

Academic Research Citation Styles: Comparative Study

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Abstract: When writing in an academic context, it is important to document the source of information used in your writing, whether that is an argument, evidence, or interpretation, so it can be traced back to the original author who developed the ideas. Proper citation enables readers to determine where specific ideas have come from and to assess the evidence in support of a research argument. It also enables readers to identify original work and ideas from the author, and those which are published elsewhere. Thus, the process of citation is a crucial one in academic communication and, in particular, in the promotion of academic integrity and the acknowledgment of the work of their colleagues. This booklet will compare the four major types of styles: American Psychological Association (APA), Modern Language Association (MLA), Chicago, and Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). All four systems have the same goal of documenting sources but there are differences in conventions, structures, and applications to different disciplines. APA style is most often used by social and behavioral scientists, and MLA style is most often used by humanists and language students. Chicago style is often used in history, literature, and other disciplines; it provides author-date and notes-and-bibliography systems. IEEE style is mainly used in engineering and computer science and in technical. Each style is compared in terms of its purpose, disciplines, and in-text citation, reference listing and type of sources. Students and researchers can choose and use the correct style in academic writing due to the knowledge of these differences.

Keywords: Citation, Academic Research, APA, MLA, Chicago, IEEE Referencing.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Academic research is an "additive" process where researchers create new knowledge by studying, assessing and extending existing scholarship. In academic writing, then, researchers need to determine the source(s) that they are using to support their arguments, evidence, interpretations, and conclusions. A formal way of drawing such links between a researcher's work and the body of previous scholarly research is provided by Citation (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021). Citation serves a practical and an ethical purpose in academic writing. In other words, citations are helpful for readers to find and review the sources that have been cited to back up specific claims. Citation is ethical because it gives credit to others work and by separating other ideas from the writer's work, it helps prevent plagiarism (APA, 2019).

There are a variety of methods for documenting sources used by different disciplines. APA is most often used in psychology and the social and behavioral sciences, MLA is most often used in the study of language and literature, Chicago in the humanities and in some other areas with

author-date system, and IEEE is widely used in engineering, electronics and computer science (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021; University of Chicago Press, 2024; IEEE, n.d.). It is crucial for students, researchers and academic writers to know these differences, as the choice of a citation style is usually influenced by conventions of a discipline, institutional needs, journal guidelines, or an instructor's/supervisor's instructions. It is important to note, then, that researchers should not choose a style of citation simply because it is their favorite style, but should instead adhere to the rules governing the use of the style in the context of their research (APA, 2019; University of Chicago Press, 2024).

II. PURPOSE AND MEANING OF ACADEMIC CITATION

A citation is a citation to a source of information, ideas, evidence or language used in an academic work. This reference could be used in the text, footnote/endnote, or by a number which links to a reference list. The full "bibliographic" details enable the reader to know and find the reference (American Psychological Association, 2019;

Modern Language Association of America, 2021). A reference is one of the main reasons for citing. If the researcher adopts another researcher's theory, argument, finding, data, interpretation or unique language, the researcher must appropriately attribute the work. In this way, citation serves as an integral part of proper research and is a sign of respect for prior research (American Psychological Association, 2019).

Another use of citation is to "prove" academic claims. Research arguments are more convincing when you allow your reader(s) to view your research, theories, data, or other evidence that supports your argument. References as a result can enable readers to assess the validity and strength of the evidence that backs up a researcher's findings (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021). Citation also allows for the readers to check the information and further research. If a reader comes across a significant argument in a research paper, then they can reference it and use the citation and reference list to find the original paper and delve deeper into the topic. This process helps to ensure transparency and reproduce scholarly communication (APA, 2019).

III. MAJOR CITATION STYLES

There are many different systems used by academic disciplines, but some of the more popular are APA, MLA, Chicago and IEEE. All have established their own rules around how to cite the author(s), year of publication, the title, page numbers, footnotes, punctuation, and the order in which the references are cited (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021; University of Chicago Press, 2024; IEEE, n.d.).

➤ *APA Style*

American Psychological Association (APA) style is the most common citation method used in the psychology, education, social, behavioral and health sciences. The official manual is now in its 7th edition (2019) published by the American Psychological Association. APA Style follows an author-date format and the author and year of publication can easily be recognized from the text (American Psychological Association, 2019). APA in-text citations usually consist of the last name of the author(s) and the publication year. For instance, if the original sentence is "Smith is a graduate of the school. (2024)," the paraphrased version could be "Smith has attended the school (2024)." APA typically specifies the page number for a direct quotation, or some other appropriate locator, such as (Smith 2024, p. 25) (American Psychological Association, 2019).

The APA reference list includes all of the details of the sources that have been referenced in the text. The basic book reference includes the name of the author, year, title and publisher. APA also has guidelines for other types of sources, such as journal articles, web pages, reports, datasets, software, audiovisual sources, and more (American Psychological Association, 2019). The significance of the publication date is strongly emphasized because in many

social and behavioral sciences, the currency of research is of extreme importance, an aspect APA gives special consideration. APA makes it easier for readers to understand the context of research findings through the inclusion of the year in the text, adjacent to the author's name (American Psychological Association, 2019).

➤ *MLA Style*

The Modern Language Association (MLA) style is mainly used in humanities subjects, such as literature, languages and cultural studies. The newest Handbook is the 2021 edition. The purpose of MLA documentation is to give the reader short citations that will lead to a detailed listing in the Works Cited list (Modern Language Association of America, 2021). Typically, MLA adopts an author-location system of organization. If you have a source that has page numbers, an in-text citation can look like (Smith 25). In contrast to APA, the year of publication is not usually a part of the basic parenthetical citation in MLA because it is generally more important to identify the author and the place the quote or paraphrase of the material was found (Modern Language Association of America, 2021).

The MLA Works Cited entry will include all of the information that is needed for the source to be identifiable. The citation system used by MLA places elements of the citation at the center of the system and allows for them to be varied for different kinds of scholarly sources (books, journal articles, websites, audiovisual materials, and other) (Modern Language Association of America, 2021). MLA is especially helpful when writing literary or other text analysis because it allows the researcher to indicate specific pages, lines, etc. in the books they are analyzing. The citation system is thus related to close reading and detailed analysis of primary and secondary sources (MLA) (Modern Language Association of America, 2021).

➤ *Chicago Style*

There are two main documentation systems offered by the Chicago Manual of Style: notes and bibliography, and author-date. The versatility of this makes the city an attractive place to conduct research and live for the wide variety of disciplines. The latest edition is the 18th (2024, University of Chicago Press). The Notes and Bibliography system is often used in history, literary or arts studies, and in other humanities subjects. Sources are cited with numbered footnotes or endnotes and full information is usually contained in a bibliography. When researchers must include further contextual information with their source documentation (University of Chicago Press 2024), this system is particularly helpful.

For instance, an item from a Chicago book is cited as such in a footnote: Academic Research Methods (Academic Press, 2024) by John A. Smith, 25. The reader is then able to turn to the bibliography for more details about the source (University of Chicago Press, 2024). The author-date system is available in Chicago as well. This system is used on the same lines as that of Smith 2024, where the citation would be (Smith 2024, 25) and the entry in the reference list would be (Smith, 2024). The author-date system works well in

situations, such as in research, where the publication date is meaningful (University of Chicago Press, 2024).

➤ *IEEE Style*

The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) citation system is mainly used by engineers, electronic engineers, telecommunication engineers, computer scientists, and others in the technical field. While the names of authors and dates of publications will be repeated many times in the text, IEEE numbers are used to identify the references (IEEE, n.d.). Typically, an IEEE citation will be in the form of [DOI]. In a paper, for instance, once such a statement is made in the paper and backed by the first source referred to then the reference [1] is used. Normally the researcher does not repeat their reference number; normally they use the same reference number as the first mention of the same source (IEEE, n.d.). The IEEE reference list is presented in numerical order, as they first appeared in the text. This system allows to maintain the technical writing relatively brief even for a paper with a big number of references (IEEE, n.d.).

Numerical approach is more useful in engineering and scientific writing because technical papers are frequently accompanied by equations, experimental results, diagrams, tables, and a lot of technical terms. A short numerical citation can be used to cite a source without causing much disruption to the flow of technical discussion (IEEE, n.d.). A comparative study of how the two different styles of citations differ. A comparison of the two styles of citations, while all documentation styles list the sources of information, they might not provide the same information to the reader. APA focuses on the author and year, MLA focuses on the author and location, Chicago styles the documentation in two ways (notes or author-date), and IEEE uses numbers for identification. These differences are based on communication practices and priorities of various academic disciplines (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021; University of Chicago Press, 2024; IEEE, n.d.).

Table 1 APA, MLA, Chicago, and IEEE Citation Styles are Compared

Feature	APA	MLA	Chicago	IEEE
Basic system	Author-date	Author-location	Notes-bibliography/ author-date	Numerical
Common disciplines	Social sciences	Humanities	Humanities and sciences	Engineering and technology
Basic in-text example	(Smith, 2024)	(Smith 25)	(Smith 2024, 25)	[1]
Full source list	References	Works Cited	Bibliography/References	References
Footnotes	Usually supplementary	Usually supplementary	Central in Notes-Bibliography	Not primary system
Publication year	Prominent	Usually omitted from basic citation	Depends on system	Included in reference
Page/location	Important for quotations	Frequently important	Important where applicable	Included where relevant

Source: Secondary Data (2026)

The comparison shows that there are differences in the type of information that is emphasized in various citation styles, as well as differences in punctuation. APA, MLA, Chicago, and IEEE styles all provide a way to make the chronology of scholarship apparent right in the text, MLA helps to identify the location of the text, Chicago offers a lot of flexibility using the notes and bibliography, and IEEE specializes in being as concise as possible using numerical references (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021; University of Chicago Press, 2024; IEEE, n.d.).

➤ *Citation and Plagiarism*

Citation is closely related with the prevention of plagiarism. Plagiarism is the act of using another person's ideas, words, sentences or data, either in whole or in part, as one's own without proper attribution. Properly using citations can make it clear that the researcher's ideas are his or her own and that the ideas of others are not (APA, 2019). When using direct quotation, it is important to note that the exact words of another author are being used. Researchers should cite quoted information correctly and include all the information

needed as appropriate to the style. As with the above, changing the words does not remove the need for the citation, as paraphrasing requires citation (American Psychological Association, 2019).

Researchers are required to have accurate records of sources, as well, for academic integrity. If references are incorrect, missing or the citations do not match the reference list, then it may be hard for a reader to identify and confirm research claims. It is therefore crucial that they are well documented, as part of responsible academic research (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021).

➤ *Designing a Data- or Information-Based Text*

Digital scholarship has gone a long way in broadening the areas of sources in academic research. These electronic resources, such as online journal articles, webpages, databases, datasets, software, social media, digital archives and other electronic resources, are increasingly being cited by researchers. Major citation systems have thus evolved

guidelines on how to write references for such sources (APA, 2019; MLA, 2021).

APA 7th edition offers tips on a wide range of electronic resources, such as web pages, articles, social media, audiovisual resources, datasets, and software. Information should be provided so that reader(s) can identify and locate the source as well as follow the specific rules for the source (American Psychological Association, 2019). The system of core elements is available to help guide online works as well. The method provides a way for the researchers to note the digital source, but it enables them to adapt the citation to the information they have available for the specific source (Modern Language Association of America, 2021). The Chicago Manual Style also offers advice for electronic and online sources, such as URLs and other electronic information. The current guidelines from the University of Chicago Press should be used for research because citation of digital sources may vary based on the type of source being cited.

➤ *Citation Management Software*

Researchers may use citation-management software to gather bibliographic data, organize their sources, insert citations into their work, create reference lists, and more. This software can be particularly helpful for extensive research papers with hundreds of sources to be cited, and needs to be cited in different styles (APA, 2019).

But these citations should be checked carefully, as they are generated automatically. Information in bibliographic databases may be incomplete, out-of-date or inaccurate and software may not always process information from unusual sources correctly. Researchers are therefore still responsible to make sure that all citations accurately reflect the source, as well as that they adhere to the proper style guide (American Psychological Association, 2019).

IV. ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS

APA also has the benefit of instantly showing the author(s) and date(s) of publication. This would be especially helpful in fields that require research to be up-to-date and developed. In some cases, however, repeated author-date citations may cause some disruptions in text when there are many citations (APA, 2019). MLA offers brief citations which are well suited for literary and text analysis. Its focus on page or other location information can facilitate your readers' ability to locate just where evidence is. But scientists working in rapidly changing areas of science might want to systems which emphasize publication dates more prominently (Modern Language Association of America, 2021).

Chicago is very flexible and has a variety of documents that will work for either notes and bibliography or author-date. Footnotes can give the researcher the chance to add in more detail about the sources, and add more commentary. The notes-and-bibliography system has the potential to create a relatively complex documentation system, however (University of Chicago Press, 2024). The IEEE's numerical

system is very compact and thus suited to technical texts which have many citations. The only thing that it has as a drawback is that readers will not be able to tell just from the citing number, who the author is, and they will have to look in the reference list to see who the author is (IEEE, n.d.).

V. CONCLUSION

The proper usage of citations in research is important for several reasons: They allow one to acknowledge sources; support arguments; help verify information and means to maintain academic integrity. While there are various systems, they all have the same objective – to create a clear connection between the research claim and the resources that inspire the research (American Psychological Association, 2019).

Academic documentation has a number of approaches, such as APA, MLA, Chicago, and IEEE. APA is one that focuses on the author and publication date; MLA focuses on the author and textual location; Chicago offers a flexible notes-and-bibliography and author-date system; and IEEE uses numerical references. These have both benefits related to specific disciplines and communication styles (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021; University of Chicago Press, 2024; IEEE, n.d.).

There is no one size fits all style of citation. The system used will be determined by the discipline, research purpose, institutional need, and the context for publication. APA and MLA are two styles that help researchers understand the rules governing a variety of citation methods, so they can more effectively, ethically, and accurately communicate their ideas to other scholars (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first step for researchers is to identify the appropriate style that is used by their university, department, journal, publisher and/or supervisor. Academic communities may have documentation conventions; personal preference is to be avoided, as is the opposite, institutional requirements.

It's also important that the most up-to-date authoritative version of the chosen style guide is used. The rules for citations can change from one edition to the next or over time, as do rules for electronic sources, author information, capitalization, punctuation, and other aspects (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021; University of Chicago Press, 2024).

It's also crucial to be consistent. After choosing the style, it should typically be used for the entire research paper. It can be confusing to mix and match styles in the same paper, and using APA, MLA, Chicago and IEEE will detract from the professional appearance of academic writing (American Psychological Association, 2019; Modern Language Association of America, 2021).

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