

AP Psychology Method Section of the Research Paper

General: “The method section describes in detail how the study was conducted. Such a description enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of your methods and the reliability and validity of your findings. It also permits experienced investigators to replicate the study if they so desire” (APA, 2001, p. 17). Since you are writing this section before you actually do your study, you should write your method section in future tense.

It is very important that you be very specific when writing this section. You and I will use your method section as a sort of blueprint when it comes time to actually collect data. For example: if you forget to mention that we will be providing pencils and paper to subjects, or that we will be using stopwatches to time certain tasks, we may forget to get those items ready on the day of data collection.

Your method section should be titled **Method**. The word Method should be centered at the top of the page in bold. The method section is then divided into 3 subsections: **Participants, Materials, and Procedure**. These headings should be flush-left and in bold. As always, this section should be double-spaced. At the end of the section, you may need to attach appendices. Appendices include questionnaires, consent forms, photographs, drawings of any special equipment used in your study, etc. Each appendix should be labeled Appendix A, Appendix B, etc.

Participants: “Appropriate identification of research participants and clientele is critical to the science and practice of psychology...When humans are the participants, report the procedures for selecting and assigning them and the agreements and payments made. Report major demographic characteristics such as sex and age (APA, 2001, p. 18).

Again, since you have not yet done your study, this subsection will be written in future tense, and will discuss who you want/expect your subjects to be and how you plan to select them. For example:

Our participants will consist of approximately 60 students who attend Rowland Hall-St. Mark's Upper School. Both male and female students from grades 9 and 11 will participate. Students will be randomly assigned to a control and experimental condition based on their last names. Students with last names beginning with the letters A-M will be assigned to the control group, and the remainder will be assigned to the experimental group. At a Monday morning meeting, our psychology instructor will announce that the control group should report to room A-6 and the experimental group to room A-10 on the following day during our school's advisory time.

Materials: “The subsection on materials describes the apparatus or materials used and their function in the experiment. Standard laboratory equipment, such as furniture, stopwatches, or screens, can usually be mentioned without detail. Identify specialized equipment obtained and the supplier's name and location. Complex or custom-made equipment may be illustrated by a drawing or photograph. A detailed description of complex equipment may be included in an appendix” (APA, 2001, p. 19).

Since most, if not all, of you are using questionnaires, you need to briefly describe the questionnaire. For example:

The Body Consciousness Questionnaire (Miller, Murphy, & Buss, 1984) consists of 30 questions that assess perceptions of body competence, internal body consciousness, and external body consciousness. Subjects respond to questions on a scale of 1 – 5, with 1 being “never true” and 5 being “always true” (see Appendix A).

If you have information on the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, you need to report it. Also, remember to add any additional references to your reference page.

If you have created your own questionnaire, be sure to describe it and provide any rationale that seems appropriate. In any case, be sure to include a copy of your questionnaire in an appendix.

If you are using stimuli such as photographs, drawing, etc., be sure to provide descriptions, and refer to them as attached appendices/ For example:

We obtained 10 pictures of elderly men and women from the internet. Then, using PhotoShop software, we.....(See Appendices A-J).

Procedure: “The subsection on procedure summarizes each step in the execution of research. Include the instructions to the participants, the formation of the groups, and the specific experimental manipulations. Describe randomization, counterbalancing, and other control features in the design...Remember, the Method section should tell readers *what* you did and *how* you did it in sufficient detail so that a reader could reasonably replicate your study” (APA, 2001, p. 20).

This section is where you describe (in detail) what you plan to do in your study. Again, this should be written in future tense. While this should include a step-by-step explanation of what you plan to do, it should NOT be written as a list. For example:

As participants arrive for the study, each will be provided with a pencil and a demographic survey (see Appendix D). After completing the survey, instructions will be read to the subjects (see Appendix E), and subjects will begin.....

Again, the more specific you are, the fewer problems you will have on the day of data collection.

Please check out the sample Method sections provided on the [Research Page](#) of this website.

References

American Psychological Association (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (5th ed.)*. Washington, DC: Author.

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