INTRODUCTION TO SCHOLARLY CITATION

The Scholarly Conversation

Universities are places where students come to learn. They are also places where scholars, or researchers, work to discover new knowledge in a variety of disciplines. As Janet Giltrow (2002) observes, although "students may see themselves as learners rather than researchers, they nevertheless do their learning under the direction of people who are trained as researchers and who read and write research publications" (p. 27). Implicitly or explicitly, the writing tasks which students are assigned at university are very often modelled on the research-oriented writing done by their professors.

Learning how to read and write in academic genres is a process of joining a conversation. As in a normal conversation, one must listen before one can speak. Students learn, and scholars conduct research, in large part by familiarizing themselves with the scholarly context in which they are embedded. Then, they **cite** the relevant voices: this allows students to demonstrate their learning, and allows scholars to demonstrate the need for and validity of their research. Through **citation**, academics can hold complex conversations across time and space, listening to the other voices in the discussion and preparing to contribute something new.

Not all undergraduates pursue research projects, but whenever they read, write assignments, or participate in academic life, all students take part in the scholarly conversation.

What is Citation?

All writing, like all dialogue, is **intertextual** (Bazerman, 2004). This means that every statement is related to the statements which came before it, which exist alongside it, and which will follow afterwards. Citation is a feature of writing and speech which makes this intertextuality explicit. A citation says, *this is how I know this information*.

We often cite our sources informally, as, for example, when we say, "I hear it's going to rain today." But scholarly citation is not informal. **Scholarly citation** is a highly formalized, intentionally conspicuous feature of academic writing. It enables researchers to communicate with each other in a rigorous, traceable, and persuasive fashion.

- *Rigorous*: Citations enable writers to acknowledge the scholarly context for their research and the sources of their information. In particular, scholars often cite **peer-reviewed** sources, which are the gold standard for the publication of new knowledge.
- *Traceable*: Citations provide a thread of references which allows readers to trace the origins of the information being presented. This traceability invites readers to follow the history of an intellectual argument or the development of a research methodology back to its origins. It also helps enable verification of any claims as well as further exploration of the cited sources.
- *Persuasive*: Citations are a persuasive feature of academic writing. By referring to authoritative and relevant sources, writers bolster their arguments, demonstrate the depth and originality of their research, and convince readers of their expertise. Citations also help demonstrate that the author is writing knowledgeably, accurately, and with accountability—attributes which are likely to be persuasive to an academic audience.

Discipline and Style

Academics organize themselves into disciplinary communities. This is why universities have departments for scholars who study English language and literature, nursing departments for scholars who study nursing, and so on. Academics create **citation styles** by following a similar rationale. The conventions of citation styles are not arbitrary. The formats of the various styles are determined by the objects and methods of study, as well as shared values and beliefs, of the distinct groups of researchers who use the style (Hyland, 2012).
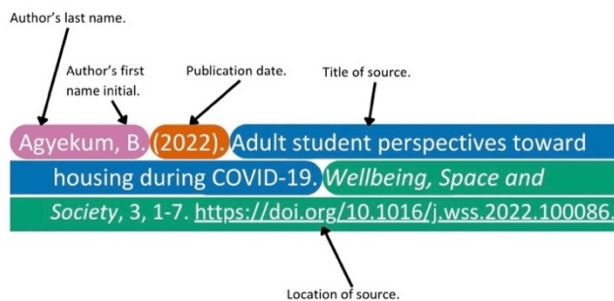
Perhaps the two most common citation styles are the Modern Language Association (**MLA**), which is typically used in the humanities, and the American Psychological Association (**APA**), which is typically used in the social sciences, natural sciences, and health sciences. Citations in this guide, for example, are formatted following APA 7th edition.
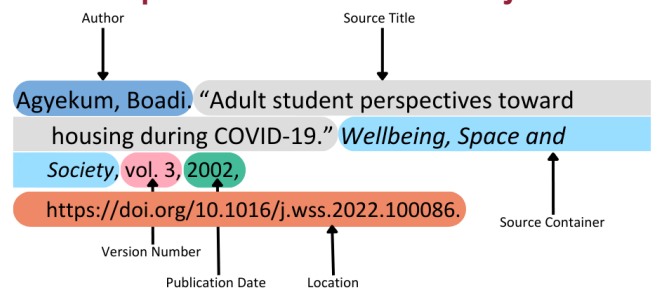
Components of a Scholarly Citation

All citations, irrespective of style, consist of two essential components. Both are required.

1. _The in-text citation_: In-text citations appear within the body of a document and indicate when an idea, fact, piece of data, etc., is drawn from an external source. (For an example, see the reference to Hyland, 2012 in the previous section.) In-text citations tell the reader the minimum amount of necessary information about any given source as required by the citation style. In APA and MLA, in-text citations are integrated into the body of the main text using parentheses. **Chicago** style, by contrast, uses footnotes. The in-text citation refers the reader to the corresponding entry in the reference list.

2. _The reference entry_: The reference entry is a detailed record of the source which appears in a separate section at the end of the paper. (For example, see the reference entry to Hyland in the list below). In APA, this list of sources is called the "References." In MLA, it is called the "Works Cited." In both styles, the lists provide comprehensive information for every cited source, including the author's name, the source title, publication date, and location of source (e.g., book, article, webpage, etc.). Reference entries provide readers with all the information they would need to locate the original source on their own.

Example APA References Entry

Author's last name.
Author's first name initial.
Publication date.
Title of source.

Agyekum, B. (2022). Adult student perspectives toward housing during COVID-19. _Wellbeing, Space and Society_, 3, 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2022.100086.

Location of source.

Example MLA Works Cited Entry

Author
Source Title

Agyekum, Boadi. "Adult student perspectives toward housing during COVID-19." _Wellbeing, Space and Society_, vol. 3, 2002, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wss.2022.100086.

Version Number
Publication Date
Location
Source Container

For further discussion, MacEwan students may consult the [Citation and Scholarship: APA](#) and/or [Citation and Scholarship: MLA](#) tutorials on mêskanâs.

References

Bazerman, C. (2004). Intertextuality: How texts rely on other texts. _What writing does and how it does it: An introduction to analyzing texts and textual practices_. Bazerman, C. and Prior, P. eds. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 83-96.

Giltrow, J. (2002). _Academic writing: Writing and reading in the disciplines_. 3rd ed. Broadview.

Hyland, K. (2012). _Disciplinary identities: Individuality and community in academic discourse_. Oxford UP.