

chicago style bibliography for a government publication

The Comprehensive Guide to Chicago Style Bibliography for Government Publications

chicago style bibliography for a government publication demands precision and adherence to specific formatting rules, especially given the unique nature of official documents. Navigating these requirements can seem daunting, but understanding the core principles and common formats will empower you to cite government sources accurately. This article provides a detailed exploration of how to properly format bibliographical entries for a wide range of government publications within the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS). We will delve into the essential components of a citation, explore variations for different types of government documents like reports, laws, and agency websites, and offer practical tips to ensure your citations are both correct and effective. Mastering the Chicago style for government documents is crucial for academic integrity and clear communication.

Table of Contents

Understanding the Core Components of a Citation

Citing Government Reports

Citing Government Legislation and Legal Documents

Citing Government Websites and Online Resources

Citing Congressional Documents

Citing International Government Publications

Common Challenges and Solutions in Chicago Style Government Citations

Tips for Maintaining Accuracy

Understanding the Core Components of a Citation

When constructing a Chicago style bibliography entry for a government publication, several key pieces of information are consistently required to provide readers with enough detail to locate the source. These components form the backbone of any accurate citation and are adapted based on the specific type of government document you are referencing. Ensuring each element is present and correctly formatted is paramount for clarity and credibility in your academic work.

The fundamental elements generally include the authoring body or individual, the title of the publication, the publication information (city, publisher, year), and location details such as page numbers or URLs. For government publications, the "author" is often an agency, department, committee, or legislative body, rather than a single individual. The title should be presented in italics or roman type depending on the format and the nature of the publication, following CMOS guidelines. Publication details are crucial

for identifying the specific edition or version of the document, especially if it has been revised or reissued.

Authoring Body

The authoring body is arguably the most critical element in citing government publications. Unlike typical academic works authored by individuals, government documents are usually attributed to the specific agency, department, committee, or sub-agency responsible for their creation and dissemination. For example, a report from the United States Environmental Protection Agency would list the agency as the author. It is essential to be as specific as possible, often including the parent department if the agency is a sub-unit. This specificity helps researchers track down the exact origin of the information.

Title of the Publication

The title of the government publication should be presented accurately and clearly. CMOS dictates that book-length publications and reports are typically italicized, while articles or less formal documents may be in roman type within quotation marks. For government documents, titles often describe the subject matter or the nature of the document, such as "Annual Report," "Legislative Hearing," or "Statistical Abstract." Proper capitalization according to CMOS is also important.

Publication Information

Publication information for government documents includes the place of publication, the publisher, and the year of publication. For federal government documents of the United States, the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO), is the most common publisher and Washington, D.C., the place of publication. However, some documents might be published by specific agencies or issued by regional offices. It is vital to identify the publisher as accurately as possible. The year of publication is essential for establishing the currency of the information.

Series Information and Document Numbers

Many government publications are part of a numbered series, which can be a crucial identifier. For instance, reports from a particular congressional committee might be designated with a series number. Document numbers, such as SuDocs numbers (Superintendent of Documents classification numbers) or

specific report numbers, are also extremely valuable for locating government publications, especially in libraries and archives. These numbers should be included in your citation if available, often appearing after the title or publication details.

Citing Government Reports

Government reports are a cornerstone of public information and are frequently cited in academic research. The Chicago style for these documents requires careful attention to the authoring agency, the report title, and any identifying numbers or series information. Properly citing these reports ensures that your readers can easily access the original source of your data and analysis. Variations exist depending on whether the report is a standalone publication or part of a larger series.

When citing a government report, start with the name of the issuing agency. If the report has a specific author or authors listed within the agency, that individual's name can precede the agency name, usually introduced by "by." The title of the report should be italicized. Following the title, you will typically find the place of publication, the publisher (often the GPO for U.S. federal documents), and the year of publication. Including any series title and number, or specific report identifiers, is also crucial for accurate retrieval.

Agency Reports

For reports published by a specific agency, such as a study by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) or a statistical compilation by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the agency name serves as the primary author. For example, a report from the Environmental Protection Agency would begin with "United States. Environmental Protection Agency." The title of the report would follow, in italics. Publication details would then be provided. If the report is widely distributed, the publisher is typically the GPO; otherwise, it may be the agency itself.

Congressional Committee Reports

Reports issued by congressional committees have a slightly different format, often including the committee name and the Congress session number. For instance, a report from the Senate Judiciary Committee during the 117th Congress would be structured to reflect this. The committee is the authoring body, followed by the report title. Often, these reports have specific document numbers like S. Rep. or H. Rep., which are essential to include.

CMOS provides specific guidelines for the abbreviation and formatting of these legislative report numbers.

Citing Government Legislation and Legal Documents

Citing government legislation and other legal documents in Chicago style requires a specialized approach due to the formal and often complex nature of these sources. This includes statutes, laws, court decisions, and executive orders. The goal is to provide a clear reference that allows legal scholars and researchers to pinpoint the exact text of the law or decision being referenced. CMOS offers specific guidelines for legal citations, often mirroring legal citation styles in certain aspects.

When citing statutes, the common practice is to include the official title of the act, the public law number, and the year it was enacted. For court decisions, the case name, volume and reporter where it is found, and the court and year are essential. Executive orders and presidential documents also have specific citation formats, typically including the order number and the Federal Register citation where it was published.

Statutes and Public Laws

To cite a federal statute, you will typically include the official title of the act, followed by its designation as a public law or a specific chapter number if applicable, and the year of enactment. For example, "Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Pub. L. no. 101-336, 104 Stat. 327." The "Stat." refers to the United States Statutes at Large, the official record of federal laws. State statutes are cited similarly, referencing the relevant state's compiled laws and session laws.

Court Decisions

Citing court decisions involves referencing the case name, the reporter volume and its abbreviation, the page number where the decision begins, and the court that issued the decision along with the year. For instance, a U.S. Supreme Court case might be cited as *Marbury v. Madison*, 5 U.S. (1 Cranch) 137 (1803). This format provides the case name, the volume and abbreviation of the reporter (United States Reports, abbreviated as U.S.), the starting page number, and the court and year. Federal and state court citations follow similar principles.

Executive Orders and Presidential Documents

Executive orders and other presidential documents are typically published in the United States Statutes at Large and the Federal Register. A citation for an executive order would include its number, title (if any), and the source where it was published, such as the Federal Register or the Code of Federal Regulations. For example, "Executive Order no. 13702, 80 Fed. Reg. 51971 (2015)." The Federal Register citation provides the volume, page, and year of publication.

Citing Government Websites and Online Resources

In the digital age, many government publications and documents are accessed online. Citing these electronic resources requires adaptations to the traditional Chicago style to include URLs and access dates, ensuring that readers can find the specific online version of the document. This is particularly important for ephemeral online content or documents that may change over time.

When citing a government website, the general principles of author, title, and publication information still apply. However, you will need to include the URL and, importantly, the date you accessed the material. This is because web content can be updated or removed without notice, making the access date critical for reproducibility. If a stable PDF version of a document is available, it is often preferable to cite that rather than a dynamic webpage.

Agency Websites

For documents or information found on an agency's official website, treat the agency as the author. The title of the specific page or document should be presented, followed by the website's name (which is usually the agency name again), and then the URL. Crucially, you must include the date of access in parentheses at the end of the citation. For example, "United States. Department of Health and Human Services. 'About Us.' Accessed November 15, 2023. [URL]." If a publication date is clearly indicated on the page, it can also be included before the access date.

Online Reports and Documents

If a government report or document is available online, but has a clear publication origin (like a specific agency and publication date), you would cite it much like a printed report but include the URL and access date. For

example, if you accessed a PDF report from the Congressional Research Service online, the citation would include the agency, title, publication year, and then the URL and access date. It's often beneficial to cite the specific URL where the PDF was downloaded.

Citing Congressional Documents

Congressional documents, including bills, hearings, reports, and debates, are a significant source of information on U.S. federal policy and legislative history. Chicago style provides specific formatting for these materials to ensure clarity and ease of access for researchers. These documents are often found through resources like the Government Publishing Office (GPO) or specialized databases.

When citing congressional documents, it is important to identify the chamber (House or Senate), the committee involved, the document type (bill, report, hearing), and any relevant numbers (bill number, report number, Congress session). The title of the document is also essential, along with the date of its publication or session. Including citations to official government publication series, such as the Congressional Record, is also common.

Congressional Bills

Citing a congressional bill requires the bill number, the chamber in which it was introduced, and the Congress session. For example, "H.R. 1, 117th Cong., 1st sess. (2021)." This indicates House of Representatives Bill number 1, introduced in the first session of the 117th Congress. If the bill became law, you would also cite its Public Law number.

Congressional Hearings

Congressional hearings are transcribed records of public testimonies and discussions related to proposed legislation or other matters of congressional interest. A citation for a hearing typically includes the committee or subcommittee holding the hearing, the title of the hearing, the Congress and session, and the date of the hearing. For example, "Oversight of the Department of Justice: Hearing before the S. Comm. on the Judiciary, 117th Cong., 1st sess., March 10, 2021."

Congressional Debates (Congressional Record)

Debates in Congress are published in the Congressional Record. Citations for material from the Congressional Record include the volume number, abbreviation of the publication, the page number, and the date. For example, "160 Cong. Rec. S1234 (daily ed. Mar. 15, 2022)." The "daily ed." indicates the version of the Record that is often cited.

Citing International Government Publications

Government publications are not limited to national bodies; international organizations also produce a wealth of documents relevant to global studies, economics, and policy. Citing these international government publications requires an understanding of how to attribute them correctly and to provide publication details that are accessible to an international audience.

For international bodies like the United Nations or the World Health Organization, the organization itself is the author. The title of the document, its report number or series designation, and the publication details (city, publisher, year) are crucial. For international legal instruments, specific citation formats apply, often referencing treaty databases or official compilations.

United Nations Publications

Citing United Nations documents often involves using the official document symbol (a unique alphanumeric identifier) and the title of the publication. For example, "United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, World Economic and Social Survey 2023: Entering a New Era of Global Cooperation (2023)." UN documents are often published in Geneva or New York. Including the publication year is standard.

European Union Publications

Publications from the European Union (EU) are diverse, ranging from regulations and directives to reports from various EU institutions. Citations typically identify the relevant institution (e.g., European Commission, European Parliament), the title of the publication, and its official publication reference or number, along with the year. For instance, "European Commission, White Paper on Artificial Intelligence: A European Approach to Excellence and Trustworthiness (2020)."

Common Challenges and Solutions in Chicago Style Government Citations

Working with government publications often presents unique challenges that can make precise Chicago style citation a complex task. These challenges stem from the sheer volume of documents, varying publication practices across different agencies and levels of government, and the infrequent inclusion of traditional bibliographic information like author bylines or ISBNs.

One common difficulty is identifying the correct authoring body, especially when documents are produced by sub-committees or task forces within larger agencies. Another challenge is distinguishing between official government publications and reports from affiliated non-governmental organizations. When encountering these issues, consulting the publication itself for explicit attribution, cross-referencing with official government databases, and adhering strictly to the most specific CMOS guidelines available are essential strategies.

Varying Author Attribution

Government documents may be attributed to a specific department, an agency, a commission, or even a committee. Sometimes, a report might list individual authors within an agency. In Chicago style, the most specific responsible entity should be listed as the author. If individual authors are named and significant, they can be listed first, followed by the agency. If no specific individuals are named, the agency or department becomes the primary author. It is crucial to capture this hierarchy correctly.

Identifying Official vs. Unofficial Sources

Distinguishing between official government publications and those produced by affiliated think tanks or research institutions can be tricky. Always look for indicators of official publication, such as government printing office imprints, official document numbers, or explicit statements of origin on the document. When in doubt, err on the side of caution and try to find corroborating evidence of its official status. If it is not an official publication, it should be cited according to standard book or report formats.

Locating Obscure Documents

Some government documents, particularly older ones or those from less prominent agencies, can be difficult to locate. CMOS encourages providing as

much information as possible to aid retrieval. This includes using Superintendent of Documents (SuDocs) numbers, report numbers, or identifying the specific library or archive where the document was found if it is not readily available through standard online repositories. Searching government archives and specialized bibliographical tools can be necessary.

Tips for Maintaining Accuracy

Maintaining accuracy in your Chicago style bibliography for government publications is paramount for the credibility of your research. It ensures that your readers can verify your information and build upon your work. The key lies in meticulous attention to detail and a systematic approach to citation.

Develop a consistent workflow for documenting your sources as you encounter them. This means taking notes on author, title, publication details, and URLs immediately. Familiarize yourself with the CMOS online resources or the latest edition of the Manual, as guidelines can be updated. When citing complex government documents, it is often helpful to consult examples specific to that type of publication, if available, and to be patient, as the process can be intricate.

- Always double-check the spelling of agency names and titles.
- Verify publication dates and any assigned document or report numbers.
- When citing online resources, confirm that URLs are active and that access dates are current.
- Use quotation marks and italics consistently as per CMOS guidelines.
- If unsure about a specific element, consult the latest edition of The Chicago Manual of Style or its online resources.
- Consider using citation management software, but always review its output for government publications, as it may require manual adjustments.

FAQ Section

Q: What is the most important element to get right when citing a government publication in Chicago style?

A: The most important element is correctly identifying and citing the authoring body, which for government publications is typically an agency, department, committee, or legislative body, rather than an individual author.

Q: How do I cite a government report that I accessed online?

A: When citing a government report accessed online, you will include the authoring agency, the report title, publication details, and importantly, the URL and the date you accessed the material.

Q: What is a SuDocs number and should I include it in my citation?

A: A SuDocs number (Superintendent of Documents classification number) is a unique identifier used to catalog U.S. federal government documents. You should include it in your citation if it is available, as it greatly aids in locating the publication.

Q: How do I cite a congressional bill in Chicago style?

A: To cite a congressional bill, you need to include its bill number, the chamber it was introduced in (e.g., H.R. for House of Representatives, S. for Senate), the Congress session number, and the year. For example: H.R. 1, 117th Cong., 1st sess. (2021).

Q: Are there special rules for citing international government publications?

A: Yes, for international publications (e.g., from the UN or EU), the organization itself is the author, and you will typically cite its official document symbol or report number, along with the title and publication details.

Q: What should I do if a government publication doesn't have a clear author listed?

A: If no specific author is listed, treat the government agency, department, or legislative body that issued the document as the author. Be as specific as

possible.

Q: How do I cite a government website page in Chicago style?

A: When citing a specific page on a government website, list the agency as the author, the title of the page, the website name (usually the agency name again), the URL, and the date of access.

Q: Should I italicize the title of a government report?

A: Yes, according to Chicago Manual of Style guidelines, book-length publications, including most government reports and standalone documents, should have their titles italicized.

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