

Description

Some journals or style guides require papers to have a running head. But, what is a running head? A running head is a short version of the paper title that is printed as a heading at the top of each page. If your document includes page numbers at the top, the running head can precede the page number or appear on the opposite edge of the page. In APA style, the running head is placed in the upper left.

The publisher often requests running heads for practical reasons. It is desirable to have every page clearly labeled as being part of the paper. If your paper is printed as a hard copy and the various pages fall to the floor or are mixed up, having a running head and page number on each page helps the reader to put all the pages back in the correct order. Even readers who are viewing an electronic version of the paper may appreciate the clear labels, especially if they are sorting through many documents simultaneously.

Guidelines for Writing Running Head in APA Style

The specific requirements for running heads vary.

- In general, running heads should be brief. APA guidelines require that **running heads be a maximum of 50 characters** (spaces count as characters).
- The running head is usually **written in all capital letters**. (For style purposes, the examples in this article use regular title case.)
- It is **placed in a header at the top of the page**. Check the journal or style guidelines for any specifics on margins, spacing, or font.

  Related: Ready with your running head and looking forward to manuscript submission? **Check these journal selection guidelines now!**

- In APA, the running head is **introduced on the first page** by the phrase “Running head” and a colon, i.e., in the following format: “Running head: SHORT VERSION OF TITLE.” Subsequent pages have only the running head itself. In other formatting styles, the running head may be introduced in this way as part of the information that appears on the title page.

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Here is an example of a running head:

Original Title: “The Impact of Climate Change on Coral Reefs in the Pacific Ocean”

Running Head: “Climate Change and Pacific Coral Reefs”

In this running head example, the full title of the article is “The Impact of Climate Change on Coral Reefs in the Pacific Ocean.” The running head condenses this title down to a shorter version that still conveys the main topic of the article.

Remember, depending on the specific requirements of the journal or publication you are submitting to, the running head format may vary. Always check the guidelines provided by the publication for any specific requirements regarding running heads.

How do you create a running head?

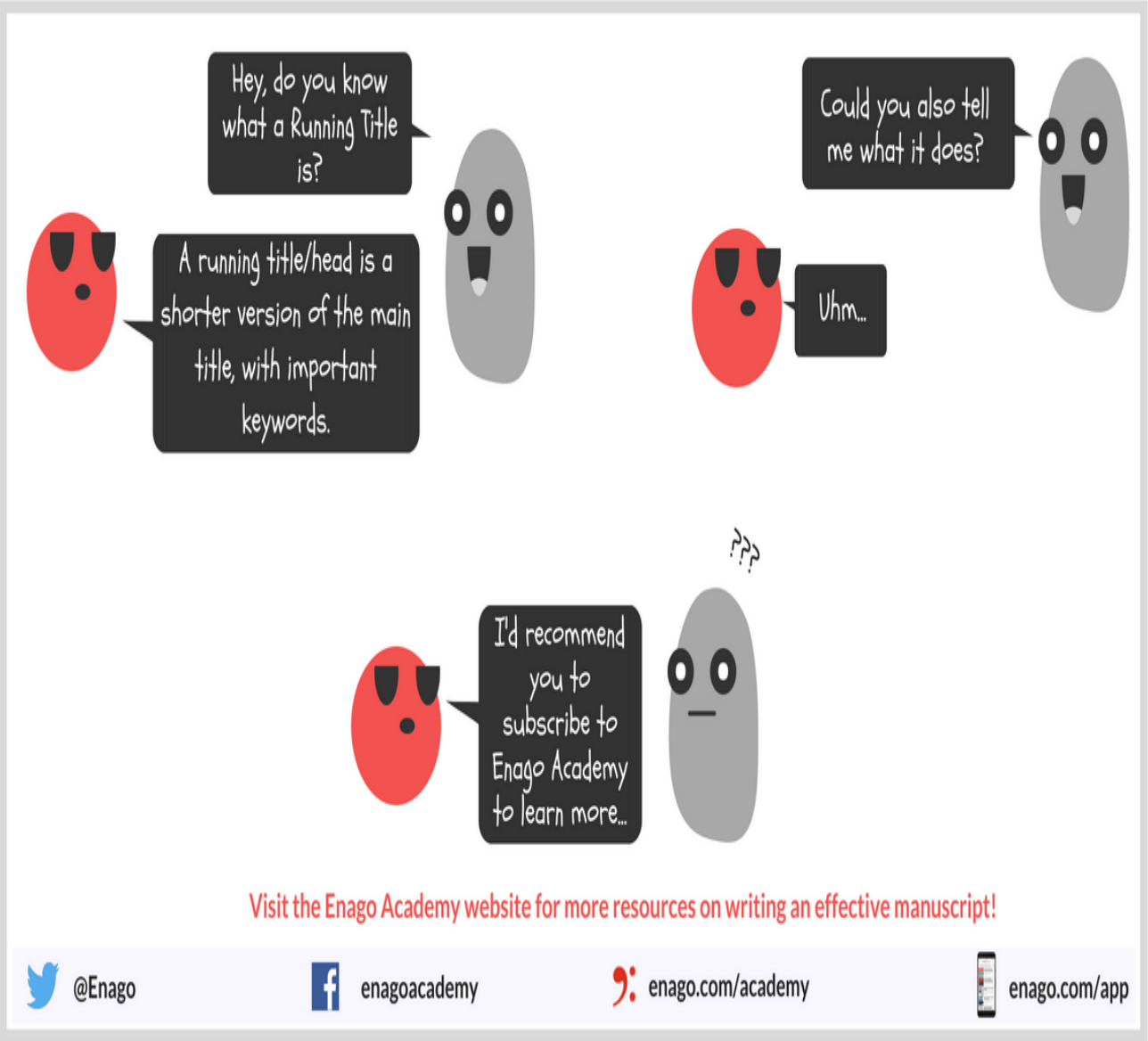
If your paper title is already within the character limit, simply use the full title as the running head—no special changes are needed. However, if your paper title is over the limit, then you need to create a distinct running head that fits within the style guidelines.

First, identify the main part of your title. For example, if the paper is called “The Effects of Running on Heart Health in Elderly Patients,” consider using only the first part, “Effects of Running on Heart Health,” or the second part, “Heart Health in Elderly Patients.” Make the choice based on which ideas and concepts are most prominent in the paper.

If it does not make sense to take part of the title to serve as the running head, try making a few tweaks or even paraphrasing the title entirely. For instance, with the title mentioned above, the running head could be “Running and Heart Health in Elderly Patients.”

Second, eliminate articles such as the words “the” and “a.” The title “Re-examining the Literary Traditions in Ancient China” can be shortened to “Re-examining Literary Traditions in Ancient China.” In this case, simply removing the word “the” from the title creates a running head that fits within the APA’s 50-character limit.

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Practical tips for writing running heads in Microsoft Word

1. How to get a character count?

If you are typing your paper in Microsoft Word, use the “Word Count” function to count characters: To do this, highlight the running head and then go to the Review menu and click on “Word Count.” The results box will show the number of “Characters (no spaces)” and “Characters (with spaces).” Read the journal or style guidelines carefully to know which number you should look at. In APA, it is the second option that is relevant, as spaces are counted as characters.

2. How to add the running head as a header on each page?

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Create a header by going to Insert and selecting “Header” under “Header & Footer.” A header will be created at the top of each page. Modifying the header on any page changes it on every page. If you wish to have the phrase “Running head” appear on only the first page, as required in APA style, check the option “Different first page” that appears under the Design menu when the header is inserted or edited. Checking this option allows you to edit the header on the first page independently while maintaining the headers on the second, third, and all other pages as the same.

References

Hume-Pratuch, Jeff. May 10, 2012. “Mysteries of the Running Head Explained.” American Psychological Association website. https://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/running-heads/ (access March 13, 2017)

Lee, Chelsea. Nov. 11, 2010. “Running Head Format for APA Style Papers.” American Psychological Association website. https://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/11/running-head-format-for-apa-style-papers-.html (access March 13, 2017)

Category

1. Manuscripts & Grants
2. Reporting Research

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