

In the previous module we looked at when and why to cite. Now let's look at the elements of a citation and how they change – or don't change – from one citation style to another.

If you aren't sure what a style guide is, here's a simple definition: a style guide is a set of rules that governs the look and layout of your entire paper, from the cover page, right through to your bibliography. Style guides specify exactly how to write out your citations – so you'll know what information you need to provide your reader - and how to format that information, depending on the type of material that you're referencing.

Now, no matter what style you use – be aware that you'll be citing **twice**: first a brief reference or number in the text of your paper right when you quote or paraphrase your source. This is referred to as an "in-text citation," "footnote," or "endnote." You'll also provide a complete citation at the end of your paper in your Bibliography, list of works cited or references.

There are a number of popular style guides and they all cover a comprehensive array of material types, but for now let's just look at one style and one material type, for example MLA style and a print book. Unless you reference more than one work by the same author, an MLA in-text citation consists of the author's last name and a page reference. The List of Works cited contains more information and is formatted in a very specific way, for example, the title is italicized and the second line is indented. Here's what that would look like in a paper.

Let's compare this to another major citation style. APA also uses in text citations – but notice that you have to include the publication year. The complete citation in the APA list of references has nearly the same elements as MLA style, but as you can see the formatting is a little different.

So what's the significance of all this? The important thing to remember is that the required elements of a print book citation are very similar between the two styles. They differ chiefly in terms of look – such as, the order in which the elements are arranged and the types of punctuation used – and the same is true of most other styles - so don't get hung up on matters of layout. At the end of the day, no matter how the elements are arranged, the point of a citation is discovery.

Think about what your reader needs to know to be able to track your citation down and read the source for him or herself. To find the book you used, your reader needs to know the answers to essential questions including who wrote, edited, translated and/or published it; what the title is; and where and when it was published.

One final note, the essential information needed to locate a source does differ from material type to material type. For example, you don't need to know the publication city for a *journal* article to track it down, but you do need to know its volume and number. You'll find out exactly which elements are required for which material types when you consult the official guide for the style you are using. We'll look at style guides and how to use them in the next module of this lesson.

You can also consult the Library's how to cite guide for more information and if you need any further help with choosing, locating or using a style manual you can contact a librarian by clicking the Ask an Expert link on the Library homepage.