

Running head: SUBJECT-TOPIC DIFFERENTIATION

**Commented [O1]:** This is the Running head with header; notice the header portion is capitalized.

There should NOT be page numbers on an APA title page. Some authorities allow for them, but , generally, in all literary practice, page numbers do not appear on the title page

An Examination of Subject-Topic Differentiation in Research Papers

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**Commented [O2]:** Title information is limited to three critical pieces of information in APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition: 1) title, no more than 15 words; it can appear on two lines if desired, separated by a colon or dash; 2) student's full name; 3) institution.

No other information should be part of the title information

## **An Examination of Subject-Topic Differentiation in Research Papers**

In choosing to write a research paper in the APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition, the student must first be clear about two related concepts: 1) the subject of the paper; 2) the topic of the paper. Yet, these important components of the research process are not always or clearly explained to students encountering the APA format for the first time. Notwithstanding, both are relatively easy to grasp, just as they are essential to understand, in order to research and, ultimately, construct a paper. Thus, it shall be argued that unless one understands the difference between a subject and a topic, relative to the construction of an APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition paper, that paper will suffer from a lack of clarity and expression, ultimately. The purpose of this brief explanatory paper is to demonstrate the differences between the subject and the topic in an APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition paper for students who may not have learned, previously, that there is a difference in these terms.

### **Subject and Topic in an APA 6<sup>th</sup> Edition Research Paper**

Perrin (2015) has written about the differences between subjects and topics in research papers. Research, according to Perrin always begins with “a subject.” A subject is a broad category of study, for example, “terrorism,” “human trafficking,” “psychotherapy,” “law-enforcement,” and the like. However, many students, when asked for a topic for a paper, will furnish, instead a subject. This is a common mistake, but one that is easily rectified. In order to transform a subject into a topic, the student-researcher must *narrow* the subject, in order to focus it in a particular direction, such that, the transformed subject now is linked to an additional variable or variables. In other words, the subject is now being examined through the lens of an additional variable or variable.

**Commented [O3]:** The title is the same as that on the title page; the difference is that this title in APA 6<sup>th</sup> ed. is **BOLDED**. This transforms the title into a LEVEL ONE heading, one of five headings in APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition.

Formatting for a Level One heading is: centered, bolded, upper and lower case.

A Conclusion is also a Level One heading.

Level One headings are major ideas.

**Commented [O4]:** Though this is not really a paper, I am approaching this brief explanation as if it were. The material that appears under the title (Level One heading) is also understood to be the **introduction**, though that term is not used in writing in APA student papers. It is used in research papers intended for professional journals.

**Commented [O5]:** This is the thesis statement of this explanatory paper; note that in APA, we do NOT use, in writing, the term “thesis,” statement. The thesis statement appears in DEDUCTIVE PAPERS; they are the ARGUMENTS we are making to the reader or the listener, in order to convince them of our position.

It is always expressed as at least ONE DECLARATIVE STATEMENT expressed in a direct, unambiguous manner. In a real student paper, the thesis should be the penultimate sentence in the introduction, the next-to last sentence or sentences.

**Commented [O6]:** The Purpose of the Essay is, traditionally, the last sentence in an APA paper. It is related to the thesis, in that the thesis is the “what” of the paper, that is, what the student is writing about; the PURPOSE is the “why”; it is why the student is making this particular argument.

After the thesis and purpose statements have been enunciated, this is THE END of the INTRODUCTION, and we move into the next section of the BODY.

**Commented [O7]:** This is a LEVEL TWO HEADING, it is a major idea; the formatting is: 1) flush left to the margin; 2) Upper and Lower Case; 3) bolded.

By way of example, Perrin (2015) has given the example of “test anxiety” (p. 2). Now it is clear that test anxiety can be an excellent subject for research, but standing alone, as it does, the researcher can lay no claim to test-anxiety being a fully-developed topic. Accordingly, the student should ask him or herself: “Who is it that is suffering from anxiety as they prepare to take an exam?” Perrin’s example is that the anxious ones are “middle school students” (p. 2). In focusing on this particular population of students, the researcher has transformed the subject (e.g., he has narrowed the subject) to a viable and credible topic, to wit: test anxiety in middle school students. By adding the variable of middle school students, the subject of test anxiety is now focused in a particular direction; the subject looks, as it were, through the lens of middle school students contending with the stress of an important examination.

If, however, the researcher wished he or she could have selected a different variable by which to narrow, which opens up a different possibility. That means a different population. A researcher, for example, might wish to study test anxiety in veteran police officers taking a promotional test; or, perhaps, the reality of test anxiety in doctoral candidates presenting doctoral dissertation’s defense. In all these examples, a specific subject, test anxiety, has been successfully narrowed into a possible topic for research. Of course, there are many more examples we could choose.

**Other examples of subject-topic differentiation.** If the subject were law-enforcement, it would need additional variables, in order to be narrowed into a research topic. For example, “law-enforcement in authoritarian societies.” Here, the authoritarian society becomes the second variable, it becomes the lens through which the researcher has focused the broad topic of law-enforcement, the particular direction in which the research will now move. If my topic is “terrorism,” that is a broad subject that requires narrowing. I might seek to understand the

**Commented [O8]:** This heading is a Level Three heading; it is a minor idea, and it is intended to develop the major idea presented in the Level Two heading. Major ideas in a major heading are “enfolded,” that is, implicit or latent within the heading and, thus, require “unfolding.” They must be articulated. This is in keeping with the nature of deductive research, which is a movement from the general (the thesis statement; the conclusion) to the specific (the facts that led to the discovery of the conclusion, the solution to the research question. In order to “unfold” the meanings of the Level Two heading, we use minor headings, such as Level Three, Four, and Five.

Students however, should always use at least two of a level three, four, or five headings, back to back. Additionally, the headings are not independent of each other; they form coherent sections or wholes within a greater whole.

Formatting for a Level Three heading is: 1) indented; 2) bolded; 3) mostly lower case; 4) end with a period; 5) text begins on the same line.

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process of radicalization as the genesis of terrorism. The broad category of terrorism has been delimited by the focus on a process (radicalization) as the way that terrorism occurs. It could be more basic than that, too: I might seek to understand terrorism (subject) as a domestic form of criminality in the United States (topic). My research might focus on the statistical aspect of domestic, American terrorism, that is, how common or rare it is, in comparison to another country's expression of terrorism. In all these examples, however, a subject, with real possibilities, has been narrowed and transformed into a viable research topic.

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References

Perrin, R. (2015). *Pocket guide to APA style* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.