

chicago style for art history papers

The Importance of Chicago Style for Art History Papers

chicago style for art history papers provides a standardized framework crucial for academic integrity, clarity, and scholarly communication within the discipline. Mastering its nuances ensures that your research is presented professionally, allowing your arguments about visual culture and historical contexts to shine. This comprehensive guide will delve into the core components of Chicago style, focusing specifically on its application to art historical research. We will explore essential elements such as in-text citations, bibliography formatting, and the specific considerations for describing artworks and referencing visual sources. Understanding these guidelines not only helps avoid plagiarism but also enhances the credibility and impact of your written work. This article aims to equip students and scholars with the knowledge to confidently navigate the intricacies of Chicago style in their art history essays, research papers, and theses.

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Understanding the Chicago Manual of Style

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) is a widely respected and comprehensive style guide originating from the University of Chicago Press. It offers detailed recommendations on all aspects of manuscript preparation, from punctuation and grammar to citation and indexing. For academic writing, particularly in the humanities, Chicago style is a go-to resource. Its flexibility allows for adaptations to specific disciplinary needs, making it exceptionally well-suited for the complex and visually driven field of art history.

Unlike some other styles that might be more rigid, Chicago style offers two primary systems for citation: the Notes-Bibliography system and the Author-Date system. The choice between these often depends on the specific requirements of the publisher or academic institution, but for art history, the Notes-Bibliography system is overwhelmingly preferred. This preference stems from the need for detailed descriptive notes that can accommodate rich contextual information about artworks and their provenance, which are vital in art historical analysis.

The Two Citation Systems: Notes-Bibliography and Author-Date

The Chicago Manual of Style presents two distinct approaches to referencing sources: the Notes-Bibliography (NB) system and the Author-Date (AD) system. While both systems are valid under Chicago, their application in academic disciplines varies significantly. Art history, with its emphasis on nuanced discussion of specific works and their historical context, typically favors the NB system.

The Notes-Bibliography System

The Notes-Bibliography system is characterized by the use of numbered footnotes or endnotes within the text to cite sources, accompanied by a comprehensive bibliography at the end of the paper. This system is particularly advantageous for art history because footnotes and endnotes allow for detailed discussions and contextual information to be presented alongside the main body of the text without disrupting the flow. You can include provenance details, brief biographical information about artists, or additional commentary that enriches the reader's understanding, all linked directly to the point in the text it supports.

The Author-Date System

The Author-Date system, on the other hand, uses parenthetical in-text citations that include the author's last name and the year of publication (e.g., (Smith 2020)). This is followed by a reference list at the end. While common in sciences and social sciences, this system is less frequently used in art history. Its brevity can sometimes make it challenging to convey the extensive descriptive and contextual information often required when discussing art objects, artists, and their historical significance. Therefore, for art history papers, focusing on the NB system is generally the most appropriate path.

In-Text Citations: The Foundation of Chicago Style

In the Notes-Bibliography system of Chicago style, in-text citations are handled through superscript Arabic numerals. Each numeral corresponds to a footnote at the bottom of the page or an endnote at the end of the document. These notes provide the necessary information to identify the source being referenced. For art history papers, the precision in these citations is paramount, especially when referring to specific details within a source or when introducing a new idea derived from a particular scholar.

The placement of the superscript numeral is crucial. It should typically appear after the punctuation mark of the clause or sentence it relates to, or at the end of a sentence or phrase. For example, if a statement is directly quoted or paraphrased from a source, the numeral follows the final punctuation. If the citation refers to a specific element within the sentence, it may be placed immediately after that element, though this is less common and should be used judiciously to avoid

clutter.

Footnotes and Endnotes: Detailed Attribution in Art History

Footnotes and endnotes serve as the backbone of the Notes-Bibliography system, offering a more detailed and flexible approach to referencing than simple parenthetical citations. In art history, where the lineage of an artwork, the nuances of its interpretation, and the scholarly debates surrounding it are often complex, these notes are indispensable.

First Reference Notes

When a source is cited for the first time, its footnote or endnote entry should be complete. This typically includes the author's full name, the title of the work (italicized for books and journals, in quotation marks for articles), publication information (city, publisher, year for books; volume and year for journals), and specific page numbers. For example, a first note for a book might look like: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 10.

Subsequent Reference Notes

After the first full citation, subsequent references to the same source can be significantly shortened. A common format is to use the author's last name, a shortened title (if citing multiple works by the same author), and the page number(s). For instance: Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 25. If you have only cited one work by a particular author, you might omit the title altogether: Berger, 25. This brevity helps keep the notes concise while still providing sufficient information for the reader to locate the source in the bibliography.

When to Use Notes

Notes are not solely for direct citations. They are also ideal for:

- Providing supplementary information or commentary that would interrupt the flow of the main text.
- Expanding on an idea or providing additional evidence.
- Acknowledging the work of other scholars or indicating a departure from established interpretations.
- Offering brief biographical details about an artist or patron when relevant.

- Listing multiple sources that support a particular point.

In art history, these supplementary uses are particularly valuable for discussing provenance, exhibition history, or the material condition of an artwork, all of which might be too detailed for the main narrative but are crucial for scholarly rigor.

The Bibliography: A Comprehensive Record of Sources

The bibliography is an alphabetical list of all the sources consulted and cited in your art history paper. It serves as a roadmap for your research, allowing readers to easily locate and verify the materials you used. The format for bibliography entries is similar to the first reference notes, but with a few key differences in punctuation and order.

Bibliography Entry Structure

For books, the bibliography entry generally begins with the author's last name, followed by their first name. Then comes the italicized title, followed by the publication information (city, publisher, year). For articles in journals, it starts with the author's name, followed by the article title in quotation marks, the journal title in italics, the volume and issue numbers, and the year. Page numbers for the entire article are included, not just the cited pages.

Example Bibliography Entries

- **Book:** Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. New York: Penguin Books, 1972.
- **Journal Article:** Clark, T. J. "Rembrandt and the Details of Modern Life." *Critical Inquiry* 11, no. 3 (March 1985): 390-410.
- **Exhibition Catalogue:** Arnason, H. H. *History of Modern Art*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003.

The bibliography should be meticulously compiled, ensuring that every source cited in the notes appears here, and vice versa. Alphabetical order by author's last name is standard, with the exception of entries that do not begin with an author's name, which are alphabetized by the first significant word of the title.

Formatting Artworks and Visual Materials

One of the unique challenges in art history is citing visual materials. Chicago style provides guidelines for referencing artworks themselves, as well as reproductions and images found in books, articles, or online. This requires attention to detail regarding the artwork's title, artist, date, medium, dimensions, and current location.

Referencing the Artwork Itself

When you are discussing a specific artwork as your primary subject, you will often introduce it in the text and then provide detailed citation information in a footnote or endnote, especially if it's the first time you are referencing it. This information is crucial for identification. The format typically includes the artist's name, the title of the artwork (italicized), the date of creation, the medium, dimensions, and the collection or location where it is housed.

For example, a footnote entry for Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* might appear as:

- Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa* (La Gioconda), c. 1503–1506, oil on poplar panel, 77 × 53 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

The details provided should be as complete as available from your research. If you are citing a photograph of the artwork, the citation would also include information about the photograph itself, usually indicating the source of the reproduction.

Referencing Reproductions and Images

When you cite an image of an artwork that appears in a book, journal, or online, your citation needs to reflect the source of the reproduction. The footnote or endnote will first describe the artwork as above, followed by the citation for the publication or website where you found the image.

For an image in a book, it might look like:

- Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, c. 1503–1506, oil on poplar panel, 77 × 53 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Reproduced in Mary Ann Smith, *Italian Renaissance Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 123.

If citing an image from an online museum collection, you would include the artist, title, date, medium, and collection, followed by the museum's website URL and the accession number if

available.

Referencing Specific Art Historical Sources

Art history relies heavily on a variety of specialized sources, including exhibition catalogues, auction records, museum collection databases, and primary source documents. Chicago style provides a framework for citing these effectively.

Exhibition Catalogues

Exhibition catalogues are crucial resources in art history, often containing in-depth essays, high-quality reproductions, and extensive provenance information. When citing a catalogue, treat it as a book, but ensure you include the exhibition title, dates, and location if relevant, in addition to the publication details.

A typical entry might be:

- Rubin, William S., ed. *Picasso in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977.

If you are citing an essay within the catalogue, you would follow the format for citing an essay in an edited book, noting the essay author, title, and then the catalogue details.

Online Museum Collections and Databases

Citing online resources requires careful attention to ensure the information remains accessible. For museum websites, include the artist, artwork title, date, medium, collection, and then the website name, URL, and date of access. It's also beneficial to include the accession number if the museum provides one.

An example for an online museum record:

- "The Starry Night." Vincent van Gogh. 1889. Oil on canvas. Museum of Modern Art. Accessed October 26, 2023. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/79802>.

Always check if the museum or database provides specific citation guidelines, as these can sometimes offer more tailored recommendations.

Common Pitfalls and Best Practices in Chicago Style

Navigating Chicago style can present challenges, especially for those new to art historical research. Awareness of common mistakes and adherence to best practices can significantly improve the quality and credibility of your work.

Common Errors to Avoid

- **Inconsistent Citation Format:** Failing to maintain a consistent format for footnotes, endnotes, and bibliography entries. This includes variations in punctuation, capitalization, and the order of information.
- **Incorrect Punctuation with Superscripts:** Placing superscript numbers before or after punctuation incorrectly, which can lead to ambiguity.
- **Omitting Essential Information:** Forgetting crucial details like page numbers in notes, publication dates, or the full title of a source in the bibliography.
- **Citing Only the Image Source:** When discussing an artwork, citing only the book or website where you saw its reproduction, rather than the artwork itself.
- **Plagiarism:** Improperly paraphrasing or failing to cite sources adequately, even unintentionally.
- **Unalphabetized Bibliography:** Presenting the bibliography in an order other than alphabetical by author's last name.

Best Practices for Art History Papers

- **Start Early:** Begin familiarizing yourself with Chicago style and the specific requirements of your assignment well in advance of the deadline.
- **Use a Style Manual:** Keep a current edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* readily accessible, or consult reputable online resources that explain its application.
- **Consult Examples:** Look at published art history articles or books that use Chicago style to observe how citations are formatted in practice.
- **Be Meticulous:** Accuracy and consistency are key. Double-check every detail in your citations against your source materials.
- **Utilize Citation Management Software:** Tools like Zotero, Mendeley, or EndNote can help

manage your sources and generate bibliographies, but always review their output for accuracy.

- **Proofread Carefully:** Dedicate time to thoroughly proofread your citations and bibliography. A final read-through specifically for citation errors is highly recommended.
- **Seek Clarification:** If you are unsure about any aspect of Chicago style, do not hesitate to ask your professor or a librarian for guidance.

Advanced Considerations for Art History Papers

Beyond the fundamental rules, art history papers may require addressing more complex citation scenarios, particularly when dealing with primary sources, archival materials, or digital art.

Primary Sources and Archival Materials

Primary sources, such as letters, diaries, manifestos, or artist statements, are vital for art historical research. When citing these, provide as much detail as possible about their origin, such as the archival collection, box and folder numbers, and dates. If the primary source is published in a compiled volume, cite it as a published primary source.

For archival material, a note might look like:

- Letter from Henri Matisse to Gertrude Stein, April 12, 1910, Matisse Family Papers, Archives Départementales des Alpes-Maritimes, Nice, France, Box 12, Folder 3.

Digital Art and New Media

Citing digital art or interactive online works can be challenging. Follow the principles of clarity and accessibility. For works embedded in websites or presented as online projects, cite the artist, title, website name, URL, and date of access. If the work has a specific accession or catalogue number, include it. For ephemeral digital art, the date of access becomes particularly important.

When discussing the critical reception or theoretical underpinnings of art movements or specific artists, ensure that your Chicago style citations accurately reflect the scholarly discourse. This meticulous attention to detail in your referencing will bolster the authority and persuasiveness of your art historical arguments.

The consistent and accurate application of Chicago style, especially the Notes-Bibliography system,

is not merely a matter of following rules; it is an integral part of constructing a sound and reputable art historical argument. By mastering these guidelines, you demonstrate a commitment to scholarly rigor and enable your readers to engage deeply with your research and the visual culture you explore.

FAQ: Chicago Style for Art History Papers

Q: What is the primary citation system recommended for art history papers using Chicago style?

A: The Notes-Bibliography (NB) system is overwhelmingly recommended and most commonly used for art history papers in Chicago style. This system employs footnotes or endnotes for in-text citations and a comprehensive bibliography at the end, which allows for the detailed explanations and contextual information often required in art historical analysis.

Q: How should I cite an artwork in Chicago style when it's my primary focus?

A: When referencing an artwork as your main subject, your first citation (usually a footnote or endnote) should include the artist's full name, the italicized title of the artwork, the date of creation, the medium, dimensions, and the collection or location where it is housed. For example: Claude Monet, *Impression, Sunrise*, 1872, oil on canvas, 48 × 63 cm, Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.

Q: What is the difference between a first reference note and a subsequent reference note in Chicago style?

A: A first reference note provides complete bibliographical information for a source. Subsequent reference notes, when referring to the same source again, are shortened. Typically, they include the author's last name, a shortened version of the title (if citing multiple works by the same author), and the specific page number(s).

Q: How do I cite a reproduction of an artwork found in a book or journal using Chicago style?

A: When citing a reproduction, you first provide the details of the artwork itself (artist, title, date, medium, etc.), followed by the citation for the publication where the reproduction appears. For instance: Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889, oil on canvas. Reproduced in Meyer Schapiro, *Vincent van Gogh* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1950), 88.

Q: What are some common mistakes art history students make when using Chicago style?

A: Common mistakes include inconsistent citation formats, incorrect placement of footnote/endnote numbers relative to punctuation, omitting essential publication details, and failing to cite artwork provenance accurately. Another frequent error is citing only the source of a reproduction rather than the artwork itself.

Q: Should I use italics or quotation marks for artwork titles in Chicago style?

A: Artwork titles, like book titles, should be italicized in Chicago style when mentioned in the text or in citations. However, titles of articles, essays, or chapters that appear within larger works are placed in quotation marks.

Q: How do I cite an exhibition catalogue in Chicago style?

A: An exhibition catalogue is typically cited as a book. The entry should include the editor(s) if applicable, the title of the exhibition catalogue (italicized), the place of publication, the publisher, and the year. For example: Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, eds., *High & Modern Art, Complicit & Critical* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998).

Q: What information should be included when citing a source from an online museum collection?

A: When citing an online museum collection, include the artist's name, the artwork's title (italicized), date of creation, medium, collection name, the website name, the URL, and the date you accessed the information. Including an accession number if provided is also helpful.

Q: Is it acceptable to use citation management software for Chicago style papers?

A: Yes, citation management software like Zotero, Mendeley, or EndNote can be very helpful for organizing sources and generating bibliographies in Chicago style. However, it is crucial to review the generated citations for accuracy and adherence to Chicago style guidelines, as the software may not always perfectly format every entry.

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