MODULE 3: CITING SCHOLARLY WORK
LESSON 1: CREATING CITATIONS

Title

Citing Scholarly Work

Module 3, Lesson 1

Creating Citations

Introduction

You're doing research for a paper on youth voting. You come across two articles that provide different numbers for how many young people voted in the most recent election. One source quotes a specific expert and includes a list of citations; the other source says that its numbers come "from a recent poll." Which one seems like a more trustworthy source? Why?

Citing your sources means that you give credit for the ideas and information you've used in your paper. It builds credibility and helps readers understand where your ideas come from. In this lesson, you'll learn:

» What elements make up a citation

» Where to find the necessary information for a citation

» How to compose your own citations

Why Cite?

Citing your sources serves you, and it serves your readers. When you provide citations for the work you've used in your paper, it gives readers a way to follow up and find more information on a topic. A good citation points your readers directly to the source.

Using proper citation also gives you credibility as an author. It allows readers to distinguish between your ideas and those of your sources.

Citation Styles

There are a variety of ways to format citations. Citation styles are issued by the major professional organizations in a discipline or field. The citation styles are published in books called style guides. For example, the Modern Language Association, or MLA, has its own citation style that is often used for papers on language, literature, and the humanities. MLA is one of the most common styles used in high school. You may also be asked to use APA style, issued by the American Psychological Association. There

are also special citation styles for medicine, legal writing, and journalism that you may encounter in college. If you're unsure which citation style to use, check your assignment or ask your teacher.

Most citation styles include the same basic pieces of information, but may require that the order or format of those pieces be a little different. For example, some styles use full first names, while others use just a first initial. Some styles capitalize every word of a title, and some capitalize only the first word. Depending on the style, you may use a period after each piece of information, or a comma between some of them. You may need to use a single space, or you may need two spaces. These are small details, but it's important to pay attention to them as you create your citations. Formatting your citations correctly and consistently tells your readers (and your instructor) that you understand the conventions of academic writing.

Here, you can see the MLA and APA versions of citations for the same article.

Elements of a Citation: Print
Print materials include books, popular magazines, and articles from scholarly journals. A complete citation for a print source will point your readers to the exact source you used — including the correct edition number, page number, or format.

Common elements of a citation include:

» **The author's name:** Who wrote the work? Usually this is a person or multiple people, but sometimes the author is an organization or institution.

» **Title:** What is the exact title of the work? If it appears within a larger work—like an article in a journal or a chapter in a book—what is the title of the larger work?

» **Publication date:** When was the work published? Are there multiple editions or revisions? If more than one date is given, use the most recent one in your citation.

For both books and journal articles, MLA style requires the author's name, the publication title and/or article title, the publication date, and the format, such as print or web.

Books also need the place of publication and the name of the publisher. If more than one place is listed, use the first one in your citation. Articles need volume, issue, and page numbers.

If you use a library database to download a book or article originally published in print, you must include the name of the database you used, the medium (the web, rather than print), and the date you accessed the material.

Elements of a Citation: Online Sources

For websites, the information required for a citation is slightly different, but the goal is the same: You want to pinpoint the exact version that you used in your research. To cite a website in MLA style, include as many as possible of the following:

1.   Author's name

2.   Page or article title

3.   Website title

4.   Name of the organization or institution that produces or publishes the site

5.   Publication date

6.   Format (print or web)

7.   Date you accessed the site

MLA style does not require that you include the website's address, but you should record it for your own reference. Some other styles, including APA, do require that the web address be included in a citation.

Do you see some common threads among these citations for different types of material? Regardless of what kind of work you're citing, the goal is to record who wrote the work, who published the work, when it was published, and what it's called.

Collecting Citation Elements

So, where do you start finding the elements of a citation? When you're looking at a book, you can find most or all of these elements at the beginning of the book, on the title page and the copyright page. If you're looking at a journal article, you can usually find information at the top and bottom of the page, and at the beginning or end of the article.

But the best time to find and record this information for a book or journal is at the beginning of your research process. When you're searching a database, you can find a complete citation for each search result. Keep all of this information with your notes for later use.

Some databases will also generate a citation in your desired format. Also, consider using citation management software to track your sources as you go. Some citation management programs are free, and your school may subscribe to others. Ask your librarian about the best citation manager to use.

You may have to look a little harder to find the information necessary to cite a website. Look at the top or bottom of the page to find information about the author, the page

and site title, and the organization that owns the site. You won't always find a publication date.

If you're having trouble finding information on a website, look for an "About Us" link. This is usually a good way to find out the owner or creator and get more information about the site.

Composing a Citation

When it's time to put together your citations, you'll need the information you've gathered about your sources — but you'll also need information about what is required for a particular citation style. Your library should have a copy of the style guide you need or the online version of the style guide.

Using your style guide as an example, plug in the information from your source material, making sure that all the elements are present. Double-check to be sure you've used capital letters, italics, and punctuation exactly as your style guide specifies.

If you don't have your style guide handy, the OWL at Purdue University is an excellent website for questions about MLA style, APA style, and using sources in your writing. It's a free, reliable site that doesn't require you to register.

Citation management software can give you a "head start" by formatting a citation from the information the program can gather. But these programs are far from perfect. It's very important to double check that the resulting citation includes all of the necessary pieces of information. For example, your software can probably find the title and URL of a website, but it doesn't know how to visit the About Us page to find the name of the website's owner. You'll need to locate that information and add it; otherwise, your citation will be incomplete.

Examples: Print and Database Sources

Now that you know where to find the information needed for a citation and how to compose one, let's take a look at some examples.

Here's the database information for an article on the writing of the Bronte sisters. This excerpt includes all of the necessary elements of a citation: author, article title, journal title, volume and issue number, publication date, and page numbers.

Now, look at how these elements appear in an MLA and an APA citation. Most of the same elements are present in both citations, but you can see that the citations look different: the pieces are in a different order, some items (like the author's name) are formatted differently, and different words are capitalized.

Examples: Web Sources

Next, let's look at sample citations for a website. Here, you can see that there's less overlap between the elements required by the different citation styles.

MLA wants you to say who owns the website and when you looked at the page. APA wants you to provide the URL so that readers can find the page themselves. APA does not include the date accessed.

Special Sources
In some cases, you may need to cite a source that's in a different form than the ones we've discussed here, like an image, a government publication, video, sound recording, or a letter or email. Your style guide will include information about how to cite these special sources.

If you're stuck or can't figure out how to cite a different type of source, remember that your librarian can always help.

Next Steps

» Next, you will complete a few practice activities related to what you've just learned.

» Then, it's on to Lesson 2, Citing and Paraphrasing.

» At the end of Module 3, you'll take an assessment of what you've learned in this lesson.