

APA Documentation Style: In-text Citations

American Psychological Association (APA) documentation style is used for citing sources primarily in the social sciences. Like similar documentation styles, APA requires that you cite your sources in two ways:

- With an in-text citation (also known as a parenthetical citation) alongside any quoted or paraphrased material
- With a References page at the end of the paper that provides a full bibliographic entry for each source

This resource focuses specifically on in-text citation. However, we also have a resource on the APA References page.

In-text Citation

APA requires that in-text citations include the author's last name, the year of publication, and the page number on which material appears if quoted directly (if paraphrased, page number is not required). Place a comma after each of these elements. Place the citation AFTER the closing quotation marks but BEFORE the sentence's punctuation.

Example: There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Hernandez, 2016, p. 36).

However, you can also identify the author within your sentence instead of including that element in your citation. If you do, place the year of publication in parentheses directly after the author's name.

Example: Hernandez (2016) wrote that there are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (p. 36).

Note that the page number still appears after the quotation. Also note that **signal verbs** (e.g., “wrote”) should be in past tense in APA. For more about signal verbs and **signal phrases**, see our resource on embedding quotations.

Note: Remember that you must include citations for any material that you directly quote OR paraphrase from your sources. Even if you put an author's quotation into your own words, if you are still using that author's idea or argument, you need to cite it. Failure to do so could constitute plagiarism.

Frequently Asked Questions about In-text Citations

Q: What if my source doesn't have page numbers?

A: If your source has numbered paragraphs, sections, or other identifying elements that make sense to use, use those with the appropriate label (para., section, table, etc.). **Example: There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Hernandez, 2016, para. 3).** Otherwise, simply exclude this item from your citation. **Example: There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (Hernandez, 2016).** Again, you only need this item if directly quoting, not paraphrasing.

Q: What if I don't know my source's year of publication?

A: APA prioritizes recent sources, so you should generally avoid using sources for which you can't find the date of publication. However, to cite a source like this, use the abbreviation “n.d.” (“no date”) instead. **Example: Hernandez (n.d.) wrote that there are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (p. 36).**

Q: What if my source doesn't have a named author?

A: Use the title of the source instead. **Example: There are “several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others” (“All About Chickens,” 2016, p. 36).** Note: the general rule is to put titles of shorter texts like articles in quotation marks; put titles of longer texts like books in italics.

Q: What if my source has more than one author?

A: If you have two authors, use both authors' names in all of your citations. Use the word "and" in your sentences, but use the ampersand symbol (&) in your citations.

Example with signal phrase: Hernandez and Williams (2016) indicated that there are "several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others" (p. 36).

Example without signal phrase: There are "several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others" (Hernandez & Williams, 2016, p. 36).

If your source has more than two authors, use all of the authors' names in your first citation, but in subsequent citations, use the first author's name only and the abbreviation "et al.," a Latin phrase which means "and others." **Example: Hernandez, Williams, and Schultz (2016) indicated that there are "several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others" (p. 36). Based on their research, Hernandez et al. (2016) recommend that new farmers choose their breeds carefully (p. 37).**

Q: What if I want to use a quotation from someone else that my author quotes?

A: These are called indirect sources. You want to attribute both your source and the person who originally said the quotation, and you do this by using the phrase "as cited in." **Example: Hernandez wrote that there are "several breeds of chicken that lay eggs more frequently than others" (as cited in Bailey, 2016, p. 114).** In this example, Bailey originally said the quotation, but you are getting the quotation from Hernandez's text.

Q: What if I don't need to use the whole quotation but just parts of it?

A: You can use ellipses (...) to cut out text from the middle of a quotation. **Example: There are "several breeds...that lay eggs more frequently than others" (Hernandez, 2016, p. 36).** Here, I have cut out "of chicken" to save space. Be aware that it is unethical to use ellipses to change or obscure the meaning of a quotation.

Q: What if I need to change the wording of a quotation?

A: You may occasionally need to change the wording of a quotation so that it makes better sense to your readers. Use brackets to do this. **Example: "They lay eggs more frequently than others" → "[Some breeds of chicken] lay eggs more frequently than others."** I have added "some breeds of chicken" instead of the unclear "they."

Q: What if my quotation is long?

A: If a quotation is 40 words or longer, treat it as a "block quotation." In APA style, block quotations do NOT use quotation marks, are indented ½ inch from the left margin, and place the period BEFORE the citation. Example:

Many people have a specific image that comes to mind when they think of chickens. However, the world of chickens is actually much more diverse than one might think. In fact,

There are hundreds of breeds of chicken all across the world. These breeds vary in such factors as feathering, color, and size. Beyond that, breeds can lay different egg colors; for example, brown leghorns lay white eggs, while buff Orpingtons lay brown eggs. Some chickens are even bred to produce unusual egg colors like blue and green. (Hernandez, 2016, p. 36)

This description illustrates just how varied chickens can be. The rest of this paper will explore...

Note: It is generally unwise to use too many block quotations, as this can cause your readers to suspect you are relying too heavily on your source material. It is often preferable to break up longer quotations into smaller pieces or find a way to paraphrase long quotations.

This resource was prepared by the Cottey College Writing Center.

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