

# Using “et al.” in APA 7: A Quick Rundown

The abbreviated term “et al.” simply means “and others.”

Typically, “et al.” will be used when referring to source material by **three or more authors within the body text of a paper.**

A source with one author will, of course, always just be referenced by their own name (e.g., Smith (2018) states...). A source with two authors will always be referenced in full (e.g., Johnson and Smith (2019) state...). Three authors, then, will use et al. after referencing the primary author (e.g., Jackson et al. (2017) state...).

According to the APA Style Manual 7<sup>th</sup> Edition (Sections 8.10-8.36), whenever you’re referring to a work with three or more authors, **you should always use et al., even in the first citation.** This is a departure from previous editions of APA.

The only time you would ever deviate from this format is if using the et al. would cause potential confusion between different sources, such as having two articles from the same year with the same lead author. The Purdue OWL provides the following example with what would otherwise be Jones et al. (2020):

If you’re citing multiple works with similar groups of authors, and the shortened “et al” citation form of each source would be the same, you’ll need to avoid ambiguity by writing out more names. If you cited works with these authors:

Jones, Smith, Liu, Huang, and Kim (2020)

Jones, Smith, Ruiz, Wang, and Stanton (2020)

They would be cited in-text as follows to avoid ambiguity:

(Jones, Smith, Liu, et al., 2020)

(Jones, Smith, Ruiz, et al., 2020)

*Note: the above information refers to rules with in-text citations and essay body text only. In your actual References page entries, you would list out each individual author (up to 20 per citation).*

## References

American Psychological Association. (2019, September). *Author-date citation system*. APA Style. <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/citations/basic-principles/author-date>

American Psychological Association. (2011, November 3). *The proper use of et al. in APA style*. APA Style Blog. <https://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2011/11/the-proper-use-of-et-al-in-apa-style.html>

Purdue OWL. (n.d.) *In-text citations: Author/authors*. Purdue Online Writing Lab. [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/in\\_text\\_citations\\_author\\_authors.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/in_text_citations_author_authors.html)

