



Citation Practices in Academic and Professional Writing

Three approaches to citation practices

There are currently three main approaches to citation pedagogy in higher education: the ethical, mechanical, and rhetorical approaches.

- 1) The ethical approach: focuses on the fundamental values of academic integrity (i.e., honesty, trust, fairness and responsibility) that writers should adhere to;
- 2) The mechanical approach: teaches the mechanics and correct use of a citation style (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago)
- 3) The rhetorical approach: aims at creating a scholarly conversation among the writer, the reader, and the source text through deep engagement with the sources—that is, interpreting, evaluating and responding to the knowledge-making contributions of others, rather than simply following the rules of a certain citation style mechanically, or associating citation missteps with the writer’s moral character.

The ethical and mechanical approaches currently dominate citation pedagogy in higher education; however, these approaches do not address many citation missteps that are due to students’ lack of knowledge or experience with citation practices in academic writing (e.g., patch writing, close paraphrasing). Therefore, approaching citation through a rhetorical lens helps writers focus on the textual functions and purposes of different citation strategies, and become aware of the choices they have when engaging with source texts.

Five common functions and purposes of citations

- 1) Providing support for particular claims

Example:

The terms “glass ceiling”¹ and “bamboo ceiling” are used in the U.S. to describe the barriers that employees face in their career advancement due to their different name, physical appearance, and cultural values (Hyun, 2005; Lu et al., 2020). In the United States, only 16.1% of board seats in Fortune 500 companies are occupied by ethnic minorities (Deloitte, 2018), although 36.4% of employees in the United States are ethnic minorities (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019).

(Adamovic & Leibbrandt, 2023, p.1; *Leadership Quarterly*)

- 2) Acknowledging the origin of theories or methods

Example:

Direct measurements of virus-containing aerosols are extremely difficult and slow. Indoor CO₂ was suggested as an indicator of ventilation of indoor spaces in the 19th century,¹⁵ and more recently as a practical proxy of respiratory infectious disease transmission risk,¹⁶ as pathogen-containing aerosols and CO₂ are co-exhaled by those infected (Figure 1).

(Peng & Jimenez, 2021, p. 392; *Environmental Science & Technology Letters*)

- 3) Introducing the current state of the field

Example:

It has also been known since the 1970s that, in infants younger than 6 months of age, perceptual sensitivity extends to nonnative phonetic contrasts (e.g., Streeter, 1976; Werker, Gilbert, Humphrey, & Tees, 1981), including acoustically similar nonnative distinctions that adults who are not speakers of that language have difficulty discriminating (see Werker, 1989, for a review).

(Werker, 2018, p. 42; *Applied Psycholinguistics*)

4) Creating a dialogue among studies

Example:

There is extensive literature that explores reading and literacy development in deaf children. One prominent line of explanation suggests that deaf children's lack of spoken language phonological awareness restricts reading achievement (e.g., Geers, 2003; Johnson & Goswami, 2010; Perfetti & Sandak, 2000; Spencer & Oleson, 2008; Venezky, 1970), while others point to much a wider range of factors including conceptual deficits, undeveloped vocabulary, and faulty educational practices (e.g., Chamberlain, 2002; Griswold & Commings, 1974; Harris & Beech, 1995; Izzo, 2002; Marschark, 1993; Mayberry et al., 2011; Miller, 1997; Padden & Ramsey, 2000).

(Cates et al., 2021, p. 2; *Applied Psycholinguistics*)

Note: Rather than reviewing each study individually or paraphrasing at the sentence level of a single study, the authors approach the literature review from a larger understanding of relevant studies in the field—an “extensive literature” as they say. They then go on to categorize the “extensive literature” into 2 camps, “one prominent line” and “while others,” thus creating a conversation among scholars.

5) Creating a research space for a proposed study

Example:

Measurements of indoor CO₂ concentrations by low-cost CO₂ sensors can often be good indicators of infection risk and suitable for mass deployment.^{17,18} However, the CO₂ level corresponding to a given COVID-19 infection risk is largely unknown. A few guideline limit concentrations have been proposed, but without a solid and quantitative basis.^{19,20} Whether a single CO₂ concentration ensures a low COVID-19 infection risk in all common indoor environments remains an open question but is critical for effective CO₂-based mass risk monitoring.

(Peng & Jimenez, 2021, p. 392; *Environmental Science & Technology Letters*)

Note: The authors cite previous studies in order to identify what is still unknown—“an open question,” in their words. That is, they point out the research gap/space that the current study addresses.

The five common functions listed above are by no means exhaustive inventory of academic citation practices. As can be seen from these examples, academic writers use citations strategically to achieve various effects in order to create a compelling research story. Therefore, citation should not be viewed simply as a compulsory move to back up claims, or to conform to the mechanical rules of a style guide. Pay attention to how advanced writers in your field utilize different citation strategies to achieve their goals, and try applying them in your own writing practice.

Bibliography

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