

## **Funnel Analogy for APA Style Manuscript Format**

APA style research manuscripts have a standard format for the flow of ideas expressed through the course of the paper. An analogy for this flow of ideas is an image of two funnels, one with the wide opening pointing upward that is balanced on top of a second funnel with the wide opening pointing downward.

This funnel analogy represents the level of analysis of ideas as the paper progresses. APA style manuscripts begin broadly (as the top funnel) in the Introduction section, introducing the topic in general. Then, major theories that will be brought to bear on the topic are described in general terms for the reader so that underlying assumptions are explained and concepts are defined. Then, the information presented narrows to specific empirical research studies in the area that support the theory that are relevant to the paper. Next, the information narrows even more to describe the present research project with its justification based on the limitations of the research reviewed, its hypotheses, and its operational definitions. This section is the most narrow part of the top funnel that represents the end of the Introduction section.

The narrow part of the second funnel begins with the particular, study-specific Method section and the Results section. The Discussion section begins where the narrow tip meets the wider base of the second funnel. In the Discussion section, first the results of the particular study are summarized in words (not numbers as in the Results section). Then, the results are linked back to specific empirical articles that did (or did not) find similar results. At this point, the funnel is getting broader as the discussion moves from the specific study back to the broader research context. At the conclusion of this section, the study results are determined to support (or not support) the broader theory tested, and additional, future studies are suggested that are consistent with this theoretical perspective. Future research suggestions should go beyond merely stating the need for a larger sample or a different group of participants and should consider what the theory would predict given the current results. Then, at the broadest base of the second funnel, the implications of the research are discussed. This section is where the writer is stepping outside of the direct conclusions of the project into applications and implications of the information learned from the research.

This funnel analogy that represents the breadth and sequence of ideas expressed in an APA style manuscript is helpful for objectively evaluating the order and type of information needed as students draft their own research papers. Examining information related to project variables with this funnel analogy in mind may help students strategically place the information summarized in their drafts and final manuscripts. When this analogy is considered, students may realize that there are logical gaps between elements that need to be filled with more narrow (or more broad) levels of analysis that link the ideas together.