In-text citations signal the use of a particular source and so must offer readers identifying information about that source—usually including author or title and a reference to a particular passage or page that also makes a clear link to the bibliography.

For an overview of related key topics on working with documentation styles, visit the videos and quizzes in this tutorial.

Explore It

By documenting your sources carefully—in your text and in your bibliography—you give readers of your research project a map to the sources you use. While reading your paper, readers should be able to identify specific types of information about the sources you use. When your in-text references are accurate and formatted correctly, they will point readers to the complete citation on your bibliography page.

All documentation styles call on you to include citations of sources in your text that are connected to entries in the bibliography that accompany your research project. Though the requirements and styles differ, MLA, APA, and Chicago styles all require basic citations in your text that identify the author and indicate which of your sources is being cited. And when you cite a particular passage in your draft, all these documentation styles require you to note, often by giving a page number, where the material appears in the source. The citations in the text of your research paper point readers to a particular entry in your bibliography.

Here are several example sentences showing in-text citations of paraphrased material from a source. Each example is accompanied by an entry for citing the source in the works cited (MLA), in the references (APA), or in a note and on the bibliography page (Chicago).

**MLA**
Teenagers may experience loneliness, depression, and a decline in “real world” social activity as a result of overexposure to chat rooms and excessive Web surfing (Johnson).


**APA**
Johnson (2001) has observed that while computers and video games pose some risks to children, they can be used effectively to teach children skills they will need in their future educational and employment careers.


**CHICAGO**
Johnson insists that technological enhancements are effective at engaging students.¹

**Note**
Learn It

The connection between the in-text citation and bibliography is vital. Readers can quickly become confused if you don’t include complete and accurate information, leading from one to the other. This connection applies to all citations, regardless of whether you have an author or other elements in the bibliography or not.

In the body of your paper, there may be times when you have to provide more than a name or a single word to help your readers find the correct source. For instance, you may need to cite more than one work by an author. Either in a parenthetical citation or in the text of the sentence, you must specify which work by the author you are citing. The in-text citation in an MLA research paper featuring more than one work by author Dan Johnson might look like this: (Johnson, “Cyber”).

In an APA-style research paper, if you cite more than one work by the same person published in the same year, you must use lowercase letters (a, b, and so on) after the year to direct readers to the correct entry on the references page:

Johnson (2001a) cited helpful uses for technology in the classroom.

If there had been more than one author named Johnson on your APA references list, your in-text citation might look like this:

(D. Johnson)

The important rule to follow is to provide your reader with enough in-text citation information to find the right source in the bibliography.

Use It

Try writing sentences that incorporate in-text citations for four of the sources listed below, using the assigned style for a current research project: MLA, APA, or Chicago format. The items are listed alphabetically and include the necessary basic elements for citation. (Note: You may wish to visit online sources for background, URLs, or other access information.)


Check with your instructor if you are unsure which documentation style is appropriate. For detailed advice and models, you may wish to consult a composition handbook or documentation guide.