



How to Cite Sources in Academic Papers

Citing Sources

How you will cite resources that you use to write a paper depends on what type of work you are writing, how you are using the borrowed material, and the expectations of your instructor.

There are different forms of citation for different disciplines. For example, when you cite sources in a psychology paper you would probably use a form of citation called **APA** (which stands for American Psychological Association), and for a paper for an English class you would use **MLA** (for Modern Language Association). These are national associations of professionals who help determine the standard rules for citations in their fields.

You can find guides to using APA and/or MLA citation on the AAC website and at the association's websites, www.apastyle.org and www.mla.org/style.

If your sources are very important to your ideas, you should mention the author and work in a sentence that introduces your citation. If, however, you are only citing the source to make a minor point, you may consider using parenthetical references, footnotes, or endnotes.

The first time you cite a source in your paper, it is a good idea to mention its author(s), title, and genre (book, article, or web page, etc.). If the source is central to your work, you may want to introduce it in a separate sentence or two, summarizing its importance and main ideas:

Journalist Peter Hessler's first book, River Town, is a memoir of his two years as an English teacher for the Peace Corps in the small Chinese town of Fuling. In the book, Hessler describes a city on the cusp of major change, with the damming of the Three Gorges only a couple years away.

Or, you can include this information in the context of a relevant sentence. For example, the following sentence puts information about the author and work before the quotation:

In his Peace Corps memoir River Town, journalist Peter Hessler writes, "Mo Money was a Party Member, but the topic didn't make him defensive," (345).

You may also want to describe the author(s) if they are not famous, or if you have reason to believe your reader does not know them. You should say whether they are economic analysts, artists, physicists, etc.

If you do not know anything about the author, and cannot find any information, it is best to say where you found the source and why you believe it is credible and worth citing. If the source is from the internet, you may want to review the handout "Evaluating Internet Sources" on the AAC website. This will help you assure the credibility, accuracy, and supported claims of the source.

Quoting

Taking the exact words from an original source is called quoting. You should quote material when you believe the way the original author expresses an idea is the most effective means of communicating the point you want to make. If you want to use an author's idea but do not need his or her exact words, you should try paraphrasing instead of quoting.

How often should you quote?

Most of the time, paraphrasing and summarizing your sources is sufficient (but remember that you still have to cite them!). If you think it's important to quote something, an excellent rule of thumb is that for every line you quote, you should have at least two lines analyzing it.

How do you incorporate quotations?

Most of the time, you can just identify a source and quote from it, as in the examples above. Be sure to include the entire citation in APA or MLA format in your "Works Cited" or "References" section, which comes at the end of your paper.

Sometimes, you will need to modify the words or format of the quotation in order to fit in your paper. Whenever you change the original words of your source, you must indicate that you have done so. Otherwise, you would be claiming the original author used words that he or she did not use. But be careful not to change too many words! You could accidentally change the meaning of the quotation, and falsely claim the author said something they did not.

How do you include long quotes in a paper?

The exact formatting requirements for long quotations differ depending on the citation style. In general, however, if you are quoting more than three lines of material, you should do the following:

- double indent the quotation -- that means adjusting the left and right margins so that they are half an inch smaller than the main body of your paper.
- "Justify" the text, so that it looks like a block of text
- do NOT use quotation marks for the entire quotation -- the graphic changes you have made already (changing the font, double indenting, etc.) are enough to indicate that the material is quoted
- single-space all of the text in the quote
- Use ellipsis (...) when you have cut out part of a quote
- Include author and page number in parenthesis at the end of the quote

So, a long quote should look like this:

Fuling is not the only place in China where crowds have an edge, and countless writers, both Chinese and foreign, have remarked this tendency. Lu Xun, probably the greatest Chinese literary figure of the twentieth century, wrote with intense feeling and frustration about the pre-Communist tendency of the Chinese to ignore their fellow men in times of need (Hessler, 113).

Reference List

A reference list is an alphabetical list of all of the sources you have used in the process of researching your work. It is also sometimes called a works cited page or a bibliography.

Your reference list, like your citations, will be in a standard format such as APA or MLA.

Reference lists should always include:

- the author(s) names
- the titles of the works
- the names and locations of the publisher
- the date of publication
- the page numbers of your sources (if they are part of multi-source volumes)

The book used above as an example would be cited like this:

MLA

Hessler, Peter. River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze. (2001). New York: Harper Collins.

[name]. [title, underlined]. [year of publication]. [city: name of publisher].

APA

Hessler, Peter. (2001). *River Town: Two Years on the Yangze*. New York: Harper Collins.

[name]. [year of publication]. [title, italicized]. [city: name of publisher].

An **annotated bibliography** is the same as a bibliography (or reference list) except that with an annotated bibliography, the bibliographic information is followed by a brief description of the content, quality, and usefulness of the source. This information is your opinion based on your evaluation of the source and its usefulness to your paper or project.

For more information, check out the online resource the OWL at Purdue writing guide, which was used in developing this guide and would be cited this way in MLA format:

Purdue OWL. "MLA Formatting and Style Guide." The Online Writing Lab at Purdue. 07 July 2009. Purdue University Writing Lab. 07 July 2009.

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>