

BOOK REVIEW

Writing With Style: APA Style Made Easy, Third Edition

by Lenore T. Szuchman

2005 Wadsworth 151 pages

Reviewed by Kristi S. Multhaup

Department of Psychology, Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina 28035-7000

I am not sure whether learning or teaching scientific writing in general, and APA style in particular, is more difficult. Fortunately for students and teachers alike, Lenore Szuchman has written a text that has the potential to ease the process.

Szuchman's book begins with a chapter that encourages students to see themselves as psychologists-in-training rather than lay people who find psychology interesting. She briefly addresses why not all professionals can use the Modern Language Association (MLA) or *Chicago Manual of Style* rules. Szuchman emphasizes the importance of looking details of APA style up in the *Publication of Manual of the American Psychological Association*, thus removing the idea that her book is meant to replace the APA manual. The strength of the opening chapter, however, resides in the cogent and concise discussion of plagiarism, including practical suggestions such as "Never try to paraphrase one sentence at a time. Instead, first read through the whole section you wish to paraphrase, then write your paraphrase, but without looking at the original" (p. 8).

In the second chapter, *Some Generalizations About How Psychologists Write*, Szuchman introduces workbook exercises. As Szuchman explains that researchers rather than studies are the ones who do things, she encourages students to collect useful phrases from articles they have been assigned to read or from InfoTrac (access to which is included with the book). For example, in Exercise 1 students record verbs that work with "someone's *study, work, experiment, research*" (p.15). Szuchman started the list with examples such as *demonstrates* and *provides evidence* and included blanks for students to record additional examples. In Exercise 4 students record verbs that work with *researchers*. Szuchman listed *have shown, found, replicated, and reported* as starters and included blanks for additional examples (p. 17). The final section of this chapter includes examples that should *not* be used in scientific writing (e.g., one-sentence paragraphs, addressing the reader as *you*).

In chapters 3-9 Szuchman takes each part of a manuscript in turn (literature review, methods, results, discussion, abstract, references, title page and other formatting). She explains what each section should contain and includes more workbook exercises. In chapter 10, *Grooming Tips for Psychology Papers*, Szuchman covers basic grammatical rules (e.g., assuring agreement between subjects and verbs, avoiding half-empty comparisons and run-on sentences) and includes numerous exercises to help students learn those rules.

One of the most valuable chapters is the Appendix, which includes sections on the *First Rewrite, Second Rewrite, Third Inspection—Not a Rewrite*, and *Final Touches*. While professors often encourage students to start writing early to leave enough time to set a paper aside and then revise it before turning it in, Szuchman makes concrete suggestions for common errors to look for in each rewrite. She suggests that the first rewrite should focus on content, the second should focus on style, and the third should focus on proofreading for common mistakes like writing *their* instead of *there*. Finally, Szuchman encourages students to use a spell-checker and to read the paper aloud to find small errors.

As a bonus in this discussion of APA style manuscripts, Szuchman addresses posters in chapter 11. She offers concrete suggestions for each section of a poster (e.g., ways to reduce a paper's introduction to a poster-size section, a list of key points to include in the method section). In addition, Szuchman explains what happens in a poster session, with practical suggestions such as wearing comfortable shoes during a poster presentation and not taking it personally if someone glances at the poster before walking away.

I assigned *Writing with Style* as a recommended (rather than a required) book for my 300-level research methods course last fall. The students were all juniors and seniors, some of whom were in their first research methods course, others of whom were in their second or third one. Chapters were assigned at relevant points during the progression of the first lab report. I did not make the exercises assignments, but instead explained why I thought it would be useful for students to do them as they read journal articles throughout the semester.

At the conclusion of the semester, I asked students to evaluate the Szuchman text. The majority of students said that they would recommend the book to another psychology major, saying things like, "It is very helpful as a supplement to the APA manual which can be overwhelming" and "it gives a concise, easy to read overview of important things to note when writing a paper." Those students who said they would not recommend the book to another psychology major typically stated that they had written several APA style papers before which familiarized them with the APA manual, thus reducing the need for the supplementary text.

I agree with the student who suggested that psychology majors should get this book when they declare their major because it is helpful in developing a scientific voice. If students began using the workbook exercises

from Szuchman's text early in their psychology training, the usefulness of the text would increase over time as more examples are recorded. That said, even advanced students who are familiar with the APA manual can benefit from the first two chapters, particularly the section on plagiarism, as well as the reminder boxes in each chapter.

The most effective way to use Szuchman's text would be to have students periodically turn in the books to ensure that they are doing the workbook exercises. However, even if the book is assigned as an optional text and a student only skims through it, the reminder boxes alone contain useful information.

Overall, *Writing With Style* is an easy read. Szuchman uses a conversational style and provides numerous helpful examples and she highlights key points in reminder boxes. The text can be used as an effective supplement to the APA manual, particularly early in students' training.