

Attributing Images

MLA, APA, and other documentation styles require that you **cite** sources that you use in your writing with in-text citations and bibliographic entries formatted according to each style's guidelines (see our resources on MLA, APA, and Chicago style). However, not all sources require citation but rather **attribution**, a less formal but still important means of giving credit to the original creator.

This resource will help you attribute images that do not require a formatted citation, either because they have a Creative Commons license for shared use or because they are part of the “public domain” of open access. For instructions on how to cite other images, we suggest consulting the Purdue OWL (<https://owl.purdue.edu/>) or your required documentation style's handbook (such as the 9th edition of the *MLA Handbook*).

Attributing Images with a Creative Commons License

Creative Commons is a non-profit organization whose goal is to expand access of creative works. A **Creative Commons (CC) license** allows for the public sharing of certain content, including images, without the fear of violating copyright laws.

While there are no specific MLA or APA guidelines for citing images with a Creative Commons license, you should still give credit to the creator of the image. According to Creative Commons' own website (link: <https://creativecommons.org/share-your-work/use-remix/>), you should strive to ensure that your attribution contains:

- Title of the image and a link to the original image
- Name of the author/licensor/copyright holder and a link to their profile page (if applicable); be aware that this may be a username rather than an individual's actual name
- Name of the CC license and a link to the license deed

The CC website suggests including all of this information in sentence form directly below the image, as in this example:



[“Chicken Traffic Jam”](#) by [Living Off Grid](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

Note: To add a hyperlink in Microsoft Word, highlight the text you wish to hyperlink, right-click, click “Hyperlink,” paste the URL (web address beginning with <http://>) in the text box next to “Address,” and click “OK.”

In this case, “Chicken Traffic Jam” includes a link to the original upload on Flickr.com, “Living Off Grid” includes a link to the author’s profile on Flickr.com, and “CC BY 2.0” includes a link to the license deed for that Creative Commons license.

Note: There may be occasions where the author/licensor/copyright holder states their own preferences for attribution. In this case, always follow their preferences.

Attributing Public Domain Images

Works in the **public domain** are not subject to intellectual property laws, perhaps because the intellectual property rights have expired or been waived by the creator. These materials are considered owned by the public.

Works in the public domain, including images, do not legally require attribution; however, it is always a good idea to provide attribution anyway—consider that proper attribution demonstrates your efforts to provide credit where it is due, enhancing your credibility. For a public domain image’s attribution, strive to provide as much of the following in your attribution as you have available:

- Title of the image and a link to the original
- Author of the image and a link to their profile (if applicable); be aware that this may be a username
- Name of the organization or website hosting/providing the image (if applicable)
- Date of publication/creation (if the date is unknown, use the abbreviation “n.d.” for “no date”; the abbreviation “c.” may be used for “circa” in case the exact date is unknown but a general date range is known)
- The statement “Public Domain”

As with attributions for Creative Commons images, format your attribution in sentence form, as in this example:



“Shot of a team of young doctors using a smartphone while having a discussion in a modern hospital” by [AJ Watt](#), istockphoto.com, 22 July 2019. Public Domain.

Note: Always double-check that your hyperlinks work and that they will take readers to the correct page. Broken or inaccurate hyperlinks damage your credibility.

This resource was prepared by the Cottey College Writing Center.

<https://cottey.edu/campus-community/kolderie-center/learning-center/writing-center/>

Attributing Images from Other Sources

For images that come from library image databases, you can usually find the terms of use on the databases. However, at a minimum, your attribution should include the creator's name, title of the image, and a full URL linking to the image.

For images that come from online sources like blogs and individual websites, you should first determine whether the image has been legally posted (do *they* attribute it to the original source if it's not original?). If it has, then your attribution should include the creator's name, title of the image, and a full URL linking to the image, unless the webpage lists its own terms of use.

For images from print publications, your attribution should include all of the following information that is available: source (the print publication), title of the image, author of the image, date of publication, volume/issue number, publisher, and page(s) used.

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