

# Workshop Assessments as Tools for Learning: Integrating Prior Knowledge and Reflection Surveys into an APA Citation Workshop

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Building meaningful assessments for writing center activities beyond tutoring remains under-researched in writing center studies. While writing center scholars have written about their experiences with workshops for several decades (Adkins; Bedore and O’Sullivan; Garahan and Crews; Wolcott; Welch; Towle), only recently have they begun publishing empirical studies of workshop effectiveness (Hopkins; Tillotson et. al; Wood et al.). This recent scholarship details the use of pre-workshop and/or post-workshop surveys to assess the effectiveness of certain types of workshops, like resume building (Tillotson et al.) and patchwriting (Wood et al.), or a center’s entire workshop program (Hopkins). These foundational studies demonstrate the power of survey-based workshop assessments as tools for determining workshop effectiveness and improving workshop practices.



When Katie inherited a strong workshop program as the new director of University of North Carolina-Charlotte’s Writing Resources Center (WRC) in 2022, she immediately sought to build equally strong assessments. A problem she found in her previous workshop assessment attempts was that surveys often distracted from the learning environment: facilitators felt awkward introducing surveys, and participants seemed to view them as an addition to, instead of an integral component of, the workshop. With this experience in mind, Katie and April—director of and graduate tutor in the WRC—aimed to create pre/post-workshop surveys with the explicit goal of enhancing student learning.

In this article, using results from an APA citation workshop assessment, we present a method of using survey instruments that prompts participants to access their prior knowledge of a topic (pre-workshop survey) and to reflect on their learning (post-workshop survey). We use pre/post-surveys (what we call prior knowledge and reflection surveys) for three distinct purposes: one, to scaffold participant learning; two, to assess the effectiveness of our workshop; and three, to analyze our results as a community of practice and improve our workshop instruction. Our goal here is to present our process of developing, implementing, and analyzing a learning-based workshop assessment as a schema that other writing center professionals can adapt to their own specific workshop contexts.

## **SURVEY DESIGN AND ANALYSIS METHODS**

Katie developed prior knowledge and reflection surveys in spring 2023 for the entire WRC workshop program, which includes five workshops focused on MLA, APA, Chicago, peer review, and revision strategies. She aimed to create short (5 minutes or fewer) surveys that encouraged participants to assess their attitudes toward and knowledge of the workshop topic before the workshop instruction and then prompted participants to solidify their learning through a

reflective survey following instruction. Both surveys included four Likert scale statements (Tables 2 and 3) and two open-ended questions.

With approval from UNC Charlotte's Institutional Review Board, we implemented prior knowledge and reflection surveys during the 2023-2024 academic year. In this article, we focus on survey results from nine in-person APA citation workshops. These workshops were facilitated in seven different courses from five departments including Writing, Rhetoric & Digital Studies; Sociology; Health Management and Policy; Special Education and Child Development; and Computer Science. All of these courses were undergraduate courses: four at the 1000-level, two at the 2000-level, one at the 3000-level, and two at the 4000-level.

Presenters, typically veteran undergraduate tutors or graduate teaching assistants, facilitated the workshops from a common slide deck with the following sections:

1. Prior knowledge survey
2. Description of plagiarism and rationale for source attribution
3. Explanation and examples of quoting, summarizing, and paraphrasing
4. Broad information about APA
5. Details about APA title page, reference pages, and in-text citations
6. Information about citation generators
7. Description of campus resources (e.g. WRC and Library) and online resources (e.g. APA Style Blog, Purdue OWL)
8. Reflection survey

Our data set consists of the quantitative Likert scale questions (Tables 2 and 3) and the written responses to two open-ended questions: one from the prior knowledge survey (*What do you already know about APA formatting and citation style?*) and one from the reflection survey (*What new information have you learned about APA citation style that you did not know previously?*). To analyze our qualitative responses, we used Cheryl Geisler and Jason Swart's method outlined in *Coding Streams of Language*, which includes steps to develop coding schemes that allow researchers to "determine recurrent phenomena within and across streams of language" (7). Following these steps, Katie and April each read through the data, making notes about potential themes. We developed an initial coding scheme, coded separately, discussed, and revised. We then solidified our scheme and achieved an interrater reliability score of 0.957 (Cohen's Kappa) indicating strong interrater agreement (Geisler and Swarts 171). Table 1 below offers a brief description of our coding scheme.

Table 1: Qualitative Coding Scheme

CODE	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
<b>METACOGNITIVE</b>	respondent provides commentary on their own knowledge of or attitudes toward APA	I know in-text citations like the back of my hand
<b>RULES</b>	respondent describes specific formatting and content of citations	author, title, and date; Size 12 font, times new Roman, double spacing, 1-inch margins all the way around [sic]
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	respondent describes general information about APA or mentions their understanding of APA's purpose, popularity, or context	It stands for American Psychological Association
<b>OTHER CITATION STYLES</b>	respondent references a citation style that is not APA	MLA but not
<b>PLAGIARISM</b>	respondent refers to plagiarism, failing/passing, or crediting sources	important for no plagiarism
<b>RESOURCES</b>	respondent refers to outside resources	If I don't know I can check with perdue [sic]
<b>OTHER</b>	response does not fit into one of the above categories or is too general to code	I had a presentation from the writing center earlier in the semester

## PRIOR KNOWLEDGE SURVEY

### Quantitative Results

From the nine APA workshops, we received 181 responses for the quantitative portion of the prior knowledge survey. Our quantitative results demonstrated an exigence for our APA workshop: while our target audience had familiarity with citation styles in general and many participants had learned about APA style, most were not comfortable using it (Table 2). Seventy-two percent of participants reported having learned APA citations previously, but 58% felt some degree of comfort with the citation style. Moreover, only 17% strongly agreed to feeling comfortable using APA in their own writing.

Table 2: Prior Knowledge Survey Quantitative Responses (181 Responses)

Statement	Strongly/ somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly/ Somewhat disagree
I understand when to credit sources in my writing.	86%	8%	7%
I feel comfortable integrating sources and using in-text citations in my writing.	70%	12%	18%
I have learned how to use apa formatting and citation style in my writing.	72%	10%	18%
I feel comfortable using apa formatting and citation style in my writing.	58%	12%	30%

### Qualitative Results

We received 120 responses for the qualitative portion of the prior knowledge survey, and we focus on responses to the question *What do you already know about APA formatting and citation style?* We found our qualitative results valuable to help us understand our target audience’s knowledge of and attitude toward APA (fig. 1).

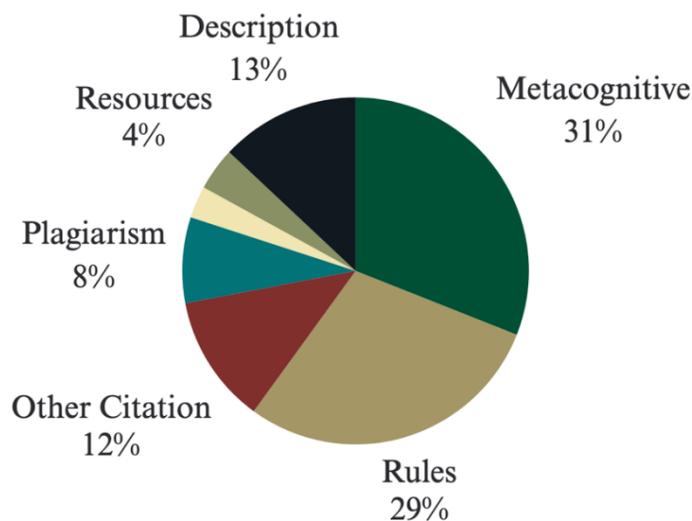


Fig. 1: Prior Knowledge Survey Qualitative Results (120 Responses)

Nearly all responses coded “metacognitive”—our most common code—demonstrated respondents' lack of confidence in their own knowledge or negative attitudes toward APA. Thirty respondents reported knowing nothing or not much about APA, with phrases like “not a thing” and “I knew it existed. That is all.” One respondent in particular expressed trepidation about using APA: “it scares me.” Two respondents called APA “tedious.” Only five respondents expressed confidence in their knowledge of APA. Moreover, 8% of respondents connected their knowledge of APA to a concern about plagiarism. Respondents’ concern, and sometimes fear, of APA aligns with our quantitative finding that only 17% of respondents felt very comfortable using APA prior to the workshop.

Twenty-nine percent of respondents included information they knew, or thought they knew, about APA citation rules. Importantly, most of these responses were general, not unique to APA, or even incorrect. Fifteen respondents generally mentioned the use of in-text citations, another fifteen mentioned bibliographic citations on reference pages, and five highlighted specific information about formatting, like font size, type, spacing, and margins. Responses coded “rules” indicate that participants could recall information about citation styles *in general* but were less apt to highlight what makes APA style unique. Additionally, 13% of responses—those we coded “description”—also provided general information related to the purpose of APA, its popularity, or its context.

Notably, our results show that when prompted to access prior knowledge of APA, participants drew on their knowledge of other citation styles and citation resources. Twelve percent of respondents mentioned other citation styles, with every response except one mentioning MLA. Lastly, 4% mention resources, specifically Purdue OWL and citation generators. Every response about citation generators held a wholly positive view of them.

### **Prior Knowledge Discussion: Assessment and Instruction Revision**

We used our prior knowledge survey results to facilitate a revision of our survey instrument and workshop instruction. Since we learned that participants often accessed knowledge of non-APA citation styles, we added the following questions to further encourage participants to connect their learning to prior knowledge: Which citation styles have you used before? Choose a citation style and identify at least two formatting rules associated with this style. With these questions, the participants who come into the workshop knowing very little about APA will still have an opportunity to access the prior citation knowledge they do have.

Additionally, we revised the structure of the prior knowledge section of our workshop to enhance interactivity. To do so, we first shared our results with the whole tutoring staff at a professional development meeting. We asked our tutors to use the results to brainstorm ideas for how we could improve our workshop. Tutors suggested we change the format of our survey to allow facilitators to anonymously share the results with the workshop participants to generate a prior knowledge discussion. To implement this suggestion, Katie and April switched survey formats from Qualtrics to Google forms because the latter provides a quick and viewer-friendly survey results summary (fig. 2). In our revised workshop, the workshop facilitators show the class their survey response summary. Then, the facilitator guides the class in a think/pair/share about their individual knowledge as well as what they found interesting about the class’s survey response summary. With this interactive activity, facilitators foster a collegial environment, gain a bird's eye view of the class’s prior knowledge, and prepare the class to link their learning to what they

already know about citing sources. Ultimately, our prior knowledge survey proved to be a useful tool for us to learn about our target audience and to improve our practices.

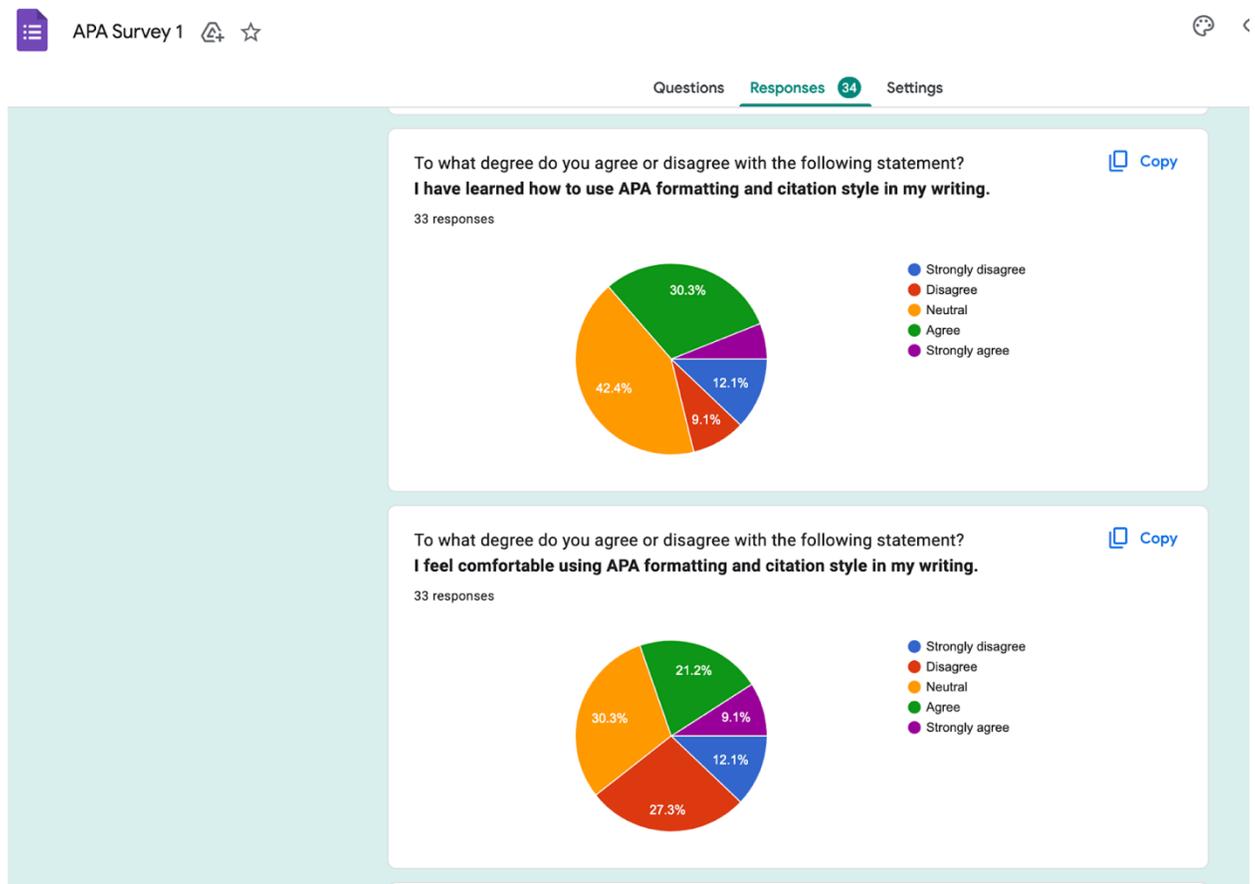


Fig. 2: Example of a Class's Summary Results on Google Forms

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: REFLECTION SURVEY

### Quantitative Results

We received 135 responses for the quantitative questions on our reflection survey. Our quantitative survey results demonstrated the effectiveness of our APA citation workshop (Table 3). Participants reported satisfaction with the workshop and, when compared to our prior knowledge survey results, participants reported increased confidence in their ability to use APA.

Table 3: Reflection Survey Quantitative Responses

Statement	Strongly/ somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly/ Somewhat disagree
Overall, I am satisfied with this workshop.	95%	2%	3%
I found this workshop to be interactive and engaging.	88%	7%	5%
I feel prepared to use apa formatting and citations style in future writing.	92%	7%	2%
I know what citation resources are available to me on campus.	98%	1%	2%

Ninety-two percent of participants felt at least somewhat prepared to use APA formatting, with just over half reporting strong confidence in their preparedness. By comparison, only 58% of participants felt at least somewhat comfortable using APA prior to the workshop and only 17% felt very comfortable. A comparison of our prior knowledge and reflection surveys shown in Figure 3 demonstrates our participants' increased confidence and level of comfort with using APA in their writing.

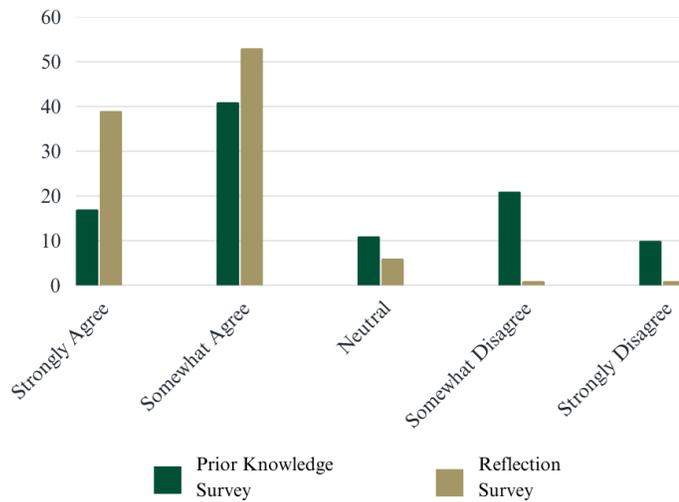


Fig. 3: Comparison of Prior Knowledge and Reflection Survey Results (Likert Statement: I feel comfortable using or prepared to use APA formatting and citation style in my writing.)

### Qualitative Results

We found our reflection survey qualitative results valuable in providing specifics about student learning, particularly when compared to the qualitative results of the prior knowledge survey (fig. 4). We received 89 responses for the qualitative portion of the reflection survey, and we focus here on responses to the question: *What new information have you learned about APA citation style that you did not know previously?*

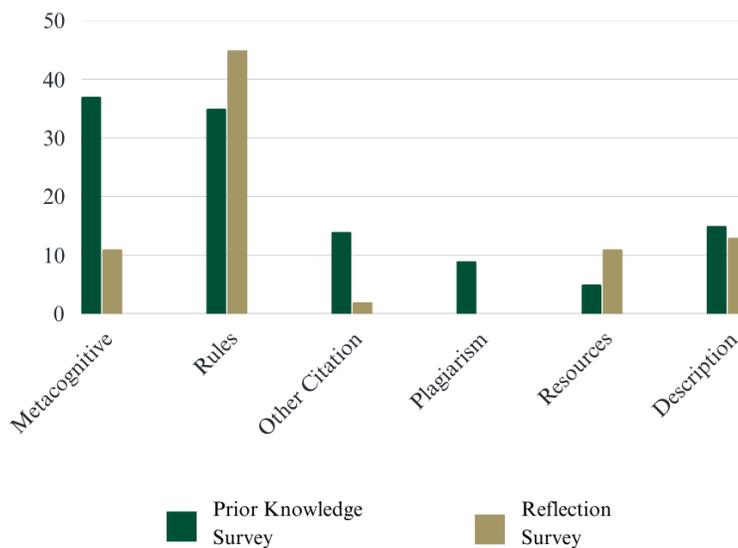


Fig. 4: Comparison of Prior Knowledge and Reflection Survey Qualitative Results

We coded significantly fewer responses as “metacognitive”—commentary about respondents’ knowledge of or attitude toward APA— in the reflection survey (only 13%) as compared to our prior knowledge survey (31%). Additionally, we saw a shift in tone: Responses coded metacognitive were negative in the prior knowledge survey but were positive/neutral in the reflection survey. Only three respondents reported not learning much from the workshop because they already felt comfortable in their knowledge of APA. The remaining eight respondents reported learning a great deal from the workshop because of their lack of prior knowledge about APA. For example, one wrote: “Everything, I didn’t have a basis before.” Unlike the prior knowledge survey responses, no respondents mentioned negative attitudes of fear or annoyance.

We coded half of the reflection survey responses as “rules”: descriptions of specific formatting and content of citations. Unlike the generic responses on the prior knowledge survey, rules-based responses for the reflection survey were more specific and unique to APA citation style. Twenty respondents mentioned citations or reference pages specifically. For example, one wrote: “Only proper nouns and first words in titles are capitalized in APA format.” Eleven respondents mention citing specific sources, like journal articles and tweets. Six comments specifically mention integration of quotes; for instance, “I learned on what to write before a direct quote and what to write after a direct quote.” The abundance and nuance of the rules-based comments indicates that participants are paying attention to the finer details of the workshop. Though the instruction about specific rules might seem tedious, our results suggest that our instruction is effective.

We also saw a rise in the percentage of responses that mentioned resources: 4% in the prior knowledge survey to 13% in the reflection survey. Five respondents referenced online resources. Four mentioned the pitfalls of citation generators, in comparison to the wholly positive associations from the prior knowledge survey. The final two comments refer to UNC Charlotte’s WRC. Notably, from our quantitative results, 98% of participants agreed that they know what citation resources are available to them on campus. These results suggest that students leave the workshop with a more holistic understanding of how to find and use resources than they began with.

Only two responses mentioned other citation styles, an 11% decrease from the prior knowledge survey. The decrease in responses suggests that familiarity with other citation styles is more relevant to prior knowledge than student learning. Notably, we did not code any responses as “plagiarism.” Despite beginning our presentation with information about plagiarism and the importance of crediting sources, this is not the information respondents recall when asked to reflect on their learning. Lastly, around the same percentage of responses were coded “description” in both the pre- and reflection surveys. These responses in both surveys tended to be general and did not teach us anything of note.

### **Reflection Discussion: Instruction Revision**

Though we found our results to indicate the effectiveness of our workshop, we still slightly modified our instruction after discussing the results as a community. Our quantitative results revealed that only 59% of respondents strongly agreed that our presentation was interactive and engaging. To address this concern, tutors suggested that presenters demonstrate the rules of citing properly by using easily accessible online resources. After all, rarely do scholars memorize citation rules; they typically use some kind of resource as a guide. In our revised presentation, the presenter opens the WRC citation style guide page, which includes resources made in house as well as links to the APA style blog, Purdue OWL, and the UNC Charlotte Library. After the presenter

introduces this resource webpage to the audience, they demonstrate how to cite a scholarly source using examples from the webpage. With this change, the audience not only sees what a correct citation looks like, but they also have an opportunity to watch the process of constructing a citation using online resources.

## CONCLUSION

We found the prior knowledge and reflection surveys to be an effective workshop assessment method. The prior knowledge survey provided a baseline of participant knowledge by which we could assess student learning using the reflection survey. The combination of these two surveys provided evidence that our APA workshop effectively raises participants' comfort-level with using APA in their writing as well as teaches them concrete details about APA formatting. We can use these results in administrative reports as well as promotional materials.

Perhaps more importantly, we created and refined assessment tools that integrate into the learning environment. We used our survey results to create a feedback loop among our participants and presenters. In professional development meetings, tutors were able not only to see our results, but to use these results to improve the scaffolding potential and interactivity of our prior knowledge and reflection surveys. We learned, then, that effective assessments must be continually refined within a writing center community of practice. We ultimately argue for the potential of this learning-based assessment process and encourage WCPs to adapt it, use it, and share their results with the wider writing center community. WCPs use survey assessments in many different areas of our work; yet directors are not always trained in survey best practices. As a community of practice, we must continue to share what works—and what doesn't—in survey research so we can improve our practices and assessments.

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