What's Behind APA Guidelines

The purpose of the American Psychological Association (APA) format guidelines is not to further complicate the writing process. Though the sheer thickness of the APA Publication Manual may seem unnecessarily or overwhelmingly complex, the guidelines themselves are just editorial conventions that provide a framework
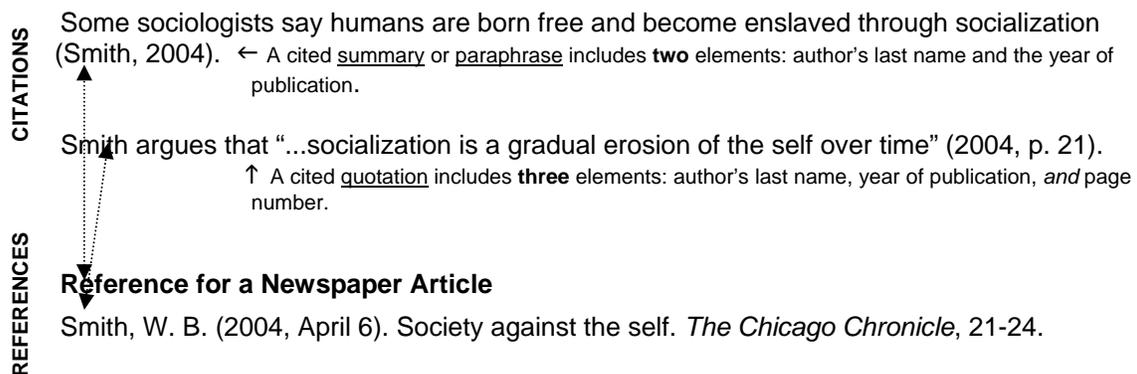for clear and structured communication.

The APA guidelines were developed in the field of psychology as a standard for submitting papers for publication. Today, the APA guidelines have been adopted by numerous disciplines as a standard format for preparing manuscripts for publication. On one hand, certain elements of APA format (i.e., running headers) are specific for publication purposes and are not always necessary for coursework assignments. On the other hand, APA does not require a Table of Contents, but an instructor may require learners to include one.

The ultimate role APA format plays in writing a paper is structural and secondary; the quality of the content (i.e. ideas, argument, position, etc.) of a paper should be your primary concern. A paper formatted perfectly according to APA guidelines may be starving for ideas and/or may require serious revision in terms of the logical flow of its argument. In other words, APA format is to content as a mug is to coffee. A paper's format simply provides the "mold" in which one's ideas—the important stuff—are developed.

APA is not meant to get in the way of writing—but a writer's frustration with APA format increases when the reasons *behind* the rules are not well understood. Since all Capella learners need to follow APA guidelines for citations and references, those particular rules are addressed in the examples below. For guidance about which additional rules of APA format to apply to course papers, learners should consult their instructors.

In-Text Citations & References, APA Style

Citations and references are two elements of APA formatting required for all Capella learners. Note that they are related. **Citations** give information within the body of the paper that a reader needs to find the source of a paraphrase or quotation. Each cited text belongs in the **reference list**, which performs two essential functions: first, it adds credibility to the author's research, and second, it documents sources that link readers to a greater community of knowledge.

CITATIONS

Some sociologists say humans are born free and become enslaved through socialization (Smith, 2004). ← A cited <u>summary</u> or <u>paraphrase</u> includes **two** elements: author's last name and the year of publication.

Smith argues that "...socialization is a gradual erosion of the self over time" (2004, p. 21).
↑ A cited <u>quotation</u> includes **three** elements: author's last name, year of publication, *and* page number.

REFERENCES

Reference for a Newspaper Article

Smith, W. B. (2004, April 6). Society against the self. *The Chicago Chronicle*, 21-24.

Tips on Using APA

- Please don't attempt to memorize the whole manual—use the index instead. Remember, the index is cross referenced, so if you can't find what you're looking for, try looking it up under a synonym. For example, if you don't find what you're looking for under "section titles," try looking under "headings." Searching this way will get easier as you become familiar with APA terminology.

- Remember, content is primary; APA format is just the "mold" into which ideas can be poured. Your ideas are more important than the mold.

- Some elements of APA format are not always required for coursework. Check with your instructor if you have questions on how to format a particular assignment.