

chicago style author date for phone call

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) has specific guidelines for citing various sources, and understanding how to properly document a phone call can be crucial for academic and professional writing. This article provides a comprehensive guide to Chicago style author-date citations for phone calls, covering the essential components of an in-text citation and a corresponding reference list entry. We will explore the nuances of identifying the "author" of a phone call, the importance of the date, and how to construct these citations accurately. Furthermore, we will delve into when and why such citations are necessary, ensuring clarity and proper attribution for informal, yet informative, sources. Mastering these principles will enhance the credibility of your work and allow readers to locate the information you are referencing.

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Understanding Chicago Style Author-Date for Phone Calls

Chicago style, particularly its author-date system, emphasizes providing readers with enough information to locate the source of a quotation or idea. While many sources, such as books and articles, have readily identifiable authors and publication dates, informal sources like phone calls present a unique challenge. The core principle remains the same: attribute the information to its origin and provide a date for verification. In the context of Chicago style author-date, the "author" of a phone call is typically the person who spoke and provided the information you are citing. This person's name serves as the primary identifier in your citation.

The date of the phone call is equally critical. Unlike published works with a definitive publication date, a phone call occurs at a specific moment in time. This date allows your reader to understand the context of the information and potentially seek confirmation if the information has evolved. The author-date system prioritizes brevity in-text while providing full details in a reference list. Therefore, understanding the components and their placement is essential for adhering to Chicago style guidelines.

In-Text Citations for Phone Calls

In Chicago style's author-date system, in-text citations are designed to be concise yet informative, directing the reader to the full entry in the reference list. For a phone call, the in-text citation will typically include the name of the person you spoke with and the date of the conversation. This format allows for quick verification without disrupting the flow of your prose.

Structure of the In-Text Citation

The standard format for an in-text citation of a phone call in Chicago style author-date is (Author Last Name, Year). However, when citing a phone call, the "author" is the individual you spoke with. Therefore, the citation would appear as (Speaker's Last Name, Year of Call). For instance, if you spoke with Dr. Jane Smith on October 26, 2023, and are referencing a piece of information from that conversation, your in-text citation would be (Smith, 2023).

Integrating In-Text Citations

You can integrate in-text citations seamlessly into your writing. When introducing a piece of information gained from a phone call, you can state the information and then follow it with the parenthetical citation. Alternatively, you can mention the speaker's name in your sentence and then place the date in parentheses immediately after their name, if their name is not already present in the main text of the sentence.

For example:

- The project timeline was extended due to unforeseen logistical challenges (Johnson, 2024).
- According to Sarah Johnson, the project timeline was extended due to unforeseen logistical challenges (2024).

In the second example, since the speaker's name is already integrated into the sentence, only the year is needed in the parenthetical citation to fulfill the author-date requirement. This offers a stylistic option that maintains clarity.

Reference List Entries for Phone Calls

The reference list, appearing at the end of your document, provides complete bibliographic information for

all sources cited. For a phone call, the entry needs to clearly identify the speaker, the date of the conversation, and the fact that it was a personal communication. This ensures that readers can distinguish it from other types of sources and understand its nature.

Essential Components of a Reference Entry

A reference list entry for a phone call should include the following key elements:

- The name of the person you spoke with (Last Name, First Name).
- The date of the phone call, formatted as Month Day, Year.
- A descriptor indicating the nature of the communication, such as "phone call" or "personal communication."

Formatting the Reference List Entry

The Chicago Manual of Style suggests a format that prioritizes clarity and ease of identification. The general structure for a phone call in the reference list is:

Last Name, First Name. Year of Call. Description of Communication (e.g., phone call with author, October 26, 2023).

For example, if you spoke with Dr. Jane Smith on October 26, 2023, the reference list entry would look like this:

Smith, Jane. 2023. Phone call with author, October 26.

It is important to be consistent with the description. If you refer to it as a "phone call" in one entry, maintain that phrasing. Some scholars also use "personal communication" followed by the date and medium.

When to Cite a Phone Call

Citing a phone call is not always necessary. The decision to include a citation for a phone conversation

depends on the nature of the information conveyed and its significance to your argument or findings. Generally, you should cite a phone call when the information obtained is:

Information Requiring Attribution

- Direct quotations from the speaker.
- Specific data, statistics, or facts not readily available in public sources.
- Expert opinions or interpretations that are crucial to your analysis.
- Personal anecdotes or experiences shared by the speaker that support your points.

If you are simply confirming a minor detail or engaging in general conversation that doesn't yield unique information, a citation may not be required. The guiding principle is to give credit where credit is due and to allow your readers to verify the source of any significant information.

Distinguishing from General Conversation

It's important to differentiate between information that requires formal citation and casual conversation. If a phone call is purely for background or informal discussion that doesn't directly contribute to the core arguments of your paper, you might choose not to cite it. However, if a specific piece of information from that call strengthens your thesis or provides essential evidence, then citing it becomes necessary.

Consider whether the information is unique or readily accessible elsewhere. If the speaker provides insights or data that are exclusive to them or their organization, and this information is critical to your work, then a citation is warranted. This ensures academic integrity and avoids presenting uncredited information as your own.

Special Considerations for Phone Call Citations

While the core principles of Chicago style author-date apply to phone calls, there are a few nuances to consider to ensure accuracy and clarity. These often relate to the "author" and the descriptive elements within the citation itself. Paying attention to these details will elevate the professionalism of your citation

practice.

Identifying the "Author" in Group Calls or Voicemails

In situations involving group calls or voicemails, identifying a single "author" can be complex. For group calls, cite the primary individual who provided the information you are referencing, if possible. If multiple individuals contributed key pieces of information, you may need to cite each individually with the specific information they provided attributed to them. For voicemails, the sender of the voicemail is considered the author. If the voicemail is from an organization or a representative thereof, you might cite the individual's name if known, or the organization if the message is general.

Handling Citing the Same Person Multiple Times

If you have spoken with the same individual multiple times for information within the same work, it is generally best to cite each distinct conversation or piece of information separately. Each time you draw upon information from a distinct conversation, create a new in-text citation referring to that specific call date and include a corresponding entry in your reference list if the information requires it. This prevents ambiguity and allows readers to pinpoint the exact source for each piece of information.

Consistency in referencing the specific date of each conversation is paramount. For example:

- (Davis, 2023) for a call on January 15, 2023.
- (Davis, 2024) for a call on March 10, 2024.

This approach ensures that the reader understands that the information comes from different interactions and contexts, even if from the same individual.

When Not to Cite

As mentioned previously, not every phone call warrants a citation. If a conversation was purely social, or if the information exchanged is common knowledge, readily available in published works, or already attributed elsewhere in your document, a formal citation is likely unnecessary. The goal is to cite when the phone call itself serves as the primary source of unique, verifiable information that supports your work.

Tips for Accurate Phone Call Documentation

To ensure your citations for phone calls are accurate and align with Chicago style author-date principles, adopting a systematic approach to documentation is highly recommended. These practices will save you time and prevent errors when compiling your reference list.

Keep Detailed Notes During or Immediately After the Call

The most effective way to accurately cite a phone call is to take thorough notes during the conversation or immediately afterward while the details are fresh. Record the following:

- The full name and title of the person you spoke with.
- The exact date and time of the call.
- Key pieces of information, including direct quotations.
- Any specific context or caveats the speaker provided.
- Your own notes about the significance of the information for your work.

These notes will serve as the raw material for your in-text citations and reference list entries, significantly reducing the risk of misremembering details or creating inaccurate citations.

Create a "Personal Communications" or "Informal Sources" Section if Needed

Some writers find it helpful to group all personal communications or informal sources together in a dedicated section of their reference list. This can improve organization, especially if you have a significant number of phone calls, interviews, or other personal communications cited in your work. Labeling this section clearly, such as "Personal Communications" or "Informal Sources," helps readers easily locate these types of references.

Within this section, maintain consistent alphabetical order by the speaker's last name. This structured approach makes your reference list more user-friendly and professional, ensuring that all sources, regardless of their format, are presented in an organized and accessible manner. Adhering to these tips will enhance

the overall quality and credibility of your academic or professional writing.

FAQ

Q: How do I cite a phone call if I don't have the person's last name?

A: If you only have the first name of the person you spoke with, you should try to obtain their last name. In academic or professional writing, using only a first name for a citation is generally not sufficient for proper attribution. If obtaining the last name is absolutely impossible and the information is critical, you may need to describe the person in a way that identifies them, such as "an anonymous spokesperson" followed by the date, but this is highly discouraged and should be a last resort, as it significantly weakens the citation's credibility.

Q: What if I took notes during a phone call but didn't record direct quotes?

A: If you have paraphrased information from a phone call and have detailed notes, you can still cite it. The citation would reflect the paraphrased information and the date of the call. Your reference list entry would still identify the speaker and the date of the communication. The key is to attribute the information to the speaker and the specific conversation, whether it's a direct quote or paraphrased content.

Q: Should I include the phone number or contact information in the citation?

A: No, generally you do not include the phone number or direct contact information in Chicago style author-date citations for phone calls, neither in-text nor in the reference list. The purpose of the citation is to identify the source of the information and the date it was obtained, not to provide a means for the reader to contact the source.

Q: How do I cite a voicemail I received?

A: To cite a voicemail in Chicago style author-date, treat the sender of the voicemail as the author. The reference list entry would typically include the sender's name, the date the voicemail was received, and a description such as "voicemail from [Sender's Name] regarding [topic]" or simply "voicemail." The in-text citation would follow the standard author-date format, using the sender's last name and the date the voicemail was received.

Q: Is it necessary to get permission from the person I spoke with before citing them?

A: While not always a strict requirement for citation purposes in academic writing, it is considered good ethical practice, especially if you are quoting them directly or using sensitive information. Obtaining permission can prevent misunderstandings and ensure that the person is comfortable with their words being attributed in your published work.

Q: What if the phone call was very brief and only a minor point was discussed?

A: If a phone call was brief and only a minor point, not crucial to your argument or containing unique information, was discussed, you may opt not to cite it. The decision to cite rests on the significance of the information obtained and whether it requires attribution to maintain academic integrity. If the information is common knowledge or easily verifiable elsewhere, a citation is usually not needed.

Q: How does citing a phone call differ from citing an interview conducted in person?

A: The core principles are similar, but the description in the reference list entry will differ. For an in-person interview, you would specify "interview with [Name]" rather than "phone call." The date and the interviewee's name remain key components for both. The in-text citations would follow the same author-date format.

Q: Can I cite a phone call as "personal communication" in the reference list?

A: Yes, some style guides, including variations within Chicago style, allow for the descriptor "personal communication." However, the Chicago Manual of Style tends to favor more specific descriptions like "phone call" or "email" when the medium is known. If you choose "personal communication," be consistent throughout your work and ensure the in-text citation still clearly identifies the speaker and date.

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