APA CITATIONS

When you use someone else's words or ideas, you need to show exactly which ones are yours and which are not. Your readers can’t know where the information in any sentence comes from unless you tell them. Maybe it’s your own idea; maybe it’s from the source you just mentioned; maybe it’s from a completely different source. That’s why academic writing expects you to cite every single source-based sentence.

In APA, there are two official ways of citing; unofficially, there's also a third, which we'll talk about after the first two. The same basic strategies are used in both paraphrases (your words, their ideas or opinions) and direct quotations (their words, their ideas or opinions), although direct quotations must include a page or paragraph number.

The purpose of any citation is to help your reader find the relevant source on your reference page. That means your citation will always include the first word(s) of your reference page entry--usually the name of the person(s) or organization considered the “author” of the work. If the author’s name is unknown, use the title instead.

■ In-text Citations

In-text citations can be anywhere in a sentence, but they are often near the beginning. The author’s name is not in parentheses, but the year is. If there are two or more names, the word “and” is spelled out before the last. Most health and social sciences don’t use first names ever; education and English may allow them, but ask your teacher if you’re not sure! Notice that you’ll use past tense to report your source’s words and findings.

WITH PARAPHRASES

- According to du Bois (2015), children need to develop their imagination.
- In their later study, Gouge and Godden (2017) also found that children need to develop their imagination.
- Children must develop their imagination, Sendak et al. (2001) argued.
- The American Dietetic Association (2005) suggested that developing children’s imagination may help develop their bodies.
- The writer of “Feeding Bodies, Feeding Minds” (2010) recommended that children develop their imagination as well as their bodies.

If the name and the page number are separated, as they are in the next four examples, the date goes with the name. If the source has no page numbers, paragraph numbers can be used instead. In a long document without page numbers, cite the first words of the heading closest to the paragraph you’re using and then count paragraphs from that heading.

WITH DIRECT QUOTATIONS

- In their later study, Gouge and Godden (2017) also found that “imagination is crucial” (pp. 112-113).
- The American Dietetic Institute (2005) noted that “imagination is crucial” (“New Foods,” para. 1).
- The writer of “Feeding Bodies, Feeding Minds” (2010) noted that “imagination is crucial” (para. 4).
Parenthetical Citations

Parenthetical citations usually come at the end of a sentence. They always include the author and the year and put both inside parentheses. If there are two or more names, an ampersand (&) is used before the last one. No first names or initials are ordinarily used. If the author’s name is unknown, use the first major word(s) of the title instead.

WITH PARAPHRASES

- Children should develop their imagination (du Bois, 2015).
- Children should develop their imagination (Gouge & Godden, 2017).
- Children should develop their imagination (Sendak et al., 2001).
- Children should develop their imagination (American Dietetic Association, 2005).
- Children should develop their imagination (“Feeding,” 2010).

Again, if the source has no page numbers, paragraph numbers can be used instead. In a long document without page numbers, cite the first words of the heading closest to the paragraph you’re using and then count paragraphs from that heading.

WITH DIRECT QUOTATIONS

- It is clear that “imagination is crucial” (du Bois, 2015, p. 42).
- It is clear that “imagination is crucial” (Gouge & Godden, 2017, pp. 112-113).
- It is clear that “imagination is crucial” (Sendak et al., 2001, para. 5).
- It is clear that “imagination is crucial” (American Dietetic Association, 2005, “New Foods,” para. 1).
- It is clear that that “imagination is crucial” (“Feeding,” 2010, para. 5).

Examples

Now, let’s imagine a paragraph in which every sentence is based on a different source. Even if only one citation strategy is used, it’s easy to see why the citations are needed:

A balanced diet is essential for good health (du Bois, 2015). That diet should include lots of complex carbohydrates and vegetables, some protein, and very little fat (Gouge & Godden, 2017). It should include relatively little sugar (Sendak et al., 2001). Complex carbohydrates can include foods like brown rice, beans, and sweet potatoes, and these foods can be important sources of fiber (American Dietetic Association, 2005).

However, using a single citation strategy can look pretty clunky. Not “wrong”—just not the best that the writer could do. That’s especially true when everything comes from the same source:

A balanced diet is essential for good health (Kann & Numeroff, 2010). That diet should include lots of complex carbohydrates and vegetables, some protein, and very little fat (Kann & Numeroff, 2010). It should include relatively little sugar (Kann & Numeroff, 2010). Complex carbohydrates can include foods like brown rice, beans, and sweet potatoes, and these foods can be important sources of fiber (Kann & Numeroff, 2010).

So most writers try to use a combination, and many also bring in a third strategy:

In a meta-analysis of 103 published studies on nutrition and well-being, Kann and Numeroff (2010) found that a balanced diet is essential for good health. The
researchers concluded that such a diet should include lots of complex carbohydrates and vegetables, some protein, and very little fat. It should, they warned, include relatively little sugar. Complex carbohydrates can include foods like brown rice, beans, and sweet potatoes and can be important sources of fiber (Kann & Numeroff, 2010).

■ Language Cues

That third strategy could be described as the use of language cues to identify a source without repeating a formal citation. Those cues can include

- Repeating the author’s name without the date, which APA allows only if the author’s name already appears outside parentheses in the same paragraph.

  Kann and Numeroff (2010) found that a balanced diet is essential for good health. The researchers concluded that such a diet should include lots of complex carbohydrates and vegetables, some protein, and very little fat. It should, Kann and Numeroff warned, include relatively little sugar.

- Using a descriptor instead of the author’s name. This strategy usually works best when the author’s name is already outside parentheses in the same paragraph.

  Kann and Numeroff (2010) found that a balanced diet is essential for good health. The researchers concluded that such a diet should include lots of complex carbohydrates and vegetables, some protein, and very little fat.

- Using a pronoun instead of the author’s name. Be careful, though: in the health and social sciences, where references are expected to be gender-blind, this strategy only works for plural authors. Like the others, it usually works best when the author’s name is already in the same paragraph, outside parentheses.

  Kann and Numeroff (2010) found that a balanced diet is essential for good health. They concluded that such a diet should include complex carbohydrates.

- Combining sentences. Short sentences aren’t bad: in fact, they can come as a relief to the reader when they’re surrounded by a lot of longer sentences. But if you have a several shorter sentences from the same source, you may be able to combine one or more of them so as to reduce the number of citations you need.

  Kann and Numeroff (2010) found that a balanced diet is essential for good health and that such a diet should include lots of complex carbohydrates.

■ Combining Strategies

When you’re writing a paragraph, therefore (whether it’s based on a single source or not), it’s most common to

- Include an in-text reference early in the paragraph.
- Use a mix of in-text citations, parenthetical citations, and language cues in the middle of the paragraph.
- Finish with a parenthetical citation at the end of a paragraph.
Frequently Asked Questions

Citing emails and interviews. Emails, phone conversations and interviews (anything your readers can’t go back and look up for themselves) aren’t included on an APA reference page. Therefore, they’re not cited in the same way as other sources. Use one of these forms instead:

- According to H.J. Potter (personal communication, September 1, 2017), confidence can help children accept change.
- Confidence can help children accept change (H.J. Potter, personal communication, September 1, 2017).

Citing multiple sources in the same parentheses. To cite several different studies backing up a point you’ve made, put them in the same order they’re in on your reference list and separate them with semicolons:

- Water is wet (du Bois, 2015; Gouge & Godden, 2017; Sendak et al., 2001).

Citing a source quoted in another source. Sometimes you want to use a fact or quotation that was originally published in a source you’ve never seen; you only found the fact or quotation when somebody else quoted it. In that case, you won’t list the original source (ex. “Lennox,” below) on your reference page. There, you’ll list only the source you actually have ex. (“Burnett,” below). In your citation, however, you’ll identify both sources. You have to list the year of the source you’re looking at, but listing the year of the original source is a judgment call—unless your teacher has given you specific instructions one way or the other.

- Lennox weeded around the plants (as cited in Burnett, 2003).
- The plants needed room to grow (Lennox, 2005, as cited in Burnett, 2003).
- The gardener “made a place for” the plants (Lennox, as cited in Burnett, 2003, p. 63).

Introducing abbreviations. No, you don’t want to write out “The American Dietetic Association” five times in one paragraph. Here are some options for introducing an abbreviation as part of a citation. After you’ve introduced it, just use the abbreviation.

- The American Dietetic Institute (ADA, 2005) reported that a balanced diet leads to better health. The ADA also found...
- A balanced diet leads to better health (American Dietetic Institute [ADA], 2005). The ADA also found...
- According to the American Dietetic Institute (ADA, 2005), a balanced diet leads to better health. A balanced diet includes complex carbohydrates (ADA, 2005).