

chicago manual of style thesis art history

The Chicago Manual of Style thesis art history is a crucial guide for students and scholars navigating the complexities of academic writing in the visual arts. Adhering to its specific formatting and citation conventions ensures clarity, credibility, and adherence to scholarly standards. This comprehensive article will delve into the intricacies of applying the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) to art history theses, covering everything from general principles and note-taking to bibliography construction and image permissions. We will explore the nuances of in-text citations, the structure of footnotes and endnotes, and the unique challenges presented by art historical research, such as the proper description of artworks and the citation of exhibition catalogs. Understanding these elements is vital for producing a polished and professional thesis that meets the rigorous demands of the field.

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Understanding the Chicago Manual of Style for Art History

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) is a widely respected and frequently used style guide in the humanities, including art history. Its comprehensive nature makes it an invaluable resource for academic writers. For art history theses, CMOS offers a robust framework for presenting research, citing sources, and formatting the final document. The manual's emphasis on clarity, consistency, and accuracy is paramount when dealing with complex visual evidence and extensive scholarly literature. Art historians often engage with a diverse range of sources, from primary archival documents and artist manifestos to critical essays, exhibition reviews, and, of course, the artworks themselves. CMOS provides guidelines that accommodate this breadth of material.

The adoption of CMOS in art history is driven by its detailed instructions on both author-editor and notes-bibliography systems. While many art history departments prefer the notes-bibliography system for its clarity in presenting sources and the ability to incorporate extensive descriptive notes, understanding both is beneficial. The author-editor system, while less common for final theses, is often used in articles and shorter works. For a thesis, mastering the notes-bibliography system is essential, as it directly impacts how the student engages with and attributes scholarly work, as well as how they document the visual evidence

supporting their arguments.

General Principles of CMOS in Art History Theses

At its core, CMOS emphasizes logical organization and clear prose. For an art history thesis, this translates to a well-structured argument that is supported by meticulously cited evidence. The general principles extend to manuscript preparation, including margins, spacing, and font choices, all of which contribute to the overall professional presentation of the work. Consistency is key; once a particular formatting choice is made, it should be applied uniformly throughout the thesis. This applies not only to headings and subheadings but also to the way names, dates, and titles are presented.

One of the foundational principles is the accurate and complete documentation of all sources. This includes not only published books and articles but also exhibition catalogs, online resources, archival materials, and interviews. The goal is to provide readers with enough information to locate and verify the sources used. In art history, this can be particularly challenging due to the ephemeral nature of exhibitions and the diverse formats in which visual information is presented. CMOS provides guidance for these specific scenarios, ensuring that even the most unconventional sources are properly attributed.

Note-Style Citations in Art History

The notes-bibliography system, a hallmark of CMOS, is highly favored in art history. This system uses footnotes or endnotes to cite sources within the text, followed by a comprehensive bibliography at the end of the thesis. The notes serve a dual purpose: they provide the necessary citation information and can also accommodate supplementary commentary, digressions, or detailed descriptions that might disrupt the flow of the main text.

For art history theses, the notes are indispensable for detailing the specifics of artworks, such as dimensions, medium, date, current location, and collection information. They also allow for in-depth engagement with secondary literature, enabling the author to introduce nuanced scholarly debates or provide brief biographical sketches of artists without overwhelming the narrative. The direct relationship between a specific point in the text and its corresponding note ensures that the reader can easily trace the origin of ideas and information.

Footnotes and Endnotes: The Heart of CMOS Citation

Footnotes appear at the bottom of the page, while endnotes are collected at the end of the chapter or the

entire thesis. CMOS allows for either, but consistency is paramount. The initial citation of a source in a note is typically more detailed than subsequent citations of the same source. This includes the author's full name, the full title of the work (italicized), publication details (city, publisher, year), and specific page numbers. For art history, this initial note might also include accession numbers or collection details for artworks if they are being cited as primary sources.

Subsequent citations of the same work are typically shortened. This usually involves the author's last name, a shortened version of the title, and the page number. For example, a first note might read: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 12. A subsequent note for the same work would be: Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 35.

CMOS also provides guidelines for citing works that have been translated, edited, or are part of a series. The careful inclusion of these details ensures that the citation is precise and informative, allowing other scholars to access the exact material being referenced. This level of detail is particularly important in art history, where the precise edition of a text or the specific publication of an artwork can significantly impact interpretation.

Citing Artworks and Visual Materials

Citing artworks themselves, whether they are being analyzed as primary sources or reproduced as images, requires special attention under CMOS. When referring to an artwork in the text, the first mention should include the artist's name, the title of the work (italicized), the date of creation, the medium, the dimensions, and the current location or collection. For instance: Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889, oil on canvas, 29 x 36 1/4 inches, Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1941.

When an artwork is reproduced as an illustration within the thesis, CMOS specifies how to create captions and how to cite the source of the image. Captions typically include the same information as the initial citation of an artwork, followed by the source from which the image was obtained. For example: Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889, oil on canvas, 29 x 36 1/4 inches, Museum of Modern Art, New York. Image courtesy of Scala/Art Resource, New York.

Obtaining permission to reproduce images is a critical, often overlooked, aspect of art history theses. CMOS does not dictate the process of securing permissions but emphasizes the ethical and legal necessity of doing so. The author must ensure that all copyrighted images are used with appropriate authorization, and this permission should be acknowledged, often in a separate list of illustrations or within the image captions themselves. The thesis writer must proactively research the copyright status of artworks and consult with their institution's library or copyright office for guidance.

Bibliography and Reference Lists

The bibliography section of an art history thesis is a comprehensive alphabetical list of all sources cited in the notes. CMOS dictates a specific format for each type of source, ensuring uniformity and ease of reference. The bibliography should include all books, articles, exhibition catalogs, websites, and other materials consulted. While the notes provide the immediate citation, the bibliography allows readers to quickly survey the range of sources the author has engaged with.

The structure of bibliography entries differs slightly from the first note citation. For example, a book entry in the bibliography would typically start with the author's last name, followed by a comma, then their first name. The title remains italicized, followed by the publication information. For edited volumes, the editor's name is also included. The careful attention to detail in the bibliography mirrors that of the notes, reinforcing the author's commitment to scholarly rigor.

An important distinction in CMOS is the potential for a "References Cited" list versus a "Bibliography." While a bibliography aims to list all sources consulted, a references cited list is strictly limited to those sources that are actually cited within the text. For art history theses, a full bibliography is generally expected, reflecting the broad research undertaken.

Special Considerations for Art History Theses

Art history theses often involve unique challenges that CMOS helps to address. These include the interpretation of visual evidence, the analysis of exhibition histories, and the citation of ephemeral materials like gallery installations or performance art. The manual's flexibility allows for the nuanced description of visual elements and the attribution of authorship in collaborative projects or works where authorship is contested.

When discussing artworks, descriptive language is crucial. CMOS provides guidance on how to integrate descriptive passages smoothly into the narrative without resorting to jargon or overly technical language unless necessary and explained. The systematic approach to citing museums, galleries, and private collections ensures that the provenance and location of artworks are accurately recorded. This is vital for establishing the context and significance of the art being studied.

Furthermore, art history research often involves the use of archival materials, personal correspondence, and oral histories. CMOS offers specific guidelines for citing these primary sources, which can be more complex than citing published works. The emphasis remains on providing enough information for the reader to locate and understand the context of these materials, even if they are not readily accessible to the public.

Common Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

One of the most common pitfalls is inconsistency in citation style. Whether it's the formatting of dates, the use of italics, or the order of information in a note, a lack of consistency can detract from the professionalism of the thesis. Regularly consulting CMOS and using a citation management tool can help mitigate this. Another frequent error is failing to cite all sources, including images, paraphrased ideas, and direct quotes, leading to unintentional plagiarism.

Misinterpreting CMOS guidelines, especially regarding complex source types like exhibition catalogs or online databases, is also a challenge. Art history departments often provide specific examples or supplementary guides to CMOS tailored to the discipline, which should be utilized. Ensuring that artwork details are accurate and complete—including artist, title, date, medium, dimensions, and current location—is crucial and requires meticulous record-keeping throughout the research process.

Finally, neglecting to obtain necessary image permissions can lead to significant delays or require last-minute substitutions, impacting the visual argument of the thesis. Proactive planning and early inquiry regarding image rights are essential for a smooth and successful completion of the art history thesis.

Q: What is the primary citation system recommended by the Chicago Manual of Style for art history theses?

A: The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) primarily recommends the notes-bibliography system for art history theses. This system utilizes footnotes or endnotes for in-text citations and is followed by a comprehensive bibliography at the end of the work.

Q: How should I cite an artwork for the first time in my art history thesis using CMOS?

A: For the first citation of an artwork in your art history thesis using CMOS, you should include the artist's full name, the title of the work (italicized), the year of creation, the medium, the dimensions, and the current location or collection.

Q: Does the Chicago Manual of Style provide specific guidance on citing images in an art history thesis?

A: Yes, the Chicago Manual of Style provides specific guidance on creating captions for reproduced images in an art history thesis. Captions typically include essential artwork details and the source from which the image was obtained.

Q: What are the key differences between a footnote citation and a bibliography entry for a book in CMOS?

A: In a footnote citation, the author's full name is used first, followed by the title. In a bibliography entry, the author's last name is listed first, followed by their first name. Publication details also follow a specific order in each.

Q: Is it necessary to obtain permission to reproduce images in an art history thesis according to CMOS guidelines?

A: While CMOS itself doesn't dictate the legal process of obtaining permissions, it strongly implies and scholarly practice requires that authors secure necessary permissions for reproducing copyrighted images in their theses.

Q: How should I handle citing exhibition catalogs that are part of my art history research using CMOS?

A: Citing exhibition catalogs under CMOS involves providing details such as the exhibition title, the name of the museum or gallery hosting the exhibition, the city, the publisher of the catalog, the year of publication, and specific page numbers.

Q: Can I use endnotes instead of footnotes for my art history thesis according to CMOS?

A: Yes, the Chicago Manual of Style allows for the use of either footnotes or endnotes, provided that the chosen method is applied consistently throughout the entire thesis.

Q: What is the purpose of the bibliography in an art history thesis that follows CMOS?

A: The bibliography in an art history thesis following CMOS serves as an alphabetical list of all sources cited in the notes, allowing readers to review the full scope of research and easily locate the referenced materials.

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