MLA and APA: What's the Difference?

**Faculty Academy Presenters:
Diane Flores-Kagan and Wendy Rider
Writing Learning Specialists
Fall 2016 Update**

Outline of Presentation

- **The writing prompt/assignment**
- **The writing assignment and the tutorial**
- **Styles and disciplines**
- **Decoding style**
- **Elements of style – MLA and APA**
- **MLA and APA differences**
- **Features of MLA style**
- **Features of APA style**
- **Works Cited**
- **Resources**
- **Activities**

Consider this:

"The writing prompt should be considered a valuable aspect within the composing process because it is a text produced by a member of the academic discourse community, a community that students must try to appropriate."

(Kendall 4)

An assignment for a formal essay should be on a page of its own and available electronically. Include the following:

- **Task – what the student should write about (the topic), the purpose for writing, a rhetorical pattern, the writing process (prewriting and research, drafting, revising, editing, proofreading)**
- **Audience – specify beyond yourself**
- **Format – specify paper length, preferred style and format, and sources that can and/or cannot be used**
- **Expectations about the process to be followed – due date(s), saving drafts and sources, Turnitin.com information**
- **Criteria for evaluation – how the final product will be graded, criteria/rubric, weight for different features**
- **Resources – writing handbook, Library, Academic Skills Center, Writing Center, online information**

Activity

(Bean 84)

Consider this:

"Time spent interpreting the assignment, as well as understanding the rhetorical situation, is far more valuable than the time spent evaluating a finished product."

(Kendall 4)

The writing assignment and the tutorial

Tutors and tutees working together:

- critically reading the writing assignment and interpreting it
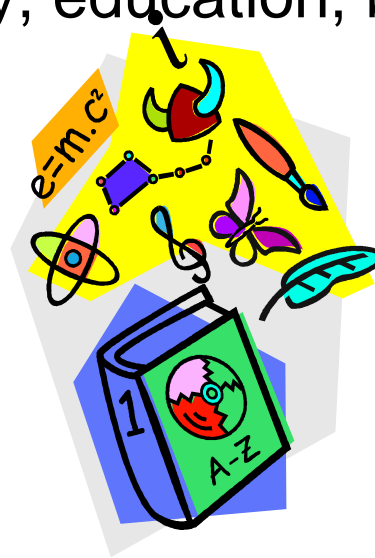
Tutors aiding tutees with

- understanding the explicit rhetorical situation before composing

- understanding the implicit rhetorical situation before composing

- using the assignment sheet as a significant planning aid for the writing process

- guiding tutees through different stages of the writing process

(Kendall 4)

Various Styles and Disciplines

http://www.avc.edu/studentservices/lc//writing/onlinematerials.html

- **MLA** – English and the humanities (art, music, theater, dance, film, philosophy, religion, world languages)
- **APA** – psychology, nursing, education, business
- **Chicago (CMS)** – history, education, business
- **CSE** – biology
- **ACS** – chemistry
- **APS** – journalism
- **ASA** – sociology
- **AMS** – mathematics
- **SAA** – anthropology

Decoding style

Expectations and conventions for writing unique to different disciplines:

- purpose for writing and conducting research

- questions asked by scholars and practitioners

- types of evidence used

- language and writing conventions

- citation style

(Hacker D-3)

The challenge for students is to become familiar with the distinctive features of writing for a certain discipline.

Activity

Elements of Style
MLA and APA

MLA
- Cross-referencing
- Manuscript guidelines
- In-text (parenthetical) citations
- Works Cited (not a bibliography)

Supporting documents (if required):
- annotated bibliography
- footnotes and/or endnotes

APA
- Cross-referencing
- Manuscript guidelines
- In-text (parenthetical) citations
- References (not a bibliography)

Supporting documents (if required):
- author note
- abstract
- footnotes
- appendix: brief materials

(descriptions, lists, details, etc.)

Differences

MLA

- author-page method of citation
- created for scholars in English composition and literature
- author's full name on first mention
- use of the "right" language for the audience being addressed
- present tense verb in signal phrase vs. past tense
- medium of publication designation (ex. Print, Web, etc.)
- many purposes for writing and research

APA

- author-date method of citation
- created for researchers in the social sciences
- authors' last names only
- objective tone, scientific writing
- economy of expression
- past or present perfect tense verb in signal phrase*
- DOI (digital object identifier) or document number
- two purposes for writing and research

* Present tense is used "to discuss implications of the results and to present conclusions" (*APA 66*).

Purpose for writing and conducting research
MLA   and   APA

- to analyze, argue, compare, contrast, define, describe, discuss, evaluate, explain, illustrate, inform, interpret, narrate, report, show cause and effect, summarize, trace, etc.

- To report original research (your own)
- To review literature previously written about a research topic

Note: A review of literature might also be included in an original research report in relation to the writer's own research.

Features of MLA Style

- Title page not required
  http://www.avc.edu/studentservices/lc//writing/onlinematerials.html

- All borrowed material is cited in-text, page number required
- Short quotations are four lines or less
- Long quotations are over four lines

- Thesis statement
  An assertion about the topic that you must show, explain, or prove; an argument   http://www.avc.edu/studentservices/lc//writing/onlinematerials.html

- Types of evidence: examples, facts, statistics, testimonies from experts, opinions, opposing argument, definitions, historical evidence, charts, graphs, maps, other visuals, etc.

Features of APA Style

- **Title page required with running head**
  http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/
- **Abstract**

- **Use of headings to help readers follow the organization of the paper. "For an original research report: Method, Results, Discussion. The introduction is not given a heading. For a literature review, headings will vary" (Hacker 416).**

- **Page numbers for quotations, paraphrases, and summaries.**
- **Short quotations, fewer than 40 words; long, 40 words or more**

- **Thesis statement—answers a research question or hypothesis.**
  For an original research report, what the experiment has proven.
  For a literature review, conclusions made by researchers about the topic. Note: The writer of the report or review also argues a position.

  http://www.avc.edu/studentservices/lc//writing/onlinematerials.html
- **Types of evidence: reports of empirical (experimental) studies; reviews; case studies, meta-analyses, etc.**   Activity

Style is important!

- Select the style appropriate to your discipline.
- Consider the purpose of your writing assignment.
- Consider the kinds of sources you want your students to use.
- Consider that letting students choose for themselves which style to use potentially does these things:
    1. Confuses them.
    2. Makes more work for you.
    3. May result in an inferior final product.

Works Cited

- American Psychological Association (APA). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed., APA, 2010.

- Bean, John C. *Engaging Ideas.* Jossey-Bass, 2001.

- Hacker, Diana and Nancy Sommers. *A Writer's Reference.* 8th ed., Bedford/St. Martin's, 2016.

- Kendall, A. "The Assignment Sheet Mystery." *The Writing Lab Newsletter,* Sept. 2008.

- Modern Language Association of America (MLA). *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 8th ed., MLA, 2016.

Resources

- ## APA Website   http://www.apa.org

  (Tutorials—The Basics of APA Style, What's New in the Sixth Edition)

- ## AVC Writing Center Website   http://www.avc.edu

  (for research and documentation online, model papers, etc.)

- ## MLA Website   http://www.mla.org

  (full text of MLA Handbook, research project narratives)

- ## OWL at Purdue   http://owl.english.purdue.edu

  (PPTs for MLA and APA)