TEACHING AND LEARNING

A Successful Approach to Assist Students in Gaining Familiarity and Knowledge of APA Style and Format

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> **Column Introduction** The teaching of citation styles and how to properly cite scholarship is an important aspect of a librarian's teaching and learning work. While there isn't a standard citation style used across business schools, APA (American Psychological Association) style is one that is prominent. In this article, the authors provide a history of APA style and how they taught it to 500 first year business students in an introductory business course by using video tutorials, quizzes, exam, and online support resources. The paper also describes challenges faced in developing the instruction content, lessons learned, positive outcomes and next steps. The teaching interventions incorporated in the course helped to increase students' ability to apply APA style in their work and increased engagement between the librarian, students, and course stakeholders. *Sandy Miller and Christina Sheley, Column Editors*

Student use and mastery of referencing is an important component of developing academic literacy and is critical to effective business communication (Nienhaus, 2004). Integrating material on academic referencing into coursework and writing assignments across diverse disciplines helps students construct knowledge and avoid plagiarism (Hendricks & Quinn, 2000). Collaborating with librarians to deliver instruction on the importance of referencing, determine ways to assess referencing, and develop tools that support students' continued use of academic referencing can be a valuable strategy for instructors.

Literature Review

Nienhaus (2004) notes that, like students in other disciplines, business students struggle with academic citations and there are many challenges when teaching this content. The American Psychological Association (APA) style was developed by a group of psychologists, anthropologists and business managers, who established a set of guidelines and procedures to translate scientific writing into a form that aided reading comprehension (American Psychological Association, 2021a). What started as a 7-page article of the first set of guidelines published in 1929 in *Psychological Bulletin* has expanded substantially and spawned multiple editions of APA Guideline Manuals. The 7th edition was published in 2020 and consists of 428 printed pages and robust online supplemental and support resources (American Psychological Association, 2021b).

APA style refers to a specific choice of writing style designed to provide guidance in all aspects of the writing process for researchers, writers, students, educators and editors primarily in the social and behavioral sciences (American Psychological Association, 2021c). Camacho (2013) notes that APA is the most common style used for business writing and suggests that APA style is an appropriate starting place

for business students learning how to cite. APA includes a reference and citation system, speaks to matters of authorship and word choices, and addresses formatting related to headings, tables, figures, language, statistics, and more (American Psychological Association, 2021c). The intent is to help writers and researchers prepare scholarly writing in a cogent, organized, concise and elegant form of communication, thus making papers and publications more accessible, accurate and inclusive (American Psychological Association, 2021b).

Familiarity with APA style also benefits consumers of APA styled papers, as they are better able to understand the framework and anticipate the sequence of information (Hummel et al., 2009). By providing uniformity and consistency, ideas flow logically, and the predictability and consistency of the presentation allows readers to focus on the paper's essential content rather than the formatting. One can scan a paper easily for key concepts, findings, and sources (American Psychological Association, 2021a).

As graduate students more than 25 years ago, the authors had first-hand experience with the challenges and struggles of attempting to grasp the wealth of information in the APA manual. More recently, as many as 67 percent of graduate students reported that the APA manual is overwhelming, the index ineffective, the organization unclear, and the illustrative examples unhelpful (Chism & Weerakoon, 2012). Although other resources, such as textbooks and research methods books, typically have sample APA-formatted papers, studies examining their effectiveness have discovered that some of these papers may contain as many as 21 errors (Ernst & Michel, 2006).

Screencasts

The term "screencasts" can be attributed to Joseph McDonald and Deeje Cooley; they suggested the name to the journalist Jon Udell, who had solicited input from his readers in 2004 to describe a new genre (Udell, 2004). Screencasting allows instructors to record an activity on a computer screen and simultaneously capture the audio explanation and then place the finished recording, often augmented with visual captions, on a website for distribution and access (Morris & Chikwa, 2014). Since the technology first become available, screencasts have been widely used for teaching a variety of topics and subjects, such as student research, assistive technologies, nursing, programming, instructional design, (Sugar et al., 2010), database applications (Tekinarslan, 2013), anatomy (Pickering, 2017), referencing skills (Stagg et al., 2013) and statistics (Lloyd & Robertson, 2012). Screencasts are notably useful in demonstrating step-by-step instructions for specific software programs or activities that involve a sequence of steps (Peterson, 2007). Since the emergence of screencasting, numerous studies have extolled the benefits of well-constructed screencasts that increase student learning, develop knowledge and skills, reduce cognitive overload, and offer an engaging and effective method for students to learn where they can access the content anytime and repeat as often as they like (Lloyd & Robertson, 2012; Mayer & Moreno, 2003; Fallon et al., 2018; Morris & Chikwa, 2014). Sugar et al. (2010) analyzed 37 screencasts of instructions in order to develop a framework of five effective instructional strategies: provide an overview; describe the procedure; present the concept; focus attention; and elaborate the content.

There have been limited studies specifically looking at the use of screencasts to teach and learn APA. Fallon et al. (2018) examined how effective and efficient screencasts were in helping students learn APA format. In their study, students reported that they found the screencasts more interesting, informative and useful than the APA manual. The findings suggested that through screencasts, students gained more knowledge of APA format, developed more confidence in its application, and corrected more errors.

The Context

One of the co-authors served as a liaison librarian (i.e., business librarian) to a business school at a mid-sized research university in North America. The business school offered a bachelor's degree and several master's degree programs in a variety of fields, including accounting, business administration, commerce, finance, and marketing.

Library Support for Information Literacy and APA Skills in the Business School

A vital component of the instructional aspect of this business librarian position was engagement with and support for students in the undergraduate business program. One of their required first-year courses, Business 101, focused on a broad array of general academic skills designed to prepare its 500 students to succeed throughout the degree program. The business librarian interaction was limited to a one-hour, in-person information literacy session during the fall semester. The former business librarian had requested more frequent opportunities to engage around topics of information literacy and library research skills, but the administration indicated this was not possible due to time constraints and a full semester of content.

Use of APA style in business writing is required throughout the degree programs in the business school, and Business 101 is the students' first introduction to it. As part of their assignments, students are required to complete and submit an academic research paper worth 15 percent of their final grade using APA. Administrators of this course had recognized and reported that the students generally perform poorly when using APA style. As a result, the former business librarian built an extensive online resource (i.e., a LibGuide on "APA for Business Students") to help undergraduate business students learn how to appropriately apply APA to their academic papers. The former business librarian invested considerable time and effort designing the guide to be user-friendly, intuitive, and accessible so students could easily find specific examples of business citations. The guide also provided a link to records of the *APA Publication Manual* in the University's library catalog, so students could learn where more than a dozen copies of the guide were available across the University Library system. Once this APA LibGuide was launched (Figure 1), the administrators, course instructors, and former business librarian encouraged the students to use this guide as a resource.

Figure 1. LibGuide for APA Business students.

The new business librarian wanted to find ways to improve the APA learning experience. In addition, the course instructors and the teaching assistants involved in grading the assignments and academic papers offered anecdotal and some quantitative evidence of poor application of APA in student papers. After further conversation, several reasons emerged: many students lack formal training or exposure to APA in high school; students need more applied instruction, rather than simply access to resources that they are unfamiliar with; students need to understand why mastery of this content is relevant; and finally, students need space to practice emerging skills before the final paper is submitted. In addition, a review of the access statistics of the APA LibGuide revealed that this resource was minimally viewed.

Considerations for a New Model

There was no instructional time available to teach students APA style in class, so an alternative option was necessary. The goal was to provide a resource that students could use to learn APA that would also serve as a reference throughout their degree program.

Most students were coming directly from high school and were part of Generation Z. The literature is rife with descriptions of this group's unique characteristics, but the most prominent one is that of being born in a world where the Internet has always existed. Known as "digital natives," they have the expectation that answers are always readily available or just a few clicks away, and their go-to medium is video, for communication, explanation, demonstration, and entertainment, in short snippets (Sheridan, 2019, p. 56). In addition, those from Generation Z have a much shorter attention span compared to previous generations, and they prefer visual forms of learning, in particular, and expect instant results and feedback (Chun et al., 2017). These characteristics needed to be considered and factored into the approach when teaching them the proper application of APA style in their academic work.

Therefore, a new strategy was developed where students would be provided APA instruction via short and succinct video tutorials using business-specific examples. Students would then be given graded quizzes and an exam so they could demonstrate mastery of the content.

The following factors and elements were considered in the design of the video tutorials:

- APA knowledge would be "chunked" into manageable segments.

    o Only the most common reference sources would be selected.

    o Short tutorials would be created for these reference sources.

- The preferred learning styles of generation Z students would be fully supported.

    o Short video tutorials would be created, i.e., videos with durations of less than three minutes each.

    o Each tutorial would be immediately followed by a quiz. The final exam would be cumulative and cover all APA topics presented. The goal was for students to gain familiarity with the most common types of reference sources, to learn APA generally, and to know how to access resources for specific examples.

- Content should have personal relevance.

    o All references in the tutorials will come from the published scholarly work of the school's faculty.

- To ensure students would have an added incentive to learn APA, completion of the tutorial was assigned 5 percent of the total course grade. Students would also get immediate results and feedback on the quizzes and exam.

The APA Video Tutorials Series

The business librarian designed the APA video tutorials based upon a point-of-need micro-video series developed for criminology and criminal justice courses that showed promise in improving students' use of APA in their papers (Britto & Britto, 2018). The goal of each video was to familiarize students with a specific aspect of APA referencing. This was demonstrated by building an APA reference or citation on the screen so students could better understand the construction. The following APA videos were created:

1. Citing your Sources
2. APA Style and Support Resources
3. In-Text Citations
4. Referencing Articles
5. Referencing Books
6. Referencing a Chapter in an Edited Book
7. Referencing Online Material

A consistent strategy was used for each video, including: outlining the key points, creating a PowerPoint deck, writing a script, a timed rehearsal followed by revisions, and a final recording of the tutorial. Snagit, by TechSmith Corporation, was the recording program used.

The End Result

Figure 2 displays the slides for the "Referencing Articles" video tutorial. Institutional graphics and logos have been removed and account for much of the white space shown below. Complete tutorial scripts were made available to students to print out, download or save. A copy of the "Referencing Articles" script is in Appendix A.
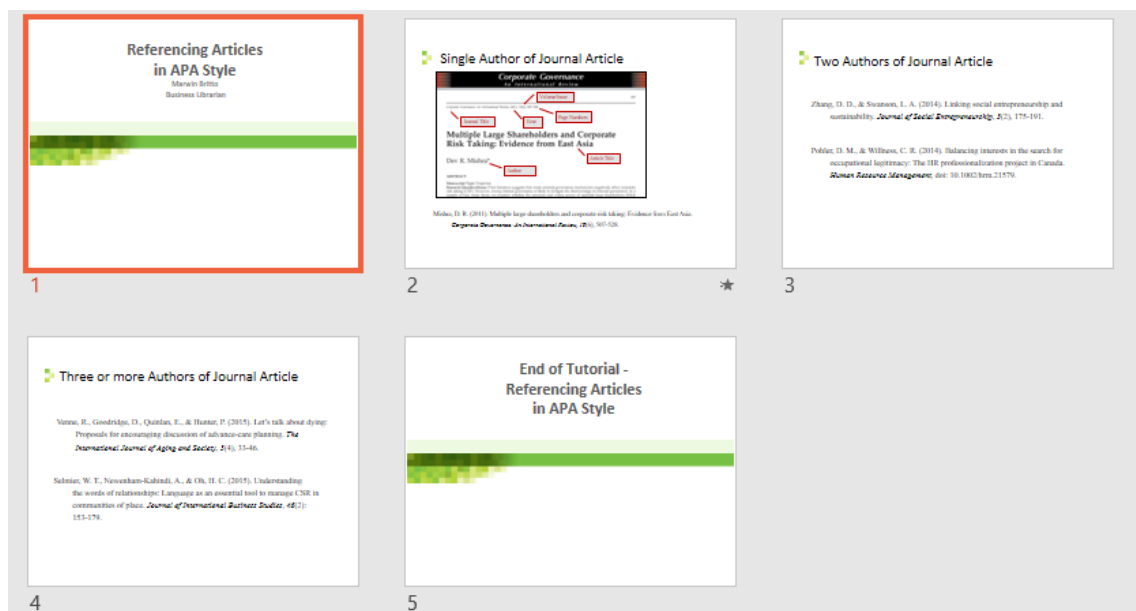

Figure 2. Slide deck for "Referencing Articles" video tutorial.

Quizzes and Exams to Test Understanding

Online quizzes were created for students to take after each of the video tutorials. Students had two weeks to complete the seven quizzes. Each quiz was made up of three multiple-choice questions to be completed in 10 minutes. Collectively, all seven quizzes were worth two percent of their course grade, and the final exam was worth three percent.

Below is an example of one of the questions in the online quiz following the "Referencing Articles" video tutorial. The correct answer (d) is in bold type. Once students selected their answer, the system would immediately provide them the correct results with a brief explanation.

For the title of a journal article in a citation:

a) Capital letters begin all major words, and all letters are italicized.
b) Capital letters begin all major words, but all letters are not italicized.
c) All words in the title are italicized, but not capitalized.
d) **Only the first word, proper nouns and the first word after a colon are capitalized, but not italicized.**
e) Only the first word, proper nouns and the first word after a colon are italicized, but not capitalized.

The final exam for the course was given online in a proctored setting. It was cumulative of all APA topics presented in the seven tutorials and consisted of ten multiple-choice questions. Students had 20 minutes to complete the exam. A sample exam question is below. The correct answer (c) is in bold type.

If the publication date is missing, when you write your citation you should:

a) Use the "last updated" date from the website where you found the source.
b) Use the word "missing" in place of the date, such as (missing).
c) **Use the letters "n.d." for no date, so it would be (n.d.).**
d) Look up the bio of the author, find his/her age, and then make your best guess.

The questions on the quizzes and exam also included a variety of APA citations, and students had to determine the correctly formatted citation. They were informed that all of the citations presented in the quizzes and exams were fictitious, so any attempts to search for the citations online would prove fruitless.

The IT group in the Business School provided excellent support in managing the APA video tutorials, quizzes and exams in the online learning management system for the course. They uploaded these resources prior to the start of the semester and provided the business librarian time to review and test the functionality of the resources before releasing them to students in the course. All in all, with a few minor adjustments, this process went smoothly.

The business librarian received only a few questions from the 500 students about accessing and using the APA video tutorials and completing the quizzes and exam. Non-completion of the quizzes and exam ranged from about 2%-9% of all students. It is not known if this was a result of choice, natural attrition from the course, or connected with issues related to the access of the APA tutorials. Table 1 displays the performance of Business 101 students on the APA quizzes and exam for one semester.

Business 101 APA Skills – Quiz and Exam Results								
Category	Exam	Quiz1	Quiz2	Quiz3	Quiz4	Quiz5	Quiz6	Quiz7
Overall Averages	8.20	2.81	2.66	2.46	2.20	2.46	2.42	2.61
As a Percentage Grade	82.0%	93.7%	88.8%	82.1%	73.5%	82.1%	80.8%	86.9%
Averages excluding Missing*	8.41	2.95	2.86	2.65	2.39	2.67	2.64	2.83
As a Percentage Grade	84.1%	98.4%	95.5%	88.2%	79.6%	89.1%	87.9%	94.3%
Students Attempted	448	437	427	427	424	423	422	423
Students Not Attempted	11	22	32	32	35	36	37	36
Total Students	459	459	459	459	459	459	459	459
Percentage who Participated	97.6%	95.2%	93.0%	93.0%	92.4%	92.2%	91.9%	92.2%
* This is the average ONLY for students who actually attempted the exams and quizzes								

Table 1. Business 101 Students' Results on APA Quizzes and Exam.

The variance in the quiz scores suggests that students were not mastering the content equally. Students scored poorest on quizzes four and six, Reference Articles and Referencing a Chapter in an Edited Book, respectively. The explanation or the examples used may have confused them, or perhaps three minutes was insufficient time to explain these particular topics. Further research will likely be able to explain these differences and address the gap.

The IT Group supplied the business librarian with complete item analyses of the questions in the quizzes and exam, which was instrumental in improving the quality of the questions for future iterations. On the whole, students did quite well on the quizzes and the exam, but the real test was in their application on the final paper, which required proficiency in APA style. Discussions with the instructors and teaching assistants affirmed that they saw a marked improvement in many of the students' applications of APA. Further research needs to be conducted to determine if the instructors' and teaching assistants' perceptions are accurate and if the implementation of this model was the catalyst for the improvement.

There was consensus that this approach has been effective and will be employed in future sections of the course. However, as the Business School has embraced a philosophy of continuous improvement, the following recommendations were offered:

1. Introduce a student feedback mechanism so students could report what worked well, and what did not work well, with the current approach to teaching APA style.

2. Request more detailed statistics for the quizzes and exam. Use the information gathered to revise and improve the process and integrity of the quiz and exam questions and answers.

3. Check to determine if there was sufficient time to complete the quizzes and exam.

4. Update the Business School faculty references used as examples in the video tutorial to include more current examples.

Conclusion

Overall, this was a positive experience that gave students in Business 101 an opportunity to gain familiarity with APA style, to learn its application through a series of seven short APA video tutorials with quizzes, and to test their knowledge on a final exam.

Beyond this course, the APA tutorials were provided as an online resource for other business students and faculty at the university and were well received and used. The business librarian distributed the APA video tutorials widely to others in the profession after presenting this model at a national conference. Plans are being developed to distribute a revised set of videos to a wider audience of academic librarians and others for feedback and use via the Creative Commons License CC-BY (see https://creativecommons.org/licenses/). Ideally, others will build upon this work and improve the utility of the model for better outcomes.

The business librarian started employment at another university just prior to the pandemic period but gave permission to his previous academic library to modify the APA materials described in this article. With the publication of the new APA 7th edition in 2020, the APA tutorials need to be revised. In the 10 years since the 6th edition was published, there have been approximately 22 significant changes in the areas of references, technology, writing style, and inclusivity (Bradley et al., 2021). The authors plan to update this video series at their new university, replace the APA references with authorship from current faculty in the business school, and offer it as a resource to the current business librarian.

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Appendix A

Script for Video Tutorial "Referencing Articles in APA Style"

SLIDE 1

Hello and welcome to this short tutorial where you will learn how to properly reference articles in APA style.

SLIDE 2

We will begin with a journal article with just one author. All of your in-text citations must also appear on your reference page at the end of your paper. The information that you need to reference your article is usually found on the first page of your journal article. Here is an example. The elements you need for your reference are: the author's name, the year the article was published, the article title, the journal title, the volume, issue and page numbers.

With this information, you can build your reference. You start with the author's last name, followed by a comma, and then his first and middle initial, with each followed by a period, and separated by 1 space. Next you add the publication date in parentheses. The title of the article is next. Only the first word and proper nouns are capitalized, and the first word after a colon as shown below. The title of the journal comes next and is italicized with capital letters used to begin all major words in the title. The volume of the journal is also italicized. This is followed by the issue number placed in parentheses with no space after the volume number, a comma, and the page range followed by a period. You will notice that a reference in APA style uses a hanging indent. This means the first line, beginning with the author's last name is left-justified and all other lines are indented five spaces.

SLIDE 3

With two authors, you begin your reference with the first author's last name, followed by a comma, and then initials, first and middle initial separated by a space, each followed by periods, and then a comma. Next comes an Ampersand and the second author's last name, followed by initials. The names of the authors should appear in the order that they are listed in the article.

The remaining information is exactly the same as for an article with one author – title of journal article, title of journal and volume number in italics, issue in parentheses, and page range.

As in the second example below, many electronic journals now use a DOI number or a digital object identifier, which provides a persistent link to its location online. If this is available, it should be included last in the reference.

SLIDE 4

The first example below shows a reference for a journal article with four authors and the second example with three authors. The format for three or more authors follows the same format as for one author with the inclusion of the additional authors' names. Each author's last name is listed first,

followed by their initials. A comma separates individual author's names from one another and an ampersand separates the name of the next to last author, from the last author's name.

The remaining information is exactly the same as a journal article with one author.

SLIDE 5

This concludes this tutorial.