

Differences in Documentation Styles

Different academic disciplines use different styles of documentation based on what publication information is generally the most important to that discipline. **Ask** your teachers and professors which style is appropriate for their courses.

In using a documentation style, you must be **accurate** and **consistent**. If your teacher specifies Chicago format, make sure that you are using Chicago format *exactly as indicated* in the documentation guide, including **punctuation and spacing**. Do not mix the styles, and don't guess – check to make sure that you have it right!

MLA (Name-page) format

MLA is the acronym of the Modern Languages Association. MLA style is used for English literature and criticism, as well as for the arts and other “humanities” disciplines. In literature and the humanities, authorship is more important than date of publication, because you may frequently be working with texts that are very old. Unlike in the sciences, where the date of a product affects its validity (an older study is likely to be outdated and inaccurate), a literary work is not necessarily less valuable simply because of its age. However, literature and the humanities place great importance on acknowledging the author of a work, because authorship is often a source of credibility.

Also, since literary texts are frequently long, MLA style requires that you give a page reference in your citation so that another reader may quickly find the specific material to which you are referring.

In **MLA and APA**, citations are given in the text so that the reader may identify immediately the source of the information. Footnotes are used only for extra information or explanations, not for documentation.

APA (Name-date) format

APA is the acronym of the American Psychological Association. APA style is used for the social sciences and some “hard” sciences, in which scholars will be using studies to support their research. Therefore, the date is important, because recent studies will likely be more accurate and relevant than older ones.

APA requires a page reference for direct quotations, but not for paraphrases and summaries. Unlike literature, where the precise wording of an idea is important and may affect meaning, in the social sciences the general findings of a study are usually more important than its precise wording.

Chicago (footnote) format

“Chicago” refers to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Chicago style is used for history, in which scholars will be using a wide variety of primary and secondary sources which must be identified and described precisely. Simply giving a name and a page number or date may be confusing, or insufficient in some other way. Footnotes allow a scholar to give a lot of information in each citation without interrupting the flow of the essay text.