



Documenting Sources: Documentation

Definition

Documentation is the acknowledgement of borrowed information, ideas, or opinions. Even though your final bibliography lists your sources, it does not give specific documentation such as particular page numbers. Giving credit to your sources may be done in several ways: parenthetical citation, footnotes, and end notes. We will be using parenthetical citations, as this is the format used in college by most instructors.

Documenting Sources

As your own research is actually based on others' research and writing, you must carefully acknowledge this with citations within your text. If you have not already done so, read the information on plagiarism on the page titled "Plagiarism and How to Avoid It."

Styles of Documentation

Documentation styles vary, often depending on the subject area for which you are writing a paper. For example, the MLA (Modern Language Association) is the style most often used in high school and college courses. Another style is the APA (American Psychological Association), used in science and sometimes political science course papers. The instructor will tell you which to use, but we will show you only the MLA style in this booklet.

Parenthetical Citation

Parenthetical citations give a brief indication of the source: for example, the author's last name and the page number. *Parenthetical* refers to the use of parenthesis () and *citation* is from the verb to cite, meaning to list or to name. Example: (Allen 223)

What Should Be Documented

1. a direct quotation
2. surveys, scientific experiments, and research studies
3. ideas or opinions that are not your own (even if written in your own words)
4. facts that are not common knowledge - ones that a general audience might not know
5. information which may be questioned

What Does not Need to Be Documented

1. factual information or opinions which are widely accepted.
Example: American Civil War began at Fort Sumter (a commonly known fact)
nuclear war would result in vast destruction (a commonly held theory)
2. familiar sayings or proverbs
Example: "A stitch in time saves nine."