

Citing Sources FAQs

1. What is a citation?

A citation provides bibliographic information (author, title, page number, etc.) about the source of an idea. Citations are ways for authors to give credit to the originators of ideas that they use in their writings. Additionally, citations provide a way for readers to learn the identity of the source of the ideas contained in the documents they are reading, so that they can replicate the research process if desired.

2. What are the basic elements of a citation?

There are several standardized ways to cite sources (see FAQ #6 below on style guides), but the most common citation styles generally include two main components (both of which are usually required when citing a source):

- In-text citations. When authors use the ideas of another in their writings, they generally are asked to acknowledge that usage in some way right there in the text itself – with a brief reference to the author, a footnote, or in some other way as defined by the particular style guide they are following.
- Complete bibliographic records. In the footnote and/or somewhere near the end of the document (e.g., in a bibliography), complete bibliographic information about all sources used in the report is usually required. Complete bibliographic records include the author, title, publication, year, and other elements. Different categories of information must be provided for different types of sources: journal articles, books, Web pages, etc.

Different disciplines (and even different instructors) require different citation elements and styles, so do not assume that what is acceptable for one class will be acceptable for another. If you are unsure, ask your instructor.

3. What must be cited?

Students sometimes struggle to understand what types of information they must cite and what types of information needs no attribution. In general terms, when one person uses the words and/or ideas of another in their writings, they must give credit to the originator of the idea. A citation must be used in this situation whether the originator of the idea is being quoted directly or not. In other words, even when you are only paraphrasing someone else's idea it is necessary to provide a citation for it.

4. What does not need to be cited?

It is not necessary to cite factual information that can be considered common knowledge (facts known by many people and found in many places), even if you personally did not know the fact until you read it in someone else's writings. For example, if you write a paper on Martin Luther

and mention that he posted his *95 Theses* in 1517, you need not provide a citation for that fact, even if you learned it for the first time from a source that you read during your research for the paper. However, if a source that you read provides an interpretation related to a common-knowledge fact and you include that interpretation in your paper, you must provide a citation to give attribution for the idea.

5. What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is presenting someone else's words or ideas as your own. Plagiarism can take many different forms, from obvious cases like taking someone else's paper and placing your name on it, to less obvious cases like reading an idea in another's writings, summarizing or changing a few of its words, and then including it in your own paper without providing a citation. Many instances of plagiarism are unintentional and happen as a result of lazy note-taking practices, so be careful. In order to avoid committing plagiarism, a good rule of thumb is, when in doubt, provide a citation.

6. What are style guides and citation styles?

Style guides provide a standardized format for all components of a citation, both in-text and complete bibliographic, for all types of sources – articles, books, Web sites, etc. In other words, each style guide provides a consistent citation style to use when writing a research paper. This consistency facilitates the replication of the research process. The three most common style guides are:

- APA (American Psychological Association)
- MLA (Modern Language Association of America)
- The Chicago Manual of Style (and Kate Turabian's simplified version of it)

There are significant format differences between each of the citation styles described in these guides, and these differences are important. When following a particular style guide it is important to pay attention to all of the details, including capitalization and other types of punctuation, underlining, abbreviation, and the order of citation elements (author, date, title, etc.). Be sure to follow consistently just one citation style throughout your paper.

7. What citation style should I use?

Your instructor is the final arbiter on which citation style you should use for your paper. If the course syllabus or assignment instructions are unclear about which style guide to follow, make sure to ask your instructor. Different academic disciplines favor different citation styles, and some may require a more obscure citation style than one of the three popular styles mentioned above in FAQ #6. Traditionally, many Social Sciences disciplines have followed APA, while the Humanities have often favored the use of MLA, and the Chicago Manual of Style has been used by researchers in the field of History.

8. How do I compose a citation? What steps should I follow?

Composing proper citations for your paper will often include the following steps:

1. Be organized during the research process. When you take notes, be sure to include the page number from the source any time that you write down the idea of another and any time that you copy down a direct quotation. Make sure to clearly differentiate in your notes between your own words and the words of the sources you are reading. Also, write down complete bibliographic information for all sources that you use at the time that you are using them so that you do not have to go back later and search for this information.
2. When you write the rough draft of your paper, include the author's last name and page number directly in the text of the paper whenever a citation is appropriate. You can then revise the format of this information to conform to a style guide's standards when you later do your final paper revisions.
3. Learn the basics of the citation style that your instructor wants you to use for your paper. Does that particular style require the use of footnotes or some sort of abbreviated in-text citation? Will a complete bibliography be necessary? (See FAQ #9 for resources to help you with this step)

When citing a source, consult examples from the particular style guide that you are following. Be sure to choose examples that correspond with the type of source that you are citing – book, journal article, newspaper article, Web site, etc. – and make sure to pay attention to the details of punctuation. Follow these examples closely when you compose your own citations. Useful examples to follow can be found in the resources described below in FAQ #9.

9. Where do I find information and examples on specific citation styles, as they relate to specific types of sources (books, articles, Web sites, etc.)?

There are many different types of sources used in writing research papers - books, journal articles, Web sites, reference works, etc. - and each of these different sources has different bibliographic elements that need description in a citation. When these different types of sources are combined with the various citation styles (MLA, APA, Chicago), each with their different descriptive formats, the process of composing a proper citation can be challenging. Thankfully, there are many resources available to help simplify this process. The CBU Library has online guides with examples in both APA and MLA formats. Other resources that will help you compose proper citations include:

- Citation Style Manuals. There is a manual available in the library for each of the three main styles (and Turabian as well) discussed above in FAQ #6:
 - MLA (MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers): Ref LB2369.G53 2003
 - APA (Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association): Ref BF76.7 .P83 2001
 - The Chicago Manual of Style: Ref Z253 .U69 2003

- Turabian (A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations): Ref LB2369 .T8 2007
- Online Resources. There are a number of online resources available to help you to compose citations for your research papers. These resources include:
 - The Owl at Purdue. This online writing lab provides a detailed section on 'Research and Citation' that includes numerous examples and explanations of the main citation style. (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>)
 - Research and Documentation Online. This site provides detailed examples of proper citations for all of the major citation styles for several different types of sources. (<http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/>)
 - Citation Machine. This site allows the user to input bibliographic information, which is then formatted according to a chosen citation style. (<http://citationmachine.net/>)
 - B. Davis Schwartz Memorial Library. This site has links for each of the major citation styles. When these links are followed, color-coded examples of proper citations for different types of sources are provided. (<http://www.liu.edu/CWIS/CWP/library/workshop/citation.htm>)