**Citation Guidelines and Formats**

This piece explores citations: why we do it, when we do it, and how. Even if you have good citation style, please check out [pages 3 and 4](#page), which discuss citing Internet sources (yes, you have to do that) and lectures and precepts.

Also, and this is a big enough problem that it deserves to be put at the front: if you don’t know how, do yourself a favor and **learn how to use Word’s footnote and endnote tool**. It’s very easy to use and it’ll make your life a lot easier.

*Why We Cite*

We all know the “don't plagiarize” reason for citation. But there's a better one, or at least one that more directly affects your grade. Proper citation tells the reader what are your own ideas and analysis and what are not. With improper or inconsistent citation, many graders will assume that everything written is someone else’s work, especially at the undergrad level.

This obviously hurts you. You could have great analysis, but unless you signal to the reader which ideas are NOT your own, they’ll never be sure which ones ARE. And remember, it’s a much harder task to come up with good ideas and analysis, and graders take that into consideration. If they think that everything you write is just parroting someone else, you’re missing major points which you could and should have earned simply because of sloppy bookkeeping.

Remember: citations are YOUR responsibility. You have a duty to make it as easy as possible for the reader to double check your facts. That means providing not only author and title, but also page numbers for EVERY discrete instance where you’re using someone else’s work. If in a single paragraph, you use two quotes and a paraphrasing of an argument, you need three separate citations, one for each instance.

*When We Cite*

The three main citation guidelines (MLA, APA, Chicago[[1]](#footnote-1)) have formats for almost every conceivable source of information, including websites. If anything doesn't fit, you can probably extrapolate what it would be. So, if you use anything (and I do mean ANYTHING – any word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, and on up) that is not common knowledge or your own original thoughts, there’s undoubtedly a citation style for it and you should use it.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Of course, the difficulty lies in defining what is common knowledge and what is your own original thinking. In the context of political science, the former can be really difficult to identify. My rule of thumb is: Is it a discrete fact or event which can be easily found (for example, in the dictionary or the first couple paragraphs – ONLY – of Wikipedia)? If so, then don’t bother with citation. If not, then you should cite it. This includes:

* Direct quotes
* Partial quotes
* Rewordings of original ideas that are not your own
* Perspectives and/or analysis of facts and events that are not your own

This covers a lot of material, so you may be wondering how any paper doesn’t end up being just a long list of citations. The good news is that we all have original ideas, and we present them every single day, if not every hour.[[3]](#footnote-3) More concretely, your originality can come out in (at least) two different fashions:

1. You offer a genuinely new idea which no one has presented before (that you know of) about the topic under discussion.
2. You combine different strands of literature together in a way that no one has done before (that you know of).

The difference? In the former, your conclusion is original, and typically the way you got there as well. In the latter, your conclusion may not be original, but the way you arrived at it certainly is. Original conclusions are usually easy to identify (and besides, you should be proud of them: very few people have genuinely new ideas in political science).

For the second method, it can be difficult to disentangle the originality of your analysis from the points made in the different sources that you draw together. Think about how you are using each individual word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, etc. Are you using it as evidence for your argument based on data that you picked up somewhere? Are you explaining someone else’s perspective? If so, then cite the relevant passages.

If, however, you are using words to connect specific pieces of evidence in a way that no one has done before (that you know of), it’s your own original work and no citation is necessary. By the way, the “that you know of” phrase is not an escape: you should make every effort to see if someone else has already said what you’re going to say.

So, in sum, ask yourself:

1. Is all of the information (in a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, etc.) common knowledge?
2. Is all of the information (in a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, etc.) my own original idea?

If the answer to both those questions is no, then cite the relevant portions. And when in doubt, be conservative and cite it.

*How We Cite*

So, cite properly, which means consistently, accurately, and fully. Pick whichever main style (MLA, APA, Chicago) you like, but:

1. Don't make up your own style, except in the exceedingly rare case when the style guide doesn't have a rule for the type of source you're using.
2. Be consistent: Use the exact same formatting every time. It's like a resume. If something’s in the same place and serves the same function, it better look exactly alike.

Most students are fine with endnotes, works cited, and “full” footnotes (the entire citation is introduced in the first instance of use - generally not a preferred citation method, but legitimate). The problem comes with in-line citations or footnotes referencing a previously mentioned text. These MUST be sufficient for the reader to determine the author, source, and page number. For source, you can use year OR name of publication, but be consistent. As an example,

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. (LastName, 1990, pp. 35-8)

- OR -

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog. (LastName, *Title of Book*, 35-8)

If you use titles, remember to use proper formatting (usually, italics) so the reader can distinguish them from names. This type of citation can also be accomplished with footnotes, rather than being done in line. Use of “ibid.” is fine, but you must still include page numbers.

Remember: it’s the writer’s job to make it as easy for the reader as possible to verify sources. And it’ll help you get more points in the end.

**A Note on the Internet**

Many people think the Internet, and anything found on it, are in the public domain and therefore don’t require citation. That couldn’t be further from the truth. The Internet puts things in a public place, but it doesn’t follow that those things are therefore are “public property.”

This includes sites like Wikipedia. Although anyone can edit a wiki, Wikipedia itself owns the material.[[4]](#footnote-4) So you must include citations, as otherwise you would be violating their property rights.

This website has lots of good information:

<http://www.publicdomainsherpa.com/10-misconceptions-about-the-public-domain.html#two>

So, Internet sources must also be cited if they don’t pass the questions above.

**Citing Lectures or Precepts**

Short answer: Don’t.

Long answer: Don’t, because it’s often a sign that you haven’t done the reading. Most things we say in lecture or precept can be found in the assigned readings. Unless you’re sure that the item we mention is not in the assigned readings, make every effort to find the original citation.

**Additional Information**

The University has a number of useful resources for additional information and clarification. Most notably, the “Rights, Rules, Responsibilities” handbook – readily available at the registrar or online at <http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/rrr/02/index.htm> – provides the University’s formal definitions and policies governing citation. You are especially directed to the “Academic Regulations” section, starting on page 59.

You may also want to check out:

*University’s Integrity Policy*

<http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/08/intro/>

*When to Cite Sources*

<http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/08/cite/>

*“Common” Knowledge and Internet Citation*

<http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/08/notcommon/>

*Examples of Plagiarism*

<http://www.princeton.edu/pr/pub/integrity/08/plagiarism/>

1. Guidelines and examples of these styles can be found at many locations online, including <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/using/instruct/citation.html#2>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Also, stick to only one style. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Like your response to the question “What did you do yesterday?” No one’s ever done all the same things you did yesterday, you don’t need to cite anyone as a source, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Incidentally, you might want to consider this fact the next time you post things to Facebook. My sister interviewed there once, and one of the perks is that employees can view anyone’s profile and anything that’s **ever been** on that profile, regardless of whether it’s currently on there or not. How can they do that? Because it’s their property. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)