

Writing With Style

APA Style Made Easy

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Chapter 4

The Method Section

Purpose

- Make it possible to replicate your study
- Allow the reader to judge reliability and validity of your study

PARTICIPANTS

Standard information

- Age
 - Usually range and mean
 - Years, days, months old?
- Sex
 - Men and women
 - Girls and boys
 - Males and females ONLY if includes both children and adults or if not human
- Number of each sex

Standard information

- Race or ethnicity
 - Capitalize the words, including Black and White.
 - Use racial and ethnic labels preferred by the groups themselves.
 - Spelling alert: No hyphenated Americans
 - Cuban Americans
 - African Americans
 - Irish American psychology majors

Special information

- What is needed to generalize from sample to population or what may limit generalization
 - Educational level
 - Occupation
 - Special characteristics, e.g.:
 - Students, patients, full-term infants, etc.
 - Region of the country
 - Marital status

Special information

- What is relevant to the subject under investigation, e.g.:
 - Sexual orientation
 - Diagnosis
 - APGAR score
 - SES
 - Rural? Urban?
 - Enrolled in bridge classes?

Grouped by existing characteristics

- Number of married and unmarried physicists
- Number of twin pairs raised together and raised apart
- Number of divorced and of widowed army sergeants
- Number of middle-aged (age range and mean) and of older (age range and mean) adults

Avoid bias

- Sexual orientation
 - Specify gender
 - Use lesbian women, gay men, bisexual men or women
- For diagnosis, people first
 - People with bipolar disorder — not bipolars
 - Children with autism — not autistic children

Avoid suggesting helplessness

- People who reported being sexually abused as teenagers
 - Not victims of abuse
- People who use wheelchairs
 - Not people who are confined to wheelchairs
- Older adults or older persons
 - Not elderly

How they got to the study

- Volunteered
- Answered an advertisement
- Were approached in the waiting room of a psychic reader
- Participated for extra credit in psychology courses
- Were offered the chance to win a silver goblet

Random?

- Not likely that they were randomly selected
- Perhaps randomly assigned to groups

Some started but did not finish

- How many did not complete?
- Why?
- Don't put them down by your choice of language
 - They did not fail to complete or fail a manipulation check
 - They did not complete; they did not return surveys; they did not pass the manipulation check

Power

- Indicate the statistical power of your main analysis, given this number of participants
- “For the main analysis, this sample size provided a power of .8 to detect a medium effect.”

Ethical treatment

- “Participants were treated according to the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association.”
- When journal articles omit this, it is because authors all stipulate to it in the letter accompanying their submission.
 - This information would be found in the *Instructions to Authors* section of the journal.

Nonhuman animals

- Report
 - Genus, species, and strain number
 - Supplier and stock designation
 - Sex, weight, physical condition
- Neuter pronouns
 - *It* not *he* or *she*
 - *That* not *who*
 - Except if the animals have names, e.g., primates

PROCEDURE

Point of view

Experimenter's

for how it was organized

- Participants were randomly assigned to the clown or the baseball star condition.

Participant's

for describing the task

- Participants read a newspaper story about either a clown or a baseball star. Then they rated their opinions about...

Tell the story logically

- What did everyone do?
 - They read something about something. Provide some key details that refer to all the stories.
 - They performed a specific task.
- How did groups differ?
 - In half of the stories the target was a clown and in half the target was a baseball player.
 - The instructions for the task were provided by either a person or a talking parrot.

Keep the logic flowing

- Participants were randomly assigned to one of these groups

Don't make the reader work too hard

– Limit abbreviations.

- P group vs. TP group is confusing if it stands for person vs. talking parrot
- but not if it stands for professor vs. televised professor

– Name the groups according to the task.

- The clown group or the baseball player group
- The person group or the talking parrot group

– This will be easier than Group A and Group B.

Apparatus

- Include this section if there is a gizmo to explain.
- Describe it from the point of view of participant.
- If available for purchase, provide make and model.
- If not, describe fully in an appendix or provide an image of it as a figure.

Materials or stimuli

- Materials

- Usually printed
- May be published tests
 - Provide reference, reliability, validity
- Provide sample items
- If author-designed
 - Provide sample items in this section
 - Full test or questionnaire in table or appendix

- Stimuli

- May be images, audios, videos, computer programs
 - Provide reference if published
- May be author-designed
 - Describe how participants interacted with it
 - Provide complete information in figure or appendix

Final pieces of the section

- If participants were deceived, indicate that they were debriefed.
- If scoring is not obvious, describe after the test or questionnaire is described.
- Manipulation check, if used, should be described in the order presented.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Write for psychologists in a different subspecialty

- They know about experimental psychology.
- Therefore, they know stuff that you don't have to explain.
 - How to randomize
 - What common terms mean
 - Counterbalance
 - Control group
 - Blind to experimental conditions

And they also know

- How to phrase simple instructions
 - Quote instructions only if important to the experimental manipulation.
- How to create scoring sheets that participants will not see
- People use pens or pencils and then they clip papers together with paper clips
- We thank people when we are finished