How To Write A Paper in International Business: A Simplified Example of APA Style

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Abstract

Writing papers is an integral part of being a student, especially in upper division courses. This paper presents a method for successfully designing a paper for International Business. Recommendations are given on organization, style, structure, and format of papers using APA (American Psychological Association) style. An example of a real paper is presented, along with a list of useful sources for students to use in researching topics in International Business. Note that while formal APA style calls for double-spacing the entire paper, you can single-space both the abstract and the references to save paper and to give things a crisp look. This abstract has a double-hanging indent on both sides and is single-spaced; this is an old preference and is not required. It does give a crisp look to the paper. Indentation of abstracts is not called for in formal APA style, but you may choose to indent. Several possible options of APA style are acceptable for different audiences. Most formal ones have abstracts that are double-spaced. If you write a graduate thesis, you will want to follow a more formal method. However, for smaller papers for my class, you may indent both sides and single-space such as I have done here. Triple space to the main header, then, in this case, the introduction. Triple space again after the introduction and begin the body of the paper. If you cannot figure out how to triple space in these areas, go ahead and just double-space.

Introduction

This “paper” has been prepared for you to help in the preparation of your term papers. Choosing a style guide is important. There are several different ones, which work well. You may choose any one you are familiar with. If you are not already well versed in any particular style, then I recommend you consider APA style, as is described in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (Fifth Edition).

Note that strict APA style does not call for typing in “Introduction” for your introduction section. However, for papers in my classes, you can type in “Introduction” as it gives a sense of order to papers written by students who are just learning style and organization. The introduction should present the problem or topic and describe how the paper will proceed to elaborate such. A good introduction of a non-empirical (no statistical analysis of data) paper will also tell why the topic is important.

## Primary Level Headings: First Level Headings

In this section, three levels of headings will be discussed, along with the appropriate spacing that they require. The format used is called APA Style, which comes from the American Psychological Association. APA Style is a format acceptable in a large number of social science publications (history, psychology, business, and others). It is an excellent style guide to use in business because of the neat and efficient look and organization it imposes on your writings. There can be several different levels of headings—there are five in the fullest, most formal style. I have chosen a simple version here with only three levels. The prior posting of this sample paper was based on the fourth edition of the APA style guide and presented some differences in the typing of headings. The version you are reading now has been updated to reflect the basics from the fifth and most current edition. One of the differences from the fourth to the fifth edition is that all instances of underlining in headings and several instances in references are switched to *italics.* This change reflects the fast-paced growth in the Internet, where underlining indicates URLs.

Note that the overall heading (Primary Level Headings: First Level Headings) is centered and typed in both upper and lower case letters. This is sufficient for most papers. However, if you wish to use more levels of headings, there are, as mentioned, five of them. Here is a good web site illustrating all five levels:

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocAPAHeadings.html>

The examples given in this web site are very clean and easy to follow. As for the preceding heading in this sample paper you are reading, note that this heading is not bolded. In fact, no headings are bolded and no headings use different font sizes or type. This is called a first-level heading. It is used for major divisions in your paper. It could also serve alone as the topic heading. Always try to triple space before a primary level heading. If you have real trouble in doing that, go ahead and use four spaces, two double space returns. This is not, however, quite the look for which we are striving. If you know how to use macro commands in your word processing program this will be a good place to create and use them. Try to triple space before all headings. For First Level Headings, triple space before and after. For lower level (third and fourth levels—we are skipping second and fifth level headings in this simplified sample) headings, triple space before but double space after them if you can.

# *Third Level Headings*

Note that the next level of headings in this simplified example is flush left and italicized. In the prior (fourth) edition of the APA Style Guide, such headings were underlined, a convention now more and more reserved for web site URLs. Do not bold any headings or change font type or style, just type them using upper and lower case letters (Note the exception where the full five levels of headings are used; in this case the fifth and highest level is in all uppercase).

Note that each paragraph in this simplified, three-level example begins indented five spaces from the left. These are the third-level headings in the full five-level APA scheme, but in this simpler example, they are the second instance of headings. They are used to delineate principal sections of your paper, perhaps a page or two long. Try to triple space *before* all third level headings, if you can. Use normal double spacing after them.

Normally there will be at least two paragraphs in a section under a third-level heading. Note that if you have a section that best fits into one paragraph, but is a little more detailed than what could be dealt with in a bulleted list, you can move to fourth-level subheadings, as is indicated in the following.

*Fourth-level sub-headings*. Note that this fourth-level heading is indented five spaces, is italicized and ends with a period. This is a paragraph heading, used for short topics that only need one paragraph of discussion. They are good for lists that follow a third-level heading. You do not need to triple space before a third-level sub-heading. Start it as a new paragraph, such as in this example. It is, after all, just another paragraph. It simply has its own label. For more examples of fourth-level headings, look below under both “margins” and “tables and figures”.

Margins, Spacing, and Page Numbering

Note that this is another primary First Level Heading. It denotes another major section of your paper. Note once again that it is centered and capitalized. Triple spacing should be used both before and after a primary heading. Often you will want to include a short introductory paragraph or two (like the paragraph you are reading now) just after a primary heading. Usually they briefly let the reader know what will follow in the sections to come, a short announcement of the topics to follow. Remember to triple space to the next level of heading.

### *Margins*

*Top and Bottom Margins*. Note that this is an example of fourth-level sub-headings. Top and bottom margins should be one inch. The only slight exception is with the use of page numbers, explained below. If you are merely stapling your finished paper together this is sufficient. Bound copies need an inch and a half indentation on the left to accommodate the visible space lost in the binding.

*Side Margins*. You should almost always use one-inch margins on the sides. However, as just mentioned, it is acceptable and recommendable to use one and one half inch margins on the left if you are going to bind your paper, or put it into some type of neat-looking plastic protector. Using 1 1/2" margins on the left improves readability of the paper in this case.

### *Spacing and Justification*

Papers should always be double-spaced. Note the exceptions around the headings, which were outlined above. You may elect to use either full justification (text makes a smooth vertical line at both the left and right margins) or left justification (a smooth vertical line at the left, words end at different places at the right).

Your guide in choosing justification should be which looks the best and is most easily read. Some word processing programs do a good job with full justification; others do not. If yours does not, then use the left justification alternative.

### *Page Numbering*

You should use page numbering in your papers. Do not count the title page as a numbered page. Begin the page numbering with the first page of text. You should not print the page number on this first page. Most word processing programs will have a function that will suppress page numbering on the first page of text. Begin showing numbering on page two of the text. You may put the page numbers anywhere, but top-right and bottom-center are two very good choices. When spacing from the top or bottom of your page to the page number, make the space one-inch.

Figures, Tables, Appendices, and References

The following sections will give you hints on how to employ figures in your text. It will also discuss how to label appendices and where to put them. Finally, it will give you examples of how to use references and bibliographies in your papers.

### *Figures, Tables, and Appendices*

*Figures*. Figures are usually used within the main body of text, normally just following an introduction to a topic. For example, you may use a strategic group map as a figure. Label the map *Figure 1* and put it just after the introduction to that section of your paper. Number your figures sequentially (Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.). Note that you may decide to put the figure at the end of the text, but they are usually more effective in the text body.

*Tables*. If you have a table, use and number it just as you do the figures. You may use them in the text, just after they are explained or introduced. You may also place tables at the end of the text, but they are more effective in the body. For example, if you are discussing market share in an industry, you may wish to place a small table showing share percentages just after you introduce the topic. Do not forget to cite your sources at the bottom of all figures, tables, and appendices.

*Appendices*. Often you will have large graphical information placed at the end of the text in the form of an appendix. An important reminder: always label your appendices and make specific reference to them in the body of the text. Do not just say "...as the appendices show." Instead, say something like "As can be seen clearly in Appendix C, Coca Cola holds the dominant share of the market in the soft drink industry."

# *References*

Put the references at the end of your text. Although formal APA style calls for double-spacing the entire paper, you can single-space your references on papers written for my classes. It economizes on space and gives them a crisp look, much the same as with the abstract. References are designed to document your sources for the reader. The following guidelines are suggested for referring to your references within the text of your paper. When you are referring to a popular press article that does not have a specific author, do so like this (*Business Week*, March 15, 1990). When you are referring to a specific book, chapter in a book, or an article by a specific author, do so like this (Hofstede, 1990).

When you are constructing your references, use all of the works you cited, listing them in alphabetical order. For your information, a sample set of references is given at the end of this paper. You may also elect to do a bibliography, which is a set of all writings you used in constructing your paper, whether you actually cited them or not. For my classes, please always use the *References* format.

An example of a partial, real reference section, a copy from a paper I had previously published, follows below for you to use as an example. The paper was written in APA format. The first entry (Alm, 1992) is an example of a journal entry. The second entry (Alvarez Rivero, 1991) is an example of a chapter from a book. The third and fourth entries (Bacon, 1992a; 1992b) are examples of popular press readings. Later, there are examples of how to reference books (Fatemi, 1990; Hufbauer and Schott, 1993). Note that the first line of each reference is indented five spaces while the remainder is flush with the left side margin.

## Conclusions

If you follow the basic guidelines outlined above, you will present a paper that does two basic things for you. First, you will be nudged into using a format that is organized. Using headings is like making an outline. In fact, if you write an outline for your paper, the outline will form the basis for your headings. Second, you will have a paper that looks professional. It is sad when good ideas are packaged in a sloppy looking format. You always want to present your ideas and work in the best looking format possible. It cues the reader to your efficiency. It also demonstrates the professionalism of the paper as well as the work that went into it.

As a final note, always have your important papers proofread by someone else. This is an absolute necessity if you are not a native speaker of English, even if you are otherwise considered "fluent" in English. Of course, if your word processing program has a spell-checker function, use it. If you are working in a group, all members should read the entire "final" draft, in its entirety. You are focusing more mental energy on the paper that way, and you are more likely to catch glitches. Correct all errors using your word processing program, and then print another "final" draft. You may wish to consider having an outsider proofread your paper. Have them look for two things. First, are there any glowing typos or grammatical errors? Often you have worked on a paper for so long, you cannot see the forest for the trees, so to say. Errors get fossilized and go unnoticed. Second, is what you wrote understandable? You know what you mean, but is it clear to your reader? If not, edit the passages that are the most difficult to understand.

In conclusion, please note a few general things that will help you earn a better grade by presenting a more clearly written, cogent, interesting and understandable paper. **I am not sure this is a good way to end the paper … perhaps we should turn this into a table and then add a summary and conclusion. Joel 4-27-14**

* Print the paper in letter quality format. Do not turn in a paper that is in some draft version. Take the time to find a printer somewhere that will put your work into a format that will not hurt your written presentation, but rather one that will help it.
* Avoid tables-of-contents or formal outlines for shorter papers (15 to 30 pages); those are for longer papers, reports, theses and larger tomes like books. You can use tables-of-contents if your paper is large and this would improve the readability.
* Do not put in a lot of unnecessary information. If you are doing a country profile for a business class, do not spend pages on the history of the country. Instead, make a recommendation that the intended reader (an expatriate getting ready to work in the target country, for example) read specific references on the country of interest.
* Limit your historical prefaces to instances such as noting the significance of knowing about the history of the country to doing business with the host-country nationals, perhaps noting a salient example or two, making references to pertinent readings that the expatriate can and should consult and then move on.
* Most importantly, cite your references. When you enter some information into your preliminary drafts put the reference citations in right from the beginning. Having a properly formatted reference entered at the time you use it will make your final edition of the paper be less work.
* When you are writing your paper, proceed in logical fashion. Explore a few concepts related to your initial idea. Write them down and proceed to collect articles and other readings from the library related to them. Read the articles and refine your concept. Then, make a general outline of your paper. From the outline, proceed on to get more readings that fit the emerging topic.
* Do not dangle headings or single lines of text that begin a paragraph. Note the transition from page one to two, and from page two to three on this paper.
* Do not use one-sentence paragraphs. Affix sole sentences to a paragraph or expand it to two or more sentences.
* Use proofreaders. All of us get so involved in our own papers that we know very well (usually) what we are trying to do. However, the printed word has a life of its own (hopefully). Proofreading can not only catch grammar, typographical, spelling, and formatting glitches, it can alert you to sections that have not adequately expressed your thoughts.

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