

APA STYLE: COMMON MISTAKES AND HOW TO FIX THEM

Parenthetical and Narrative Citations (Two or More Authors)

APA Style includes two in-text citation formats: parenthetical (both the author and the date are in parentheses, separated by a comma) and narrative (only the date appears in parentheses).

- When there are **two** authors, use “&” in the parenthetical format but “and” in the narrative counterpart. [Example: (Liu & Apple, 2025) vs. Liu and Apple (2025)]
- When there are **three or more** authors, use “et al.” in the narrative citation but add a comma after “et al.” in the parenthetical counterpart; provide only the first author’s last name. [Example: Liu et al. (2025) vs. (Liu et al., 2025)]

Possessive “’s” in Narrative Citations

When using the possessive case in in-text citations, always **put “’s” before the date**; common examples are:

- Liu’s (2025) study
- Liu and Apple’s (2025) research
- Liu et al.’s (2025) case study

Direct Quotations and Placement of Periods and Citation Information

Direct quotations can be categorized as short quotations (< 40 words) and block quotations (≥ 40 words). Double quotation marks appear only in short quotations. In terms of the placement of periods and citation information:

- Put the citation information **before the period** in short quotations.

“Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas porttitor congue massa. Fusce posuere, magna sed pulvinar ultricies, purus lectus malesuada libero, sit amet commodo magna eros quis urna” (Liu, 2025, p. 18).

- Add the citation information **after the period** in block quotations (indenting the whole block 0.5 inch from the left margin).

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas porttitor congue massa. Fusce posuere, magna sed pulvinar ultricies, purus lectus malesuada libero, sit amet commodo magna eros quis urna. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Maecenas porttitor congue massa. (Liu, 2025, p. 18)

Never put the citation information within quotation marks in short quotations. If the original text already has embedded citations, keep them within quotations. Provide reference entries for these embedded citations only if you cite them elsewhere in your manuscripts.

"Nunc viverra imperdiet enim. Fusce est. Vivamus a tellus (Liu & Apple, 2025). Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Proin pharetra nonummy pede. Mauris et orci" (Liu, 2025, p. 18).

Title and Sentence Case Capitalization for Reference Entries

Two capitalization cases are used in APA Style: title (capitalizing all major words and words of four letters or more) and sentence (capitalizing only the first word in a sentence and proper nouns but lowercasing most words). Follow the sentence case when providing reference entries unless they are titles of periodicals or proper nouns:

Chen, C., & Liu, A. J. (2024). Understanding partnership in teacher and student feedback literacy: Shared responsibility. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 61(1), 31–44.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14703927.2022.2153722>

Format of the Reference List

Refer to the following considerations when formatting the reference list:

- Begin the Reference List on a new page after the text. Use "References" rather than "Works Cited" or "Bibliography."
- List all reference entries alphabetically by authors' last names. Double-space the entire reference list and hanging-indent each reference entry 0.5 inch.

DOIs

In APA Style (7th edition), it's a basic requirement to include the DOI (i.e., digital object identifier) as long as you can find them for your referenced sources.

- If DOI is unavailable, provide the URL instead. If both are unavailable (especially for old, printed works), do not include them.
- Do not include words like "Retrieved from" or "Accessed from" before the hyperlinks.
- Standardize all DOI links in the reference list entries with reference to the following format:
<https://doi.org/xxxxx>

Do not use the old "DOI: 10.1177/xxxxx" or "http://dx.doi.org/" styles.

Hyphen (-), En Dash (–), and Em Dash (—)

Hyphen, en dash, and em dash can be confusing as they look very similar. A common mistake is using a hyphen rather than the en dash when providing the page range information in main texts and reference entries (e.g., 31–44 vs. 31–44). Appropriate practices are:

- Hyphens (-) are often used for compound words (i.e., words composed of two or more words). [Examples: high-frequency words, lower-class families]
- En dashes (–) are usually used for a numerical range or equal-weight compound words. [Examples: pp. 31–35; Beijing–New York flight]

- Em Dashes (—) are used in main texts to amplify or separate elements within sentences, with no spaces before or after them. [Examples: Pronunciation assessment is never neutral—it is raciolinguistic and political—when evaluating accented speech.]

Commas

The use of commas in APA Style deserves special attention in the following three cases:

- Adding a comma (also known as the Oxford comma) before the last item when listing a series of three or more items. [Example: Red, white, blue, and yellow highlighters]
- Adding a comma when using the following Latin abbreviations in parentheses: “e.g.”; “, etc.”; “i.e.”; “viz.”.
- In reference entries, use commas to separate the author’s last name and other initials (e.g., Liu, A. J.), to separate the author’s initials from other authors’ names (e.g., Chen, C., & Liu, A. J.), and to separate parts of the same reference element.

Chen, C., & Liu, A. J. (2024). Understanding partnership in teacher and student feedback literacy: Shared responsibility. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 61(1), 31–44.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14703927.2022.2153722>

On that note, APA Style reference entries usually include four elements: Author, Date, Title, and Source; periods are added to separate these elements.

Additional Resource

APA Style Quick-Guide: This short guide from George Mason University Writing Center highlights some common APA formatting concerns and provides guidance. <https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/writing-resources/citing-sources/apa-style-quick-guide-2020>