In-Text Citations for Works with Multiple Authors

A manuscript written in APA format should present readers with enough information to locate the sources presented, but not inundate them with too much information. Therefore, it is important to know when to properly use “et al.” (which means “and others”) in the text of a manuscript.

When citing a source that was written by 2 authors, you should always include both authors’ last names. If a source has 3 authors, you will include all 3 authors’ last names in the first call-out only. Each subsequent citation can have the lead author’s last name followed by “et al.” The same rule applies to references written by 4 authors.

Material with 5 or more authors is where it gets tricky. A source that is authored by 5 people is commonly cut short when cited. The proper way to cite this type of source in APA format is to list all 5 authors in the first call-out; “et al.” is only used following the lead author’s name in citations that appear later. Many writers think that it isn’t necessary to use all 5 authors’ names the first time, but it certainly is!

A source written by 6 or more authors is the only instance in which you may use “et al.” following the primary author’s last name in the first call-out. For these references, you may use “et al.” each and every time. However, don’t forget that you still need to list at least the first 6 authors’ last names in your reference list. Even though the names may not appear in your in-text citations, they still need to be presented to readers in the reference list so they can easily locate the source.

Katie R. Brownlow, BA, is a Managing Editor, Jannetti Publications, Inc., a Division of Anthony J. Jannetti, Inc., Pitman, NJ. She may be contacted via email at katie@ajj.com.

APA Quick Takes © Jannetti Publications, Inc., 2009