

Spacing after Punctuation in APA

APA Helps

In this session of APA helps, we want to look at punctuation spacing in APA.

There are rules for one space, for no spaces, and for two spaces. When you use one space after any comma, colon, or semicolon. Also, after any periods that separate parts of a reference citations, so this would be in your references list only at the end of your paper, for example between the date and the title. Also, between initials, so in your references list where you have an author like “Jones, J. R.,” you would put one space in between the “J” and the “R.”

Some exceptions to the one space rule are when you use no space, and that is for commonly accepted abbreviations such as a.m., p.m., i.e., or U.S. No space is used in those abbreviations. When you use two spaces would be at the end of sentences, so any sentence ending punctuation whether is a period, or an exclamation mark or a question mark, two spaces are used. And if you have access to the blue APA Publication Manual, Sixth edition, you will find this information on pp. 87-88.

So let's go into our Word document and let's look at a paper that has been started. You can see there the first sentence has already been typed in. Notice the use of “e.g.” with no spacing in that abbreviation, that's one of those commonly accepted abbreviations. Also, you notice the use of a comma and a semicolon and there is only one space after that. I'm at the end of my first sentence here and I'm ready to type in my second sentence, so I would want to space two times, and just to save time, I'm going to copy in my second sentence rather than type it out. So you notice that a little green squiggly line has been placed where I have my two spaces. It looks like there's actually three spaces there – let me make sure I have the spacing correct. It's alerting me that there probably is something that I want to look at there. So that is a Word functionality because it wants to only use one space after a sentence-ending punctuation. That actually is a setting that can be changed in your default, and if you wanted to call Off Campus Library Services we would be happy to help you set that up in your own Word program, but it may not be something you want to change permanently in your Word program.

Now if we go down, and I've already created some of the references for this particular document, you can see that here between the R. and J. there is one space, and you can see that with the little grey bar. There is only one space between the period after the date and the beginning of the title or also here and the end of the author names in this case and the beginning of the date, so anytime that I have punctuation in my references entry there should only be one space showing and since I have my default set on one space I don't see the little squiggly lines like I had before. You can see a colon here, so, anytime there should only be one space between those entries.

So just to review, our information: one space after commas, colons, semicolons; one space after any sections or separate parts of a references entries, for example, the date and the title; periods used with initials in personal names, so a first name second name, I don't know maybe his name was John Robert – so I used the initials J period space R period. The exceptions to that rule are

no space in commonly accepted abbreviations, and two spaces are used after any kind of a sentence within the body of your paper.

So I hope that helps you to understand how to do spacing, and with any APA question you have you can consult with Off Campus Library Services using our toll free number at 1-800-521-1848, or you can email us at ocls@indwes.edu. We look forward to hearing from you!