Have you noticed that references in most recently published journal articles end with a string of numbers and letters? That odd-looking item is the article’s digital object identifier (DOI), and it may just be the most important part of the reference. The DOI is like a digital fingerprint: Each article receives a unique one at birth, and it can be used to identify the article throughout its lifespan, no matter where it goes.

Developed by a group of international publishers, the DOI System provides a way to guarantee that digital copies of articles can remain accessible even if a journal changes its domain name or ceases publishing. DOIs are assigned and maintained by registration agencies such as CrossRef, which provides citation-linking services for scientific publishers.

In the sixth edition of the APA Publication Manual, DOIs are formatted according to the initial recommendations from CrossRef:

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The DOI prefix (10.1037, in the case of APA journals) is a unique number of four or more digits assigned to organizations; the suffix (rmh0000008) is assigned by the publisher and identifies the journal and individual article.

Recently, however, CrossRef changed the format of the DOI to a more user-friendly one in the form of a URL:

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As you can see, the DOI itself is the same (10.1037/rmh0000008), but it is preceded by http://dx.doi.org/ to insure that it resolves into a working link. Because this change is recent and many publishers are still implementing the new CrossRef guidelines, either the old or the new DOI format is acceptable. But be sure not to mush them together! Here are some examples.

**Correct:**
- doi:10.1037/rmh0000008
- http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/rmh0000008

**Incorrect:**
- doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/rmh0000008
- Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/rmh0000008