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Preface

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is pleased to continue its association with the publication of Bruce Findlay and Leah Kaufmann’s *How to Write Psychology Research Reports and Essays*, now in its 8th edition.

Undergraduate psychology education aims to develop psychological literacy. Knowledge of research methods, critical thinking skills, and communication skills are valued competencies of psychology graduates. Undergraduate research projects and assignments are designed to help students master these skills; yet first- and second-year students may find writing research reports and essays daunting.

Findlay and Kaufmann’s book is designed to make these learning tasks less challenging for students. It uses easy-to-read and student-friendly language. The book is intended to complement undergraduate textbooks and the current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychology Association* (APA). The book will help students to plan and organise their research report, to express their ideas clearly, and to follow APA style. The book also alerts students to key issues, such as referencing sources correctly and avoiding plagiarism. It now includes information on electronic referencing, online sources, and submissions. Flowcharts, checklists, and sample reports provide further guidance on psychological writing. There are now additional examples for postgraduate students.

I am pleased to recommend the new edition of this book as a valuable resource to students throughout their undergraduate studies. Students interested in a career in psychology are invited to explore the APS website and our resources for students, including Psych Student Headquarters (www.psychology.org.au). The APS website also shows the diversity of careers in psychology, opportunities to network, and resources provided for students and student subscribers by the APS. You can subscribe to the APS by visiting https://join.psychology.org.au.

Sabine Wingenfeld Hammond, PhD, FAPS
Executive Manager, Science, Education, and Membership
Australian Psychological Society
Introduction

Introduction to Students

If you’ve picked this up to see what it’s like – buy it! It’ll save you a lot of hassles in your undergraduate psychology career.

While most psychology students do not go on to become the sort of psychologists who publish journal articles, most psychology departments treat you as if you will! For example, you will be expected to write research reports that differ from typical assignments and essays, and although they are not as long or complex as those an academic would write, they are designed to lead you towards that level. This book will give you all the information you need about how to prepare and write psychology research reports and essays in psychology at the undergraduate level, without overburdening you with all those extra touches that are needed for publication.

There is a glossary of those words that are on the tip of your tongue but whose meaning escapes you at the moment. There is an index that will lead you to the help you need for any particular feature of a research report or essay that is bothering you. There are flowcharts of the processes involved in writing a research report and an essay. There are a couple of good examples of research reports that you can use as a sort of graphical index, and a couple of examples of badly written reports to show you what to avoid.

If you want some global advice for undergraduate writing in psychology, it is – learn to plan ahead! It will save you a lot of anxiety of the sort that occurs when your computer fails at midnight and the assignment is due at 9 o’clock the next morning. This book will show you how to learn this valuable skill.

Good writing! It’s not nearly as difficult as you might think.
Introduction to Staff Members

Purpose of the book. This book is intended to address the need for a set of guidelines for writing undergraduate-level psychology research reports and essays. It is aimed at first- and second-year students, although it may be useful to address weaknesses in preparation, writing, or even submitting assignments among more senior students. It is not, however, a guide to writing for publication. It does observe the conventions required by the 6th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), and it includes the rationale for those conventions, as well as the steps to be taken in producing and presenting psychological research reports and essays. A student who grasps these concepts and learns the conventions will have a sound basis for presenting research in a professional manner, and writing well-argued essays, so that the later step of writing for publication should be an easier one to take.

Why such a book is desirable. Increasing student numbers and dwindling resources (especially, face-to-face teaching opportunities) in Australian universities often result in students spending less time in classes on the more basic skills and approaches to writing research reports and essays. It can also mean students get less guidance on this (assessed) aspect of their learning and are less able to understand or make use of feedback on what they have written. This is particularly true at first-year level.

Many psychology departments produce handouts on writing research reports and essays which, however brief, are time consuming to develop, and are a further burden (beyond core content development) on the demands of increasingly burdened academics. They may also be produced by staff members who have been writing for publication for some time and who may take for granted a good deal of information that first-year students, in particular, do not know. For this reason, many students find the conventions of psychological report writing especially difficult, since the requirements differ both from those of their other tertiary subjects and from their own previous experience. Moreover, when students are left to seek answers to very basic or seemingly obvious questions (which they can be too embarrassed to ask of staff members), they often find ad hoc or inaccurate answers (e.g., from the internet, other students, or even less experienced staff), and this can lead to complaints from students about what is expected in research reports.

Students will find this book useful because it is considerably more detailed than the typical departmental handout, but not as overwhelming as books advising on writing for publication, such as the Publication Manual of the APA. Some of the more advanced books are mentioned towards the end of Chapters 5 and 6.

Difference from the previous edition. Since the 6th edition of the Publication Manual of the APA was published in 2010, publishing in general has continued to change, especially in the accessibility and presentation of electronic resources. While the 6th edition of the Publication Manual updated some conventions to meet the changes in publishing, especially the use of the doi, the APA has also published, electronically, a more detailed style guide to electronic references. The latest edition of the current book includes some
of this material. In addition, we have updated guidance on issues like online submission and the use of online sources (e.g., online journals) and tools (e.g., Turnitin).

The examples of opening sentences, summaries of prior research, and referencing examples are fairly recent material from Australian and New Zealand academics. We hope your students are tickled to see the names of academics they may know used as glowing examples still active at the time of writing, and relevant. The occasional URL used as examples have been updated to ensure they are still active and relevant.

In response to requests from third- and fourth-year students, who say they are finding the book useful in their higher years, we have also included some examples of more sophisticated tables and figures and how they should be reported in text.

Academics are encouraged to consider embedding and using this book in courses. It may save teaching time by recommending that students buy and frequently refer to this book. If you are using this book as an aid to your teaching and have any constructive criticisms to offer, especially about the newer sections, we would appreciate hearing from you.

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How to Use this Book

This book has a number of design features which we hope will make it easier to understand the information you need to know. There are often good and poor examples cited. The examples will be in figures, because one of the conventions you need to learn is that illustrative material belongs in figures. The format of the figures and tables throughout this book is the format that you are expected to learn, but in addition there will be icons to remind you which are good and which are poor examples. They will look like this:

- **Good examples for you to follow** will have this “tick” beside them.
- **Poor examples or formats** that you should avoid using in your work will have this “cross” beside them.
- **Notes**, which will often accompany tables, will have this little “notepad” icon beside them. Please read them carefully!
- **Finally**, this icon will accompany comments or instructions that require even closer attention than usual. It will refer to things that are absolutely essential for you to be aware of.

Please be aware that the examples throughout the book illustrating the conventions you need to know about are not exhaustive. You should not get the idea that these examples are the only way to express those particular conventions, but they are certainly acceptable ways. As you become more comfortable with writing in this style, you will be able to be more creative within the existing conventions.

At the start of Chapters 4 and 6 there are flowcharts that indicate the sequence of activities for the successful writing of research reports and essays, respectively. These may serve as a useful summary and reminder of the process once you have familiarised yourself with the details. There are also checklists for research reports and essays, at the ends of Chapters 5 and 6 respectively, that will help you to plan and mark off your achievements in your first few assignments. Feel free to photocopy them and use them to measure your progress.

There are good and bad examples of two research reports, starting on page 129. The first is a fairly straightforward one, such as you might expect in your first one or two assignments. The second is rather more complex, but you might encounter one like it late in first year or early in second year. They are not meant to be the only way you can write a research report, but they are acceptable ways; they can also be used as a sort of index, if you are looking for something but can’t think of the word that would allow you to use the normal index. You can look at the part of the report where you expect to find advice, then
be referred to the sections or pages where that advice can be found. The bad examples include many of the errors that students commonly make. Have a look at them, see if you can spot the errors, and check the answers on pages 147–149 and 172–174.

At the beginnings of Chapters 2 to 6 there are lists of keywords. Before reading each chapter, look up these words in the Glossary at the back of the book. This will ensure that when you first encounter them in the context of the chapter they will already be a little familiar. Their meaning should become even clearer as you read through the chapter.

**Educator Resource – Test Bank**

The Test Bank provides a wealth of testing material. Updated for the new edition, each chapter offers a wide variety of question types, arranged by section. Questions can be integrated into Blackboard, Canvas or Moodle Learning Management Systems.
Acknowledgments

Thanks to the many academics who adopted earlier versions of this book for their introductory psychology classes. Thanks also to the reviewers who made comments on the 7th edition. We have incorporated most of the changes they suggested. We are also very grateful to the many students who have expressed their appreciation for the earlier editions of this book, and whose comments and experiences have led us to clarify or expand some points. They more than offset the feeling we sometimes get that, although students are persuaded to buy the book, many seem not to pay attention to it. It’s many years ago now, but one first-year convenor set as a research report the topic used in previous editions as an example in the back of the book. The distribution of students’ marks, and the errors they made, suggested that a large number of students didn’t realise this!

It may not be apparent to the casual reader, but the publications referred to as examples in reference lists, and from which we draw good examples of opening sentences, hypotheses, and summaries of prior research, are most frequently the work of Australasian psychology researchers. We are impressed by the number of publications produced by our academic colleagues, and the ease with which we can find good examples without looking beyond Australia and New Zealand. We like to think that we are reinforcing the inspiration they are to their students.

At many universities, a high proportion of tutorial teaching, and therefore responsibility for instructions about, and marking of, research reports, is done by sessional staff, primarily higher degree students. We are continually impressed by, and grateful for, their dedication and professionalism. Similarly, we are blessed with congenial associates who offer advice in constructive ways. As ever, the responsibility for any remaining errors must be our own. In particular we are grateful to Ben Williams for his statistical and graphical advice, and to Aimee, Adam, Martin, Rose, Kelly, Ian, and Elisa, whose excellent reports allowed us to amalgamate them into the good report.