

How Do I Read a Citation? Transcript

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You may be searching for sources for a research paper when you find one article that is very relevant to your topic. The article references some other sources that sound promising and includes citations in a bibliography at the end, but you don't know how to find the actual articles. Knowing how to read those citations can help you find what you need.

But what exactly is a citation? A citation is a written way of giving credit to individuals or organizations for the intellectual and creative works used to support research. Citations help lead readers to those works. Citations can come in different styles, and which one you use will depend on the discipline.

MLA is typically used for humanities subjects like literature or languages; APA is used for education, psychology, and many of the sciences; and Chicago is common in history, business, and the fine arts. There are also more subjectspecific styles, such as IEEE, which is generally used in Engineering. This might be confusing at first, but all of these styles have the same basic elements to help you find the source.

Regardless of whether it's a citation for an article, a book, or a webpage, they will include the author, title, and publication date, but there may be other information as well that will help you find the source. Let's look at an example.

Let's say you're researching the effectiveness of pets on stress relief for undergraduate students. You find the following citation for an article that sounds promising:

Somerville, J. W., Kruglikova, Y. A., Robertson, R. L., Hanson, L. M., & MacLin, O. H. (2008). Physiological responses by college students to a dog and a cat: Implications for pet therapy. *North American Journal of Psychology*, 10(3), 519-528.
<https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A191856983/HRCA?u=xshracd2588&sid=HRCA&xid=2688c511>

The first thing you'll want to note is the author's name. In this case, there are five authors: Somerville, Kruglikova, Robertson, Hanson, and MacLin. This will be the first part of the citation whether it's in MLA, APA, or Chicago. Depending on the style, the given name might only be an initial. The date is also important to note and is often presented in parentheses. For this source, the date is the year 2008. You'll also want to look for the title. If it's a book, it'll be italicized. If it's an article, the title might be in quotation marks depending on the style. In this case, because the citation is in APA, you can see that the title, "Physiological responses by college students to a dog and a cat: Implications for pet therapy," is in sentence case.

You may have noticed that there's another title that is italicized here, *North American Journal of Psychology*. That's the title of the publication. After that, if you're looking at an article citation, you'll find the volume and issue numbers, which in this case are volume 10 and issue 3. These are useful to know when you're locating an article in particular. For some types of sources, this will be followed by page numbers to give you a more precise location. Here, those pages are 519528.

Finally, sometimes you'll also find a link provided at the end of a citation when the source is a website or available online. This is usually the easiest way to find a source from a citation when it's available, but because links can change, it's not always a guarantee. This is why it's helpful to have a full citation. You can then search for the title in a library database or Google Scholar and use the rest of the information to confirm you've found the right article.

If you're still having trouble with reading a citation and finding a source, contact UH Libraries for further help.