

chicago style footnote example personal communication

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) provides comprehensive guidelines for academic and professional writing, and understanding its intricacies is crucial for accurate citation. This article delves into a specific, often nuanced, aspect of Chicago style: the footnote example for personal communication. We will explore the necessary components of citing various forms of personal interaction, from emails and interviews to social media messages and phone calls, ensuring proper attribution and allowing readers to locate your sources. Mastering this citation method is essential for maintaining academic integrity and providing transparency in your research. This guide will break down the process with clear examples and practical advice for every writer.

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Understanding Personal Communication in Chicago Style

In academic and research writing, personal communication refers to information exchanged directly between individuals that is not published or readily accessible to the public. This can include conversations, interviews, letters, emails, phone calls, and even direct messages on social media platforms. Properly citing personal communication is vital for giving credit to your sources, avoiding plagiarism, and allowing your readers to verify the information you present. The Chicago Manual of Style, widely adopted in humanities and some social sciences, offers specific rules for these types of citations to ensure clarity and consistency.

The primary goal of citing personal communication is to acknowledge the information's origin without overburdening the reader with details that are difficult or impossible for them to access. Unlike published works, personal communications are typically not available in libraries or online databases. Therefore, Chicago style prioritizes providing enough information in the footnote for the reader to understand the nature and context of the communication, and in some cases, how to follow up with the source if necessary, while keeping the bibliography entry concise or often omitting it entirely.

Key Components of a Chicago Style Personal Communication

Footnote

When creating a footnote for personal communication in Chicago style, several essential pieces of information must be included. These components work together to clearly identify the source of the information. The specific details required can vary slightly depending on the mode of communication, but the core elements remain consistent. Accurate and complete inclusion of these details is paramount for adhering to the style guide.

The fundamental elements generally include:

- The type of communication (e.g., email, interview, phone call).
- The date of the communication.
- The name of the communicator.
- The relationship of the communicator to the author, if relevant and helpful for context.
- The specific content or topic discussed, if not immediately obvious from the text.
- Location of the communication, if applicable (e.g., city for an interview).

The exact phrasing and order of these components are important for adhering to Chicago style's precision. It's crucial to remember that personal communications are typically not listed in a bibliography because they are not retrievable by the reader. The footnote serves as the sole point of reference.

Citing Emails in Chicago Style

Emails are a common form of personal communication encountered in research. Citing an email in a Chicago style footnote requires specific formatting to ensure clarity and accuracy. The primary aim is to identify who sent the email, when it was sent, and what it pertains to, without including the sender's full email address or requiring the reader to access private correspondence.

When referencing an email you received, the footnote typically begins with the sender's name, followed by the nature of the communication and the date it was sent. For instance, if you received an email from a professor about a research paper, the footnote might look like this:

- John Smith to author, November 15, 2023, regarding the early draft of the research paper.

If you sent an email to someone and are referencing their reply, you would cite their reply in the same

manner. If you are quoting directly from the email, you should also include the relevant quoted text within the footnote or indicate that the information is derived from the email. It is generally good practice to provide enough context so the reader understands why this personal communication is relevant to your argument.

It is important to note that if the email is publicly archived or shared with a wider group (e.g., a mailing list that is publicly accessible), it might be treated differently and could potentially be included in a bibliography. However, for private, one-to-one emails, the footnote is the standard method of citation.

Citing Interviews in Chicago Style

Interviews are a cornerstone of qualitative research, and Chicago style provides clear guidance on how to cite them in footnotes. Whether conducted in person, over the phone, or via video conference, interviews represent a direct exchange of information that needs proper attribution.

A typical footnote for an interview will include the interviewee's name, the fact that it was an interview, the date it took place, and the location if it was an in-person interview. For example:

- Interview with Jane Doe, conducted via Zoom, October 26, 2023.

If you are quoting a specific passage or referring to a particular piece of information from the interview, you may want to add details about the context or specific point being referenced within the footnote. For instance:

- Interview with John Adams, conducted in his office, Chicago, IL, December 1, 2023, regarding his early experiences in the civil rights movement.

It is also important to consider whether the interview was recorded. If a recording exists and is accessible (e.g., provided to you by the interviewee), you might note its existence. However, for most standard interview citations, the focus remains on the factual details of the interview itself.

Citing Phone Calls and Conversations in Chicago Style

Spontaneous conversations and scheduled phone calls also constitute personal communication and require appropriate citation when their content is used in your writing. The principles for citing these are similar to emails and interviews, focusing on identifying the source and timing of the exchange.

When citing a phone call, the footnote should include the name of the person you spoke with, the fact that it was a phone call or conversation, and the date. For example:

- Phone call with Professor Emily Carter, September 10, 2023.

If you are referencing a casual conversation that occurred during a meeting or event, you can describe it as such. For instance:

- Conversation with Dr. David Lee, following the departmental seminar, March 2, 2024.

As with other forms of personal communication, if a specific piece of information or a direct quote is being used, it is helpful to provide a brief contextual note within the footnote. The goal is to enable the reader to understand the origin of the information without requiring them to access private conversations.

Citing Social Media and Digital Messages in Chicago Style

In today's digital landscape, direct messages on social media platforms, instant messages, and other forms of digital personal communication are increasingly common sources of information. Chicago style has adapted to include these, though the guidelines can be more flexible due to the varying nature of these platforms.

When citing a direct message, for instance, on Twitter or Instagram, the footnote should identify the platform, the users involved, and the date. For example:

- Direct message from @userA to author, Twitter, July 15, 2024.

For instant messenger conversations (e.g., via WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger), the format would be similar, emphasizing the participants and the date. If the conversation is ongoing or particularly lengthy, you might specify a particular message or exchange. For example:

- Instant message exchange with Sarah Chen, WhatsApp, March 5-6, 2024.

It is crucial to remember that the privacy settings of social media platforms play a role. Citing content from private messages is standard, but referencing publicly posted content on social media might be handled differently and could potentially be included in a bibliography if it meets the criteria for published material.

When Personal Communication Does Not Require a Citation

While it is generally best practice to cite all information derived from external sources, not all personal communication necessitates a formal footnote in Chicago style. Understanding these exceptions can help streamline your writing process and avoid unnecessary clutter in your footnotes.

Information that is considered common knowledge within a specific field, or general background information that you have acquired through personal interaction but is widely known, often does not require citation. For example, if you had a brief conversation with a colleague about a well-established

theory in your discipline, and you are simply referencing the theory itself, a footnote might not be needed. Similarly, casual exchanges of information that do not form the basis of a specific argument or assertion in your work may not require a citation.

However, caution is advised. If the information you received from personal communication is specific, unique, or critical to your argument, it almost always requires a footnote. When in doubt, it is safer to cite. The primary principle is to ensure that your readers can identify the source of any factual claims or unique insights presented in your text.

Final Considerations for Personal Communication Citations

When navigating the citation of personal communication in Chicago style, a few overarching principles should guide your practice. Consistency in your formatting is paramount. Once you establish a method for citing a particular type of personal communication, adhere to it throughout your work. This not only helps you maintain accuracy but also makes your citations easier for your readers to follow.

Remember that the primary purpose of any citation, including for personal communication, is to provide transparency and attribution. Your footnotes should be clear enough for a knowledgeable reader to understand the origin of the information without needing access to private or unpublished materials. While Chicago style offers specific guidelines, the context of your research and the nature of the communication itself will often inform the best approach.

Always consult the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* or its online resources if you encounter complex or unusual situations. Understanding these nuances ensures that your academic work is both rigorously sourced and impeccably presented, upholding the highest standards of scholarly integrity.

Q: What is the primary difference between citing a personal email and a published article in Chicago style?

A: The primary difference lies in the accessibility of the source. Personal emails are private correspondence and are not publicly available, so they are cited only in footnotes. Published articles are accessible to the public and are therefore cited in both footnotes and a bibliography.

Q: Do I need to include the recipient's email address in a Chicago style footnote for an email?

A: No, you do not need to include the recipient's email address in a Chicago style footnote. The footnote should identify the sender and the date, and provide enough context for the reader to understand the nature of the communication.

Q: If I interviewed someone over the phone, how should I indicate this in my Chicago style footnote?

A: For a phone interview, you would typically include the interviewee's name, specify that it was a "phone interview," and provide the date. For example: "Interview with Jane Doe, phone interview, October 26, 2023."

Q: Can I cite a Facebook comment as personal communication in Chicago style?

A: Whether a Facebook comment is cited as personal communication depends on its context and accessibility. If it's a private message, it would be treated as personal communication. If it's a public comment on a post, it might be treated as published online material and potentially included in a bibliography.

Q: Do I need to list personal communications in my bibliography in Chicago style?

A: Generally, no. Personal communications are typically not listed in the bibliography in Chicago style because they are not retrievable by the reader. The footnote serves as the sole citation.

Q: What if I had a conversation with a colleague that provided crucial information for my research?

A: Even a crucial conversation with a colleague needs to be cited. You would note the person's name, describe the interaction (e.g., "conversation with Dr. Smith"), and provide the date. For instance: "Conversation with Dr. John Smith, December 10, 2023."

Q: How do I cite a text message conversation in Chicago style?

A: For a text message conversation, you would typically indicate the sender, the platform (e.g., "text message"), and the date. For example: "Text message from Sarah Lee, November 20, 2023." If the conversation spanned multiple days, you would note that.

Q: What if the personal communication is very informal, like a quick

chat?

A: Even informal chats that provide specific information relevant to your research should be acknowledged. You can describe the interaction concisely, for example, "Brief conversation with Alex Chen at the conference, October 15, 2023." The key is to identify the source and timing.

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