

Introduction to Citations

Citations are used to show your reader(s) where the information in your paper was originally published.

Citations are important because they show your reader(s):

- when the information was published
- who the author of the information is
- which journal or group published the information
- which version the information was published in (usually just for literature)

All of this information about the information you cite in your papers is important because it not only keeps you from plagiarizing¹ other people's ideas, but it also helps you prove to your reader(s) that you know your topic.

Many of us might see information on television, the radio, the internet, or social media that is not cited.

Usually, we then ask ourselves, "how does this person know this?" or "where did he or she get his/her information?" By using citations, our readers are more likely to trust us and what we write.

Citation styles

Different scholarly and professional organizations have established their own ways of citing information. The most common citation styles that you will encounter in college were developed by the **APA** (The American Psychological Association) and the **MLA** (Modern Language Association). Other citation styles include **Chicago** (published by the University of Chicago), **CSE** (Council of Science Editors), and **IEEE** (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers).

Why do I have to use a citation style?

It is important to use the citation style that is used in the field you are writing for. For example, many social scientists use the APA citation style for their papers. APA in-text citations include years, but years are not included in other citation styles' in-text citations. For social scientists, the year that research was conducted is important since research could be conducted various times over multiple years; therefore, if the reader does not know which year the research came from, she or he might not fully understand the paper.

Each citation style has details that are important for that field, so be sure to use the citation style that your instructor suggests.

Types of citations

In academic writing, it is important to cite your information two ways: with in-text citations and a bibliography (i.e., works cited page or references page).

In-text citations

In-text citations are citations that are inserted in the main text of your paper. The purpose of these citations is to let your reader know from where a specific piece of information came. If you do not include in-text citations, your readers will be more likely to distrust your credibility as an author and you are in danger of plagiarizing.

To avoid plagiarism, you must cite all information that is from another source. That means that even if you put someone else's ideas in your own words, it still must be cited. You must cite all information that you quote directly from another source, paraphrase, or summarize using in-text citations.

There are two ways to include in-text citations in your paper: using a signal phrase or using parentheses.

¹ Plagiarize: "To use the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own words or ideas" (Merriam-Webster).

Signal phrase

An effective way to include in-text citations is by introducing the author's name in a signal phrase and adding the page number at the end of the quotation or paraphrase. A signal phrase is simply a phrase that signals to your reader that a citation is coming soon in your paper. In the examples below, the signal phrase is in **bold** text. Use signal phrases to cite information the first time it appears in your paper. After that, you can use the parenthetical citations (see below).

APA signal phrase example

According to Anna Smith (2010), Professor of History in the School of Humanities, "the greatest generation..." (p. 263).

MLA signal phrase example

According to Anna Smith, Professor of History in the School of Humanities, "the greatest generation..." (263).

Parenthetical citations

Parenthetical citations use parentheses to show from where the information you are using came. Inside the parentheses, you will include the author's last name, and in some cases the year and page number.

APA parenthetical example

Often, "[t]he greatest generation..." (Smith, 2010, p. 263).

MLA parenthetical example

Often, "[t]he greatest generation..." (Smith 263).

Bibliography

Bibliographies are called different things depending on which citation style you are using. In MLA, for example, it is called the Works Cited page, and in APA, it is called the References page. The bibliography shows your reader all relevant information regarding your sources. In your bibliography, you typically need to include the following information for each source.

- The author's name
- The title of the source
- Publication information
- Date of publication

When you list electronic sources in your bibliography, you often need to include the following.

- Website publication information
- The date you accessed the information

Different citation styles require that you include different information, so be sure to consult reliable citation style resources to ensure that you are including the correct information. For examples of bibliographies from different citation styles, visit the Mary Stangler Center for Academic Success, or see the Resources section on the next page.

Resources

Citation resources are available as you need them. Below is a list of available sources for APA and MLA.

APA

- *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th Edition*
This book can be found at the library or in the Mary Stangler Center for Academic Success.
- Purdue OWL APA Formatting and Style Guide
This online style guide can be found at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>

MLA

- *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th Edition*
This book can be found at the library or in the Mary Stangler Center for Academic Success.
- Purdue OWL MLA Formatting and Style Guide
This online style guide can be found at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>