

# Principles Of Citation

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Citing the words of others is common in many situations in which we use language; for example, when we report to a friend what another friend has said, we are citing our friend's speech. If your friend Mary tells you that she does not like the new Jack Black movie because its themes are "undeveloped," and you report this to Jane, you are citing her speech when you say, "Mary says that the themes in Jack Black's new movie are undeveloped," or when you say, "Mary's argument against the new Jack Black film is that the themes are undeveloped." In both these cases, you are citing or reporting Mary's speech. What happens, though, to the status of Mary's speech if you say to Jane, "The themes in Jack Black's new film are undeveloped"? The original source of this comment has now been obscured, leaving your listener to believe that *YOU* are the source of the comment. Hmmmm....

Academic writers cite others' words, too, as often and as routinely as speakers do in everyday conversation, yet the routines of citing the words of others in an academic context are distinctive to the needs of academic writers and academic readers. Citing the words of others in an academic context is very importantly connected to the work of generating and communicating knowledge that experienced and novice research writers do here. Whether we are novice researchers or professional researchers, we cite the ideas of others so that we can participate in ongoing discussions about topics that are relevant in a research setting.

Though it is commonly believed that we cite the words and ideas of others to "back up" our own ideas, in fact we cite others for far more significant academic reasons than mere "support." For example, in order to develop my own thinking so that I can make a contribution to ongoing academic conversations, I first need to discover what academic writers have already said about the topic I am researching. Once I know what has been said (or published) about my topic, I can position myself in relation to others' ideas, showing, for example, where I agree with my sources and where my thinking diverges. When I cite the ideas of others, I position my own thinking in relation to other important statements that have previously been made on my topic, and this helps to establish not only my right to speak by acknowledging what others have said, but also helps me to know what can be said on a topic – what is relevant to say – and how my "take" on my topic will make a contribution to building knowledge on the topic.

When I cite my sources in the context of writing as a researcher, I am engaged in a very active conversation with fellow researchers. Citation invites other thinkers and writers into my research so that we can work together to develop knowledge and understanding. This doesn't mean that I invite others into my research conversation just to repeat what they have said, but much more importantly, to respond to these others, to test their reasoning and conclusions, to represent my thinking in relation to their thinking.

Another important reason that I cite my sources is to provide my reader with a way to return to the researchers who I am conversing with. Since my reader will have an interest in the conversation I am engaged in, he or she may also wish to consult my sources to carry on that conversation in different directions than I have done in my own research. Or my reader may wish to further develop an idea I have proposed or to dispute my claims, and so I must give him or her a description of how to return to my sources. Citing my sources provides this description.

Because academic writers are usually conversing with others' ideas in the form of written sources of information, and because academic readers want to be able to make a strong connection between specific material – ideas, concepts, other writer's positions or claims, bits of information, “facts” – and the source of the material, academic writers are in the habit of citing their sources in two places: within the body of their writing precisely where they are inviting in others' ideas, and at the end of their document in a full reference citation, providing a full description of their source. Citing in the body of the text supplies the writer with (usually) the author of the source and perhaps the year the source was published, as well as (sometimes) a page number on which the idea is located in its original source, while the full reference citation provides the reader with the author's name, the title of the source, its year of publication, and publication information.

## Some general principles of citation, or documentation, styles

- All citation styles cite both within the text and then at the end of the document or at the foot of the page, providing information in text that directs the reader to a list of sources located elsewhere. This list of sources is called a Bibliography in Chicago style, References in APA style, and Works Cited in MLA style, and it provides a fuller description of the source so that the reader will know how to locate that exact source if she or he wishes.
- All citation styles provide these categories of information: name or names of authors; date of publication; titles of books; titles of articles and names of journals in the case of journal articles; publication information: for books this includes the city or place the book was published and the name of the publisher — for journal articles this includes the volume, issue and page numbers that the article can be found on.
- All citation styles act as cross-referencing systems in which the information cited in the body of the writing, usually — but not always — an author's last name, refers the reader to the first piece of information, usually — but not always — the author's last name, in the entry in the bibliography.

## Examples in MLA and APA styles

Here is a citation of the book called *Research Decisions* in both a **full reference citation** and **in text**.

### Using MLA style

- On *Works Cited* page:  
Palys, Ted. *Research Decisions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Toronto, ON: Harcourt Brace, 1997.

- *In text*, MLA style, there are a number of ways to refer your reader to this source:

#### **Citation of a summary**

In *Research Decisions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives*, Palys describes the range of research methods currently practiced in research institutions around the world (12).

#### **Citation of a summary and a paraphrase**

Researchers around the world use a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research methods (Palys 12). Palys notes that qualitative methods of research offer a “human-centred” approach to research, while quantitative methods suggest that objects of study can be understood from a positivist perspective (13).

#### **Citation of a direct quotation and a secondary citation**

Palys refers to research as “engagement”(3). He explains this concept of engagement through Morgan’s claim that “science is basically a process of interaction, or better still, of engagement. Scientists engage a subject of study by interacting with it through means of a particular frame of reference” (qtd. in Palys 3), suggesting the role of the observer in what is observed.

### **Using APA style**

- On *References* page:

Palys, T. (1997). *Research decisions: Quantitative and qualitative perspectives* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Toronto, ON: Harcourt Brace.

- *In text*, APA style, documentation of sources will look like this:

#### **Citation of a summary**

In *Research Decisions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives*, Palys (1997) describes the range of research methods currently practiced in research institutions around the world.

#### **Citation of a summary and a paraphrase**

Researchers around the world use a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research methods (Palys 1997). Palys notes that qualitative methods of research offer a “human-centred” approach to research, while quantitative methods suggest that objects of study can be understood from a positivist perspective (p. 13).

#### **Citation of a direct quotation and a secondary citation**

Palys (1997) refers to research as “engagement” (p. 3). He explains this concept of engagement through Morgan’s claim that “science is basically a process of interaction, or better still, of engagement. Scientists engage a subject of study by interacting with it through means of a particular frame of reference” (Morgan, 1995, as cited in Palys, 1997), suggesting the role of the observer in what is observed.

**The Academic Success Centre has online and tutoring resources available to help you with writing in a variety of disciplines, understanding and producing MLA, APA, and Chicago styles of citing sources, and documenting your academic work. Check our website for links and more information.**