The APA Documentation System

Dr. Karen Petit
Documentation explains where borrowed words, statistics, ideas, pictures, charts, music, and other items came from.
Without documentation, readers and listeners will not know:

- Which words in the paper are Teddy’s?
- Which ideas are Teddy’s?
- Which words came from a book?
- Did the picture of the flower come from a Web site, a painting, or Teddy’s camera?
- Where can someone find more information from the same source?
- Are the statistics from a recent source?
- Who sang the song? Who composed the song?
- Was the song heard on a CD, at a concert, or on a Web site?
Quotations, Paraphrases, and Summaries

Source documentation is used while communicating borrowed words or ideas in quotations, paraphrases, and summaries.

- **Quotations**: Include Source Information
  - Borrowed words
  - Use quotation marks

- **Paraphrases**: Include Source Information
  - Borrowed ideas
  - Do not use quotation marks

- **Summaries**: Include Source Information
  - Borrowed, condensed ideas
  - Do not use quotation marks
A documentation system is used in research papers and other kinds of communication to describe the source(s) of borrowed information and words.

Documentation systems include:

The APA System, from the [American Psychological Association](https://www.apa.org), is the documentation system that is used in social science fields.
Components of the APA System

For each borrowed word or idea, an in-text citation is placed in the paper.

Writing is an important academic and career skill. An article discusses how “the quality of your writing can determine success or failure” (Jacobs, 1998, p.1).

The first word of the citation has to match the first word of a Reference list entry.

Reference

In-text Citations

An in-text citation can be formatted in two different ways:

- with the author’s name, the year, and the page number in parenthesis
- with the author’s name and the year in a lead-in phrase and with the page number in parenthesis

An article discusses how “the quality of our writing can determine success or failure” (Jacobs, 1998, p. 1).

Jacobs (1998) discusses how “the quality of your writing can determine success or failure” (p. 1).
To indicate a change from the writer of the research paper to one of the sources of information or words, a **lead-in phrase** is often used.

Unless the author’s words indicate otherwise, the **in-text parenthetical citation** shows readers the end of the source’s ideas/words, as well as the year and the page number.

The words following a citation can show a continuation of the same viewpoint or a **change to a different viewpoint**.

---

According to the National Commission on Writing (2004), writing is important. A survey shows that writing is a “threshold skill” needed to get hired and promoted at work (National Commission on Writing, 2004, p. 3).

Also, this survey shows . . . .

In addition to being important at work, writing is also important in . . . .
What No Citation Means

Whenever a citation is not present, a reader will assume that the idea and the words are the research paper writer's.

Incorrect source documentation often results in plagiarism:

Writing is a threshold skill for both employment and promotion purposes.

Revision should include checking for places where additional source information is needed.

This revision has a citation documenting the source of borrowed ideas and words:

In a survey of 120 large American companies, writing was found to be a “threshold skill” for both employment and promotion” purposes (National Commission on Writing, 2004, p. 3).
Strong communication skills are important in today’s professional careers. According to Jacobs (1998), “Whether you are pitching a business case or justifying a budget, the quality of your writing can determine success or failure” (p. 1). Police officers, for example, need to record information, write reports, and sometimes showcase their written documents in a courtroom. A single ineffective communication could result in a criminal being found innocent of a crime. In a survey of 120 large American companies, writing was found to be a “threshold skill” for both employment and promotion purposes (National Commission on Writing, 2004, p. 3). People in all of today’s careers need to be able to communicate effectively to interact appropriately with their colleagues, bosses, customers, and other people, as well as to communicate their knowledge and to showcase their accomplishments.
Good Organization While Citing Sources

- The organization of a paper or speech should be focused on the writer’s or the speaker’s ideas.
- The thesis and topic sentences should convey the writer’s or speaker’s main ideas, rather than being quotations from sources.
- Source material is most often used to support a writer’s or a speaker’s ideas.

... Strong communication skills are important at work and in college. When at work, an employee needs to be skillful in communication in order to successfully complete many tasks. For example, a person often has to write reports, send e-mails to colleagues, and speak with his/her boss. According to Jacobs (1998), “[T]he quality of your writing can determine success or failure” (p. 1).

Good communication is also important in college...
Correct grammar, including correct sentence structures, is needed when using source material and citing sources. If the use of a quotation results in unclear writing or grammatical errors, then revision of the lead-in phrase is needed, or the writer/speaker can use a paraphrase or a summary instead.

Strong communication skills are important in today’s professional careers. According to Jacobs (1998), “Whether you are pitching a business case or justifying a budget, the quality of your writing can determine success or failure” (p. 1).
The works that have been “referenced” in the body of a paper or a speech are listed on a “Reference” page.

The format of a Reference page includes:

- Alphabetical order to organize the works
- Hanging indents to format the second and later lines of each entry
- Double spacing for most academic papers
“Reference” or “References”

- The singular word “Reference” is used for a Reference page with only one entry.
- The plural word “References” is used for a page with more than one entry.
Reference Page Entries Include:

- Name(s) of author(s)
- If there is no author’s name, an organization’s or a company’s name
- Year of publication in parenthesis
- Title(s)
- Print publication information, such as city, state, publisher, volume, and issue
- Electronic publication information, including the Web site’s name, database title, DOI, and the words “retrieved from” with the URL (if there is no DOI).

The Format of Titles for Reference Pages

An italic font is used for the titles of independent items.
- Newspapers
- Journals
- Books
- Web sites
- Databases
- Films
- Paintings
- Performances

A regular font is used for short works published as parts of longer works.
- Essays
- Songs
- Stories
- Poems
- Web pages
- Articles from Web sites, newspapers, and journals
Commonly Used Abbreviations

“p.”
• Used in the citations of a paper to indicate “page”

“pp.”
• Used in the citations of a paper to indicate “pages”

“n.d.”
• Means no date of publication was stated by the source

“et al.”
• Used in a citation to indicate additional authors

“…”
• Ellipses are used on a reference page to indicate additional authors.
References


The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.
Contact Information

This presentation is the creation of

Dr. Karen Petit
Community College of Rhode Island
400 East Avenue
Warwick, RI 02886
E-mail: kmpetit@ccri.edu
Phone: 401-825-2279