

How to use

footnotes

There are several proper ways to cite sources in academic papers. Students often rely upon in text citation styles such as MLA (Johnson, 271) or APA (Johnson, 1998, p. 217). However, most historians prefer a citation model that provides source information right at the bottom or “foot” of the page. Guidelines for how to use proper footnote format can be found in Hacker’s and Sommers’ *A Writer’s Reference* in the sections on CMS (Chicago Manual of Style) notes and bibliography, but the process is simple. For books, use this format.¹ Articles are cited in this manner.² Historical primary sources can get a little trickier. Here is an example for a historical newspaper obtained from an online database.³ It’s always a good idea to highlight the exact location where you obtained a source –professors need to see a roadmap for your research. So, if you view a published book online through something like Google Books –you need to acknowledge that.⁴ The citation style for general websites keeps evolving, but at minimum, you need to provide author or host institution, site name, and page URL.⁵ If you are citing a letter from a collected edition of writings, then try to include as much information as possible.⁶ Or, if you are citing a primary source excerpt or some essay from a larger collection, include key details about its origins.⁷ This is especially important when you are using primary sources reprinted in other types of sources. You can also acknowledge a historical quotation, like John Adams’s famous line, “Facts are stubborn things,” from a secondary source.⁸ For repeated citations to the same source, you can abbreviate in subsequent references.⁹ Finally, citations should be numbered in consecutive order, from the beginning of your paper until the end --and notes should appear at the bottom of each page. Also, citations typically go outside of all punctuation and at the end of the sentence, and undergraduate students should strive to keep explanatory text or discursive asides out of footnotes. With citations, it often feels as if the biggest challenge is simply to remember all of the minor rules (such as with footnotes, author names appear in regular order, but in bibliographies, it’s last name then first name). But the bottom line in citing sources is to provide the careful reader with a consistent and clear roadmap to your research. Try to provide all information essential to understanding the exact nature of the source. The rest will take care of itself.

¹ Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 222-3.

² Carl F. Kaestle, "Ideology and American Educational History," *History of Education Quarterly* 22 (1982): 137. [JSTOR]

³ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, (Philadelphia), April 15, 1750. [Accessible Archives]

⁴ J. C. Levenson, *The Mind and Art of Henry Adams* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1957), 22. [Google Books]

⁵ J.A. Leo Lemay, "Benjamin Franklin," University of Delaware, <http://www.english.udel.edu/lemay/franklin/>.

⁶ John Hay to John G. Nicolay, Washington, August 7, 1863; Tyler Dennett, ed., *Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1939; reprint, New York: Da Capo, 1988), 76.

⁷ "Narrative of William and Ellen Craft," excerpted in Charles L. Blockson, ed., *The Underground Railroad: Dramatic Firsthand Accounts of Daring Escapes to Freedom* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1987), 10-14.

⁸ Quoted in David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 103.

⁹ Walters, 109.