How Do I Check My Citations?

Overview

If you click on this resource, you are probably writing an essay, and somewhere in the prompt is a sentence that reads something like this: "be sure to cite outside sources following [MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.] style." We're here to help you make sure that you cite your sources correctly, following the citation style suggested by your instructor. You might be wondering: but why should I follow a style at all? Here is a possible answer: using a particular style "makes it easier for readers to navigate and comprehend a text through familiar cues that refer to sources and borrowed information" (owl.purdue.edu).

General Considerations

Using a specific citation style is about more than following specific rules—it helps you engage with your disciplinary audience is a way that conveys authority to your writing. Following a specific citation style shows that your work belongs to an academic discipline.

Following a citation style requires more than making sure you cite your sources and give credit where credit is due. It is about following specific conventions that a disciplinary academic community has agreed upon.

You are not required to learn all the details of a citation style. In fact, very few people are familiar with the conventions of each citation style. What's important is that you know where to look and how to retrieve this information.

In Practice

As we said, you do not need to be an expert in citation styles to cite correctly, but it is important that you know where to find this information. As a student at UM, you have 3 easy resources that you can use as you write your academic papers.

1.   **A Writer's Handbook.**

There are many writer's handbooks available to you in the library. Here are some of them:
- *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers*, edited by Ruszkiewicz et al.
- *A Pocket Style Manual*, edited by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommer
- *Easy Writer*, edited by Andrea Lunsford

Any one of these will work, but make sure you consult the latest edition, because citation styles get updated and they change through time. We like *Easy Writer*, because it is very portable, and it is cheap if you decide to buy it. You will use such a handbook throughout your undergraduate career, so it might be a good investment.

In these handbooks, you can access all citation styles, and all you need to do is to figure out what kind of media you are citing. These handbooks usually offer two sections: one for in-text citations and one for

the list of references that you have at the end of your essay. Once you figure out where to cite, then you need to consider what you are citing. Is it a book? Is it an article? Is it in print? How many authors? Is it a digital source? Is it an encyclopedia entry? Is it an article in a newspaper on the web? These handbooks offer templates for each of these media, and you just need to follow the template and include the information from the source you are citing.

2.   **The Purdue OWL (online writing lab)**

If you are connected to the internet, you can always use the [Purdue OWL](#). As their site states, "The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University houses writing resources and instructional material, and we provide these as a free service of the Writing Lab at Purdue. Students, members of the community, and users worldwide will find information to assist with many writing projects. Teachers and trainers may use this material for in-class and out-of-class instruction."

Here, you can find all the information you find in the handbooks we mentioned above, but you would navigate that information through hyperlinks rather than turning paper pages. If you are working in APA, you can then click on the tab "APA Guide" on the left of the screen. You can then click on the dropdown menu on the left of the screen (APA Formatting and Style Guide), and follow the same steps we advised you to follow when consulting a writer's handbook.

3.   **The University of Michigan Library**

As a student at UM, you have access to the resources offered by the [Library](#). Once you reach that site, you can click on "Research and Scholarship" on the upper menu. Then, you can click on "Citation Management." As that site says, "keeping track of your sources (and citing them properly) is an essential part of academic research. We offer a variety of tools and support to help you organize, format, and share your references, so you can stay focused on the project at hand. We support the use of **Zotero**, **Mendeley**, and **EndNote**."

These are examples of citation software that help you generate references and citations following a specific citation style that you select. It might take a while to become familiar with how to use these kinds of software, so we invite you to spend some time playing with them before you have to use them to complete an academic assignment. A good idea is also to make an [appointment](#) with a librarian and learn how to use them. Librarians are there to help you!

Exercise

Spend some time becoming familiar with the resources we introduced above. In fact, we advise you to follow the order we set up here: start with acquiring confidence in consulting a paper writer's handbook, having a sense of where the information is printed; then, move to exploring the Purdue Owl site, and maybe bookmark that link on your web browser; finally, play with some citation software, and see how it works. We know that, nowadays, society is more and more connected through the internet. However, you cannot foresee when an outage happens—it might be the night before your paper is due! So, we strongly support you investing in a paper writer's handbook.

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