



*Learning with Purpose*

# Mistakes to Avoid

## Do's and Don't's When Writing Papers in Psychology

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# Steps in this tutorial

- 1) State goal of this tutorial
- 2) Avoiding errors with in-text citations
- 3) Avoiding errors with quotations
- 4) Avoiding errors with References list
- 5) Not using Information Literacy skills
- 6) Not paying attention to good writing

# Goal

- To show you a number of mistakes that students often make in writing Psychology papers.
- To encourage you to check your work carefully to try to avoid these mistakes

# Objectives

- By the end of this tutorial you should be able to
  - Cite sources properly in your paper
  - Avoid the use of quotations
  - Prepare a proper References list
  - Use your Information Liertacu skills effectively
  - Avoid common problems in writing

# In-text Citations: Errors of Omission

When using information taken from a source for a written assignment, students sometimes fail to:

- Include any citation—a source *must always* be cited
- Include all authors' last names with a first citation of a source
- Include the year of publication
- Place the citation close to the initial presentation of information from that source (simply sticking a citation at the end of a paragraph is not appropriate)
- Put a period after 'al.' in 'et al.'—'al.' is an abbreviation for 'alia,' meaning 'others'

# In-text Citations: Errors of Commission

When citing sources in a written assignment, students sometimes:

- Include first names and first/middle initials along with last names—last names only
- Mix up when to use ‘and’ (always when the citation is in the text of a sentence) and when to use the ampersand ‘&’ (only when the citation is in parentheses)
- Put the citation at the end of a sentence outside the final period—a citation is part of the sentence in which it appears

# In-text Citations: More Errors of Commission

When citing sources in a written assignment, students sometimes:

- Include degrees or affiliations of authors—unnecessary information (unless there is some special reason why you need to include it)
- Include titles of books or articles, or identify publishers or journals—again, almost always unnecessary
- Cite the same source repetitively—once you have identified your source, you do not need to cite it again and again in the same or even in multiple consecutive paragraphs, *unless* you also present some other source and then return to the first one

All of these simply drive up the word count without any adding any substance

# In-text Quotations: Errors of Omission

When taking 5 or more words verbatim from a source for a written assignment, students sometimes fail to:

- Place the works within quotation marks—this is perhaps the most serious form of academic dishonesty, because, whether by intent or not, when you do this you are cheating by presenting another’s work as your own, no different from copying from the student sitting next to you during an exam
- Identify the precise source: along with authors and year, the exact page number from a paged document, or precise URL from within a website

# In-text Quotations: Errors of Commission

When taking information from a source for a written assignment, students sometimes:

- Quote excessively—unlike in other fields, psychologists rarely use quotations in their writing; most papers you write in psychology should have *no quotations at all*

Exceptions might include:

- words from an important speech
- a quote from the transcript of a therapy session
- an illustrative quote from someone responding to a survey question in a qualitative study
- an unusual or very influential definition or principle offered by an expert or a significant historical figure (e.g., Freud, Skinner)

(If in doubt, consult your instructor ahead of time.)

# References: Errors of Omission

When creating a References list to include at the end of a paper, students sometimes fail to:

- Call it References—it is not ‘Works Cited’ or ‘Bibliography’ or ‘Sources Used’
- Arrange the list alphabetically by first author’s last name
- Ensure that every source cited in the paper is included in the References
- Use proper APA formatting
  - Failure to list all authors
  - Failure to include year, or to place it someplace other than right after authors’ names
  - Failure to use proper mix of upper and lowercase letters in titles of articles
  - Failure to italicize titles of journals and volume numbers
  - Failure to include pages (first page-last page)

# References: Errors of Commission

When creating a References list to include at the end of a paper, students sometimes:

- Include sources that were never cited in the paper
- List authors' names in an order different from the order used in the in-text citation
- Provide Internet addresses for published sources instead of publication information

# References: Errors of Commission

When creating a References list to include at the end of a paper, students sometimes:

- Include elements not required by APA style formatting:
  - Full first names, and/or degrees, and/or affiliations
  - Month along with year for a periodical
  - Listing publisher of journal in addition to, or instead of, the name of the journal
  - Including 'Volume' or 'Vol,' or 'pages' rather than 'pp'
  - Listing EBSCOHost or other such electronic sources for published works