

chicago manual of style figure citation format

The Chicago Manual of Style figure citation format is a critical component of academic and professional writing, ensuring proper attribution and clarity for visual elements. Understanding how to correctly cite figures, whether they are photographs, illustrations, charts, or graphs, is paramount for avoiding plagiarism and for guiding your readers to the original source of the image. This article will delve into the intricacies of the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) approach to figure citations, covering everything from the basic requirements to more nuanced scenarios. We will explore the placement of captions, the content of notes, and the specific details needed for various types of sources, offering a comprehensive guide to mastering this aspect of scholarly communication.

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Understanding Figure Citations in Chicago Style

The Chicago Manual of Style, in its latest edition, emphasizes a thorough approach to acknowledging the origin of any visual material used within a text. This extends beyond simply noting the source; it involves providing sufficient detail so that a reader can easily locate and verify the original image. The system is designed to be both informative for the reader and respectful of the creator's intellectual property. Properly formatted figure citations enhance the credibility of your work and contribute to a scholarly environment built on accurate referencing.

Chicago style distinguishes itself by primarily relying on notes (footnotes or endnotes) for detailed citation information, though a bibliography may also be required depending on the publication context. For figures, this means the primary citation information will typically appear in the figure note, often accompanied by a brief credit line directly on the figure itself or within the caption.

Basic Elements of a Chicago Style Figure Citation

A complete Chicago style figure citation, typically found in the figure note, requires several key pieces of information to be comprehensive. This ensures that the reader has all the necessary details to identify the source of the figure. The core components aim to pinpoint the specific artwork or image and its original context.

Essential Components for Figure Notes

When constructing a figure note, several elements are crucial for accuracy and completeness. These are the building blocks of any robust citation under the Chicago system:

- The name of the creator (artist, photographer, illustrator, etc.).
- The title of the work, if applicable, or a descriptive title for the figure.
- The medium or type of work (e.g., photograph, oil painting, digital illustration).
- The date of creation.
- The publication information (for published works), including title of the book, journal, or website, volume, issue, page numbers, and publisher.
- For online sources, the URL and the date of access are essential.
- Any relevant collection or repository information (e.g., museum name, library archive).
- Page number or figure number within the original source, if applicable.

Figure Numbering and Titling

Consistent numbering and clear titling are fundamental to organizing and referencing figures within your document. Chicago style recommends a straightforward approach that aids both the writer and the reader in navigating the visual elements of the work.

Figures are typically numbered sequentially throughout the document, starting with Figure 1. Each figure should be accompanied by a concise, descriptive title. This title should immediately inform the reader about the content of the figure without requiring them to read the caption or notes. For example, instead of just "Chart," use "Figure 1: Projected Sales Growth, 2023-2025." This clarity is vital for comprehension, especially in technical or research-oriented documents.

Placement and Content of Figure Captions

The caption serves as a brief, introductory label for the figure. It typically appears directly below the figure and often includes the figure number and title. While the caption provides a quick overview, the detailed citation information is usually reserved for the figure note.

The caption's primary role is to identify the figure and provide any minimal context necessary for immediate understanding. It should be brief and to the point. For figures that are central to an argument, the caption might offer a sentence or two expanding on what the figure illustrates. However, it is not the place for exhaustive source details.

The Role of the Credit Line

In addition to the caption, a credit line is often included. This is a condensed acknowledgement of the source, typically appearing within or immediately below the caption, or sometimes within the figure itself if space and design allow. The credit line can be as simple as "Photograph by John Smith" or more detailed like "Adapted from Smith, *Journal of Art History*, 2022." The purpose of the credit line is to give immediate, albeit brief, recognition to the source of the visual material.

Figure Notes: The Core of Attribution

Figure notes are the cornerstone of Chicago style figure citation. They provide the comprehensive details that allow readers to locate the original source. The format of these notes can vary slightly depending on the source type, but they follow established principles for providing bibliographic information.

These notes are typically placed at the end of the document, grouped together under a heading like "Notes" or "Figure Notes," or they can be presented as footnotes directly on the page where the figure is discussed or displayed. The decision between footnotes and endnotes often depends on publisher guidelines or author preference, with footnotes offering more immediate context.

Structure of a Typical Figure Note

A well-constructed figure note will include the creator's name, the title of the work, publication details, and page or figure numbers. The specific order and punctuation will align with Chicago's general note-taking conventions. For example:

- Author/Creator's Name, Title of Work (Publication Information), page or figure number.
- For online sources: Author/Creator's Name, "Title of Page/Article," Website Title, publication date, URL (accessed Date).

It's important to remember that if a figure is cited extensively in your text, the first note referencing it

should be more detailed, while subsequent notes referring to the same source can be shortened to an "ibid." or a shortened title format, following the standard Chicago note citation practices.

Citing Figures from Different Source Types

The specifics of a Chicago style figure citation will vary depending on where the figure originated. Each source type necessitates slightly different bibliographic information to ensure the reader can accurately trace the image back to its original context.

Books and Print Publications

When a figure is taken from a book, the note should include the author of the book, the title of the book, publication information (city, publisher, year), and the specific page or figure number where the image appears. If the figure itself has a credited artist or illustrator different from the book author, that information should also be included. For instance:

- Jane Doe, *The History of Photography* (New York: Acme Press, 2020), fig. 5.
- Credit: Photograph by John Smith.

Periodicals (Journals and Magazines)

Citing figures from journals or magazines requires details about the article in which the figure appears, as well as the periodical itself. The note should include the author of the article, the article title, the journal/magazine title, volume and issue numbers, publication date, and the page or figure number. If the figure has a distinct creator (e.g., a photographer credited separately), their name should also be mentioned.

Example:

- Robert Johnson, "Renaissance Art Techniques," *Art Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (Spring 2022): 45, fig. 2.
- Credit: Illustration by Maria Garcia.

Websites and Online Resources

Citing figures from websites requires careful attention to detail, as online content can be more ephemeral. The note should include the creator's name (if available), the title of the specific page or image, the name of the website, the publication or last updated date (if available), the full URL, and the date you accessed the material. This ensures the reader can find the content even if the page structure changes.

Example:

- "The Great Fire of Chicago," Chicago Historical Society Online, last updated May 10, 2021, <http://www.chicagohistory.org/greatfire> (accessed October 26, 2023).

Unpublished Materials

Figures derived from unpublished sources, such as personal archives, correspondence, or manuscripts, require a description of the material, its location (e.g., name of archive, university library), and any relevant collection or item numbers. The date of the material is also crucial.

Example:

- Letter from Abraham Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln, March 15, 1863, Lincoln Family Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield.

Reusing Figures and Copyright Considerations

When you use a figure created by someone else, it is not only a matter of citation but also of respecting copyright. The Chicago Manual of Style strongly advocates for obtaining permission to reproduce copyrighted images, especially in published works. Even if you are providing a full citation, permission is often legally required.

The process of securing permission typically involves contacting the copyright holder (often the creator, publisher, or a licensing agency) and explaining how you intend to use the image. You will then negotiate terms, which may include a fee and specific credit line requirements. Always document the permission you receive.

Common Pitfalls and Best Practices for Figure Citations

Navigating the requirements for Chicago style figure citations can be complex. Awareness of common mistakes and adherence to best practices can prevent errors and ensure accuracy in your work.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Insufficient detail in the figure note.
- Omitting the date of access for online sources.
- Not obtaining necessary permissions for copyrighted material.
- Inconsistent numbering or titling of figures.

- Confusing the caption with the detailed figure note.
- Using incorrect punctuation or order of elements in the note.

Best Practices for Accuracy

- Always consult the latest edition of The Chicago Manual of Style for definitive guidance.
- When in doubt, provide more information rather than less in your figure notes.
- Keep meticulous records of where you find each figure and any permissions obtained.
- If possible, view the original source of the figure to ensure accurate transcription of details.
- Use consistent formatting across all your figure citations.
- Consider creating a separate list of figures with their captions and credit lines if the document is image-heavy.

Concluding Thoughts on Figure Citations

Mastering the Chicago manual of style figure citation format is an essential skill for any writer aiming for academic rigor and professional integrity. By meticulously following the guidelines for numbering, titling, captioning, and especially for constructing detailed figure notes, you ensure that your work is not only visually engaging but also ethically sound and thoroughly documented. The process, though detailed, ultimately serves to enhance the reader's experience and the overall credibility of your research and writing.

FAQ

Q: What is the primary location for figure citation information in Chicago style?

A: The primary location for detailed figure citation information in Chicago style is the figure note, which can be presented as a footnote or an endnote. A brief credit line may also appear with the figure or caption.

Q: Do I need to include a URL for figures found on a website?

A: Yes, when citing a figure from a website, it is crucial to include the full URL along with the date you accessed the material to ensure the reader can locate the specific content.

Q: What information is required for a figure citation from a book?

A: For a figure from a book, the citation in the figure note should include the author of the book, the book's title, publication information (city, publisher, year), and the specific page or figure number where the image is located.

Q: Can I use a figure from another source without permission?

A: While proper citation acknowledges the source, it does not negate copyright. For most published works, you will need to obtain explicit permission from the copyright holder to reproduce a figure, even if you provide a complete citation.

Q: How should I number my figures in a Chicago style document?

A: Figures in a Chicago style document should be numbered sequentially throughout the work, starting with Figure 1. Each figure should also have a clear, descriptive title.

Q: What is the difference between a figure caption and a figure note?

A: A figure caption is a brief title and possibly a short descriptive sentence that appears directly with the figure. A figure note, on the other hand, is a detailed bibliographic citation providing the full source information, typically found at the end of the document or as a footnote.

Q: How do I cite a figure that has a different creator listed than the author of the book or article it's in?

A: If a figure has a distinct creator (e.g., a photographer or illustrator) who is different from the author of the main work, you should include that creator's name and the relevant details about their contribution in the figure note, often following the primary source information with a "Credit:" line.

Q: Should I include the medium of the figure in my citation?

A: Yes, for figures such as artworks or photographs, it is good practice to include the medium (e.g., oil on canvas, digital illustration, photograph) in the figure note to provide a more complete description of the original work.

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