right matters more here than anywhere else.

You'll see the two citation patterns that cover nearly everything, the reference list rules that decide marks, and worked examples for journal articles, books, chapters, tests and the DSM 5 TR.

If you'd like a hand checking your own dissertation, our assignment writing service can review your referencing against the APA 7th rules and flag the errors before your marker finds them. The rest of this guide gives you the same checks to run yourself.

1. What APA 7th Asks of Your Psychology Dissertation

APA 7th is the citation style most psychology departments ask for. Every claim that comes from someone else's work needs a citation in the text, and every citation in the text needs a matching entry in your reference list. That's the whole system. Two lists that match each other, nothing extra, nothing missing.

In text citations are short: a surname and a year in brackets, or woven into your sentence. The reference list gives the full details at the end. When the two parts agree, your marker can check any claim in seconds. When they don't, it looks careless, even if your argument is strong.

Most of your entries will be journal articles from the last ten years or so, with a few classic studies and the odd book or test manual. That's normal for the subject, and it means the journal article format is the one to learn first, because you'll use it more than any other.

2. In Text Citations: The Patterns You'll Use Every Day

There are two ways to cite in text. A parenthetical citation puts the author and year in brackets at the end of the claim: (Bandura, 1977). A narrative citation weaves the name into your sentence and puts only the year in brackets: Bandura (1977) showed that children imitate the behaviour they observe.

One author is simple. Two authors are joined by an ampersand in brackets and by the word and in your sentence: (Smith & Jones, 2020) in brackets, Smith and Jones (2020) in a sentence. Get this the wrong way round and it's the kind of slip a marker notices at once.

Three or more authors take et al. from the very first citation: (Lopez et al., 2021). You don't list all the names first and shorten them later, the way older styles asked. Note the full stop after al, and the comma before the year.

The same author in the same year needs a letter: (Brown, 2020a) and (Brown, 2020b), with matching letters on the reference list entries. When you cite several sources at once, list them alphabetically inside one set of brackets, separated by semicolons: (Anderson, 2019; Carter, 2021; Diaz, 2018) is right, because the order follows surnames, not years.

3. Your Reference List: The Rules That Decide Marks

Your reference list sits on a fresh page after your final chapter, headed by the single word References in bold, centred at the top. Entries run in alphabetical order by the first author's surname, and every line after the first of each entry is indented. That's the hanging indent.

The whole list is double spaced, including between entries, with no extra blank lines added. Don't add blank lines to make it look tidier, because the spacing is part of the style. Each entry ends with a full stop, except when it ends with a DOI or a URL, which carries no full stop after it.

Only sources you actually cited belong in the list. A source you read but never cited stays out, however useful it was. And the reverse holds too: everything you cited in the text must appear in the list. Before you submit, read the two lists against each other. It takes ten minutes and catches the most common referencing error there is.

The reference list at a glance

Order: alphabetical by the first author's surname. Ignore A, An and The at the start of a title.

Hanging indent: the first line sits flush left, every line after it is indented. It lets a reader scan surnames fast.

Spacing: double spaced all through, with no extra blank lines. The gaps are part of the style.

Heading: the word References in bold, centred at the top. On a fresh page after your last chapter.

Only cited works: every entry was cited in your text, and nothing else. Read the two lists against each other.

4. Journal Articles, Books and Chapters: Worked Examples

A journal article reference has four parts in a fixed order: authors, year, article title and source details. Here's a well known one: Bandura, A. (1977). Self efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. Psychological Review, 84(2), 191 to 215.

The article title uses sentence case, so only the first word and proper nouns take capitals. The journal name and the volume number are in italics, while the issue number sits in brackets and stays plain. The page range follows, then the DOI as a full link when the article has one, with no full stop after it.

A book is simpler: Khan, S. (2020). An introduction to cognitive psychology (2nd ed.). Academic Press. The book title uses title case and italics, the edition sits in brackets after the title, and the publisher closes the entry. Leave the edition out for a first edition.

A chapter inside an edited book names both the chapter author and the book editor: Ahmed, R. (2019). Memory and ageing. In L. Thompson (Ed.), Advances in cognitive psychology (pp. 42 to 67). Scholarly Press. The chapter title stays in sentence case and plain text, the book title takes title case and italics.

5. Psychology Sources That Trip Students Up

Tests and scales need a citation too. When you use a questionnaire or a test, cite the manual or the article that introduced it, and name the test in your text with capital letters: the Beck Depression Inventory, not the beck depression inventory. Your marker expects to see its source in the reference list, just like any other source.

The DSM 5 TR is cited as a book, with the American Psychiatric Association as the author: American Psychiatric Association. (2022). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed., text rev.). American Psychiatric Association. In text, give the full name first, then use the abbreviation: (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) first, then (APA, 2022). Careful here, because APA in that spot means the association, not the style.

Secondary sources are a trap. If you read about Piaget's work in a textbook but never read Piaget himself, cite it as (Piaget, 1954, as cited in Smith, 2020) and put only Smith in your reference list. Never list a source you haven't read. Markers respect that more than a padded list.

Software gets a mention as well. Name the program and its version the first time you use it in your methods. Personal communications, like an email from your supervisor, are cited in text only, with a date, and never appear in the reference list.

6. The Errors Markers Spot First

The most common error is a reference list that doesn't match the text: sources cited but never listed, or listed but never cited. Read the two against each other before you submit.

Next comes capitalisation. Article and chapter titles use sentence case, so only the first word and proper nouns take capitals. Book and journal titles use title case, with the journal name and volume number in italics. Check every entry against that split.

Then the small slips: an ampersand missing from a parenthetical citation, et al. written without its full stop, a DOI given as a bare number instead of a full link, or a URL followed by a full stop. Together they tell a marker the list was rushed.

Finally, don't trust a reference manager blindly. Tools like Zotero or Mendeley save hours, but they import errors from databases just as fast as they import correct entries. Check every entry the tool creates against the rules in this guide. If you'd like a second pair of eyes, our assignment writing service can check your reference list entry by entry before you submit.

APA 7th looks fussy until you've written a few entries, and then it turns into habit. Learn the journal article format first, because you'll use it most, then the book and chapter formats, then the psychology extras like tests and the DSM 5 TR. Keep your in text citations and your reference list in step with each other, and check both before you submit. If you'd like a hand with the final check, our assignment writing service is ready to help, and you can reach out through the contact page for a free quote.