



## WHAT MY TEACHER NEVER TOLD ME ABOUT CITATION

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As I reach the end of my undergraduate career, I thought I'd share some of the wisdom that I *didn't* learn from my teachers and professors about citation. One of the most mystifying (and miff-tifying) parts of practical learning is citation. The whole process seems to be made intentionally inaccessible for the average student by "the establishment" of academia. For instance, did anybody tell *you* that it's not plagiarism if you forget to include a hanging indent, or misplace a comma in your bibliography? Now I'm not advocating sloppy work, but it seems like educators miss the point when teaching the mystical art of citation.

It's ironic to me that citation, as a device for aiding in academic discourse, is so absolutely convoluted and obtuse. I digress; the real point of citation is to help the reader understand what you are writing about, and where you got it from. That's it. So here's an attempt to make something that's commonly thought of as incredibly frustrating into a useful tool.

### WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Most teachers take the "abstinence only" approach to teaching about plagiarism: they'll tell you to avoid it, but not what it is. At the Writing Center, we advocate full awareness of plagiary, and here's the definition:

Failing to cite quotations and borrowed ideas.

Failing to enclose borrowed language in quotation marks.

Failing to put summaries and paraphrases in your own words.

(See Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference* 6th edition, page 359.)

## WHAT IS CITATION?

Citation is just a way to show where you borrowed ideas from. These ideas can be paraphrased by putting them into your own words, or quoted directly from the original author. The real point here is to allow your readers to trace the ideas back to the original source so they can learn what you've learned from the author. Those in the biz call this "aiding in academic discourse," and we call it "giving credit where credit is due." Citing also helps us, the eggheads-in-training (aka the students), prove our learning and legitimize our new and exciting ideas to stodgy old professors who won't just "take your word for it."

Citation comes in as many styles as there are fish in the sea, but the most commonly used are Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), and Chicago Style. These styles are usually assigned, but if you're given the choice, it's a good idea to select a style based on the area of study for which you're writing. For instance, if you're writing a treatise on abnormal psychology, you'll probably want to use APA, but if you're doing a literary comparison of postmodern and neo-futurist dystopias, MLA will probably be better equipped to serve your citation needs.

Aside from the different styles, citation has two forms with distinct roles in a piece of writing: in-text and end citation.

## IN-TEXT CITATION

In-text citation is different for every style:

### MLA

With MLA, generally you'll want simply to put the author's name and the page number inside parentheses, like so (Flanagan 1). Of course there will be variations. For instance, if you don't have the author's name, you will use the title ("What My Teacher Never Told Me About Citation" 1), or if it's an organization's publication, such as the Writing Center's fabulous yearly *Inkwell*, you would use the organization's name (Evergreen Writing Center 32).

### APA

APA in-text citation is very similar to that of MLA, except that you'll want to put the year of publication in addition to the author's name and page number (Flanagan, 2009, p. 1). For in-depth information on MLA and APA citation, you'll want to read the article, "Why We Cite" in last year's *Inkwell* (Radelich & Flanagan, 2008, pp. 71-83).

### CHICAGO STYLE

Chicago Style is not used heavily anymore at Evergreen, but it used to be a mainstay of the social sciences. I had to use Chicago for my U.S. history class, and I'd spend two hours on my paper and twice as much working on my foot and endnotes. Needless to say, the hours of sleep that I lost on this style of citation give license to my editorial decision to relegate Chicago to the place of

“(dis)honorable mention.” However, I’ve included an example of Chicago footnotes as per the request of world-renowned social scientist Christopher Rotondo, who says, “I love Chicago style; I like to put it in my boots to feel that citation sensation between my toes.”<sup>1</sup>

## END CITATION

End citation is pretty formulaic in almost every style. The common names for this form of citation are: bibliography, reference page, works cited, endnotes, etc. The biggest hang-up with end citation is that people don’t understand the basic formula and therefore can’t alter it for the different kinds of sources they need to cite.

To keep it simple, I’m going to give an example of a substitution method in MLA style. This way, you can use a basic formula, but substitute different information as needed.

This is an example of the standard “one book, one author” works cited entry:

Gouda, Brie. *Blue, Bleu, Blew, and Blue: A Lactatious Anthology of Dairy Farming Anecdotes Gone Wrong*. Milwaukee: Roquefort Printing, 2000.

But, what if this book is a collection of essays, and you’ve only used one of the essays? For this, you would take the citation you have and plug in the title of the essay as well:

Gouda, Brie. “Cultured Comparisons: Probiotic Bacteria in Yogurt.” *Blue, Bleu, Blew, and Blue: A Lactatious Anthology of Dairy Farming Anecdotes Gone Wrong*. Milwaukee: Roquefort Printing, 2000.

But, what if this essay, which is part of an anthology, was found on a website? You’ll take the citation you have (as above) and plug in the date you saw the article on the web, and the URL:

Gouda, Brie. “Cultured Comparisons: Probiotic Bacteria in Yogurt.” *Blue, Bleu, Blew, and Blue: A Lactatious Anthology of Dairy Farming Anecdotes Gone Wrong*. Milwaukee: Roquefort Printing, 2000. 19 February 2009 <<http://www.cheesus.org>>.

Even though the citation will be slightly different for APA or Chicago, the same principle of modifying the reference by substituting applicable information applies. By learning a few basic entry types for works cited pages, you will be able to mix and match so that your citation looks shiny and perfect, just like mine.

And there are plenty of resources both in books and on the web, notably Diana Hacker’s *A Writer’s Reference*, 6th edition, and website <<http://www.dianahacker.com>>; also the Purdue Online Writing Lab website, <<http://www.owl.english.purdue.edu>>.

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1. Christopher V. Rotondo, in discussion with the author, March 2009.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The last thing that I've learned is this: Don't get hung up on the technical aspects of citation; just do your thing and make sure you support your arguments and give yourself plenty of source material for analysis. As long as you give credit, you're usually in the clear.