

Writing about Psychology

I. General Purpose

Psychologists investigate human behavior and perceptions and write for a wide audience. Some audiences are researchers, psychotherapists, teachers, students, clients, government entities, the criminal justice community, business leaders, and the general public. Writing about psychology involves inquiry, discovery, evaluation, and communication.

II. Types of Writing

- Literature reviews: Thematically organize and summarize existing studies, important themes in order to highlight the need for more research
- Research Papers
- Lab Reports
- Poster Presentations (for conferences): A collection of empirical studies conducted by different people or groups presented in graphic format
- Theory Papers: Discuss the origins of advances in some topical area of research, while offering a new way of thinking or interpreting
- Meta-analysis: Uses an advanced statistical technique to summarize the effects of independent studies examining the same psychological phenomenon
- Case Studies: Thorough history of individual cases or studies
- Methodological Papers: New procedures for tackling research problems
- Daily journals
- Empirical reports: Based on observations and experimentation; describe theory, methodology, results, and implications of original research

III. Types of Evidence

- Case Studies
- Experimental results
- Empirical research
- Quantitative data (numerical measurement; facts and statistics)
- Qualitative data (examples and illustrations; descriptions of interviews or researcher observations)

IV. Writing Conventions

- Write in logical, objective, concise, and straightforward manner
- Be confidential and respectful of client
- Use charts, diagrams, and tables to support and illustrate evidence
- Use thorough research to demonstrate credibility
- Present empirical data provable through quantitative evidence, not statements of experts
- Use qualitative information based on observation and the statements of research subjects
- Use past or present perfect tense for reporting conclusions, present tense when discussing results
- Avoid ambiguous, outmoded, or inappropriate language when referring to ethnicity, gender, and/or sexual orientation
- First person can be used but sparingly in order to avoid passive voice
- The focus in psychology is on the results of research, not on the writer or experimenter

V. Terms/ Acronyms/ Concepts

- DSM (Diagnostic Statistical Manual)
- Diagnosis
- Abstract (used in APA style before the introduction; a summary of the paper, including keywords)
- SSI (Social Sciences Index)
- SSSCI (Social Science Citation Index)
- Evaluation vs. Critique
 - Evaluations: imply a more general discussion of a program or a theory's strengths and weaknesses.
 - Critique: a detailed judgment

VI. Citation Style

- APA (American Psychological Association)
- APA Thesis style (for research design and results)
- APA Journal style (for research papers)

Sources:

Cullick, Jonathan S. and Terry Myers Zawacki. *Writing in the Disciplines: Advice and Models*. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011. D-122-127.

Dunn, Dana S. *A Short Guide to Writing about Psychology*. New York: Pearson. 2011.