

chicago style humanities common errors

chicago style humanities common errors often trip up students and seasoned academics alike, leading to citations that confuse, footnotes that misdirect, and bibliographies that lack clarity. Navigating the complexities of this widely adopted citation style, particularly within the humanities, requires careful attention to detail. This comprehensive guide delves into the most frequent mistakes encountered when employing The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) for academic writing in fields like literature, history, philosophy, and art history. We will explore common pitfalls in parenthetical citations, footnotes, endnotes, and bibliography entries, offering clear explanations and practical advice to help writers achieve accuracy and academic integrity. Understanding these nuances is crucial for presenting scholarly work effectively and adhering to established academic conventions.

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Understanding Chicago Style's Nuances in the Humanities

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) is a cornerstone of academic publishing in the humanities, renowned for its flexibility and comprehensive guidelines. However, this very comprehensiveness can also be a source of confusion, leading to recurring errors. Writers often struggle with the dual citation systems it offers: notes-bibliography (NB) and author-date. While both are valid, the NB system, with its detailed footnotes or endnotes, is more prevalent in fields like history, literature, and art history.

The primary goal of Chicago style is to provide readers with complete and easily accessible information about the sources used. Errors in citation distract from the content and can undermine a scholar's credibility. This section will set the stage for exploring these errors by emphasizing the importance of meticulous adherence to the style's principles. Understanding the purpose behind each citation element—whether it's a footnote number, a bibliographic entry, or a parenthetical reference—is the first step toward avoiding common mistakes.

Common Errors in Footnotes and Endnotes

Footnotes and endnotes are the backbone of the notes-bibliography system in Chicago style, and they are a frequent locus of errors. These notes are designed to provide precise source information for specific statements or quotations within the text, allowing readers to locate the exact origin of the information with minimal effort.

Incorrect Placement of Footnote Numbers

A common oversight is the improper placement of footnote or endnote numbers. According to CMOS, these numbers should always follow the punctuation of the sentence or clause they refer to, rather than being placed before it. For instance, a footnote number should appear after a comma or a period, not before. This ensures that the citation is clearly associated with the preceding text without interrupting the flow of the sentence.

Incomplete First-Time Citations

When a source is cited for the first time in a note, Chicago style mandates a full bibliographic entry. A frequent mistake is providing only partial information, such as a name and page number, which is reserved for subsequent citations. A complete first-time note should include the author's full name, the full title of the work (*italicized* for books, in quotation marks for articles), publication information (place, publisher, year), and the specific page number(s) referenced.

Truncated Subsequent Citations

Conversely, writers often fail to abbreviate subsequent citations correctly. After a source has been cited in full once, subsequent references should be shortened. This typically involves using the author's last name, a shortened title (if necessary to distinguish from other works by the same author), and the page number. Using the full bibliographic information repeatedly is inefficient and deviates from standard practice.

Misformatting of Source Elements in Notes

Errors in formatting individual source elements within notes are pervasive. For example, book titles should be *italicized*, while article or chapter titles should be enclosed in quotation marks. Author names in notes appear in their normal order (e.g., John Smith), unlike in bibliographies where they are reversed (Smith, John). Forgetting to *italicize*, using the wrong punctuation, or misrepresenting these elements can lead to confusion.

Omitting or Mismanaging Page Numbers

The specific page number(s) are critical for pinpointing the source of information. Errors include omitting page numbers altogether, providing a range of pages when only one is relevant, or using incorrect abbreviations like "p." for single pages and "pp." for multiple pages, which Chicago style generally advises against, favoring just the numbers.

Frequent Mistakes in Bibliographic Entries

The bibliography, or reference list, at the end of a work serves as a comprehensive list of all sources consulted and cited. Mistakes here can make it difficult for readers to locate the original works.

Incorrect Author Name Order

The most common error in bibliographic entries is the misordering of author names. For books with a single author, the last name should always come first, followed by a comma, then the first name and middle initial (if provided). For multiple authors, the first author's name is reversed, but subsequent authors' names appear in their natural order (first name, last name).

Improper Title Formatting

Similar to notes, the formatting of titles in the bibliography is crucial. Book titles must be italicized. Titles of articles, chapters, or essays should be enclosed in quotation marks. Incorrectly applying italics or quotation marks, or failing to capitalize titles according to Chicago style rules (which often follows sentence case for titles unless they are proper nouns), are frequent mistakes.

Inconsistent Publication Information

The publication details provided in a bibliographic entry must be accurate and consistently formatted. This includes the place of publication, publisher name, and year of publication. Errors might include omitting the publisher, using an outdated or incorrect publication year, or inconsistently formatting city names. Chicago style generally advises using the city of publication. If multiple cities are listed, use the first one.

Misformatting of Article and Journal Information

For journal articles, common errors involve misformatting the journal title,

volume, issue number, and page range. The journal title should be italicized, followed by the volume and issue number, and then the page range. For instance: *Journal of Humanities*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2023): 145–160.

Omitting Essential Entry Components

Bibliographies require specific components for each source type. Forgetting to include essential information, such as the DOI for online journal articles, or specific details for other media like websites or dissertations, is a common oversight that hinders a reader's ability to find the source.

Issues with Parenthetical Citations

While the notes-bibliography system is prevalent, some humanities disciplines also utilize parenthetical citations, especially for shorter works or specific contexts. The author-date system, though less common in traditional humanities scholarship, also relies on parenthetical citations.

Incorrect Author-Date Pairing

When using parenthetical citations, the most fundamental error is an incorrect pairing of the author's name and the publication year. The parenthetical should precisely match an entry in the reference list. Any discrepancy, such as a typo in the author's name or an incorrect year, breaks the connection and frustrates the reader.

Missing Page Numbers for Direct Quotations

Even within parenthetical citations, direct quotations require specific page numbers. Failing to include the page number after a quotation, or using an incorrect format for it (e.g., "p. 10" instead of just "10" in some contexts, though Chicago is flexible here, consistency is key), is a common mistake that deprives the reader of precise source location.

Over-reliance on Parenthetical Citations

In many humanities fields that prefer the notes-bibliography system, overusing parenthetical citations for secondary information can be considered a stylistic error. These citations are best reserved for direct quotes or very specific pieces of information, with broader discussions often being handled through footnotes or endnotes.

Handling Specific Source Types

The diversity of sources encountered in humanities research—from ancient texts to contemporary digital media—presents unique challenges for citation.

Citing Online Sources and Websites

A significant area of error involves citing online sources. Many writers struggle with identifying the correct author, title, website name, publication or last updated date, and crucially, the stable URL or DOI. Omitting the access date is also a common mistake for sources that are subject to change.

Referencing Edited Volumes and Anthologies

Citing individual chapters within edited volumes can be complex. Errors include citing the editor as the author of the chapter or failing to attribute the chapter to its actual author. Both the author of the chapter and the editor of the volume, along with the title of the chapter and the title of the collection, are essential components.

Citing Archival Materials and Manuscripts

Archival materials, such as letters, diaries, and unpublished manuscripts, require specialized citation formats. Common errors involve not providing sufficient descriptive detail to identify the item uniquely within the archive or misattributing collection names.

Citing Translated Works

When citing a translated work, it is crucial to acknowledge both the original author and the translator. Errors include failing to mention the translator, or misattributing the translated text solely to the translator. The original title and the translated title should both be clearly presented, with the translator's contribution noted.

Style Guide and Formatting Oversights

Beyond specific citation rules, general adherence to Chicago style's formatting preferences is also a common area for errors.

Inconsistent Use of Italicization and Quotation Marks

While discussed in previous sections, the inconsistent application of italics for book titles and quotation marks for article titles, or vice-versa, bears repeating as a pervasive error. This applies across both notes and bibliographies.

Incorrect Punctuation within Citations

Punctuation within citation elements can be tricky. For example, commas, periods, and colons must be used precisely as prescribed by Chicago style. Misplacing or omitting these punctuation marks can alter the meaning or readability of a citation.

Formatting of Numbers and Dates

Chicago style has specific guidelines for formatting numbers and dates, particularly in bibliographic entries and footnotes. Errors might include inconsistent use of cardinal versus ordinal numbers, or incorrect formatting of years and date ranges.

Failure to Consult the Latest Edition of CMOS

The Chicago Manual of Style is regularly updated. Relying on outdated editions or informal online guides can lead to errors, as the style evolves. Staying current with the latest edition is paramount for accurate citation.

Mastering Chicago style in the humanities is an ongoing process that demands diligence and attention to detail. By understanding and actively avoiding these common errors, writers can significantly enhance the clarity, accuracy, and professionalism of their scholarly work. Consistent practice, careful review, and a thorough understanding of the principles behind Chicago style are the keys to producing impeccable citations.

Q: What is the difference between the notes-bibliography and author-date systems in Chicago style?

A: The notes-bibliography (NB) system uses footnotes or endnotes for citations and a bibliography at the end of the work. It is more common in the humanities like history, literature, and art history. The author-date system uses parenthetical citations in the text (e.g., (Smith 2020, 15)) and a reference list at the end. This system is more prevalent in social sciences

and some sciences.

Q: How do I correctly cite a book for the first time in a footnote using Chicago style?

A: For a first-time footnote citation of a book, you need to provide the full bibliographic information. The format is typically: Author First Name Last Name, Book Title (Place of Publication: Publisher, Year of Publication), Page Number. For example: John Smith, *The History of Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 45.

Q: What are the common errors when citing journal articles in a Chicago style bibliography?

A: Common errors include misformatting the journal title (should be italicized), incorrect placement or omission of volume and issue numbers, improper page range formatting, and failing to include the DOI for online articles. The standard format is: Author Last Name, First Name. "Article Title." *Journal Title* Volume, no. Issue (Year): Page Range. DOI.

Q: When should I use italics versus quotation marks for titles in Chicago style?

A: In Chicago style, full-length works such as books, journals, newspapers, and websites are italicized. Shorter works, such as articles, chapters, essays, and poems, are enclosed in quotation marks. This rule applies consistently in both notes and bibliographies.

Q: How do I handle multiple authors in a Chicago style bibliography?

A: For works with two authors, list both, with the first author's name reversed (Last Name, First Name) and the second author's name in normal order (First Name Last Name). For works with three or more authors, list only the first author's name reversed, followed by "et al." (Latin for "and others").

Q: What is the correct way to format a subsequent footnote citation in Chicago style?

A: After a source has been cited in full for the first time, subsequent citations should be shortened. The most common format is Author Last Name, Shortened Book Title (if necessary), Page Number. For example: Smith, *History of Ideas*, 78. If only one work by an author is cited, you might only need the author's last name and page number: Smith, 78.

Q: How should I cite a translated work in Chicago style?

A: When citing a translated work, you should include both the original author and the translator. In a note, the format is generally: Original Author First Name Last Name, Original Book Title, trans. Translator First Name Last Name (Place of Publication: Publisher, Year), Page Number. In the bibliography, you typically list it under the original author's name.

Q: What are the risks of not using the latest edition of The Chicago Manual of Style?

A: Not using the latest edition can lead to citing sources using outdated rules, which may be considered incorrect or unprofessional by academic reviewers and publishers. Style guides are periodically updated to reflect changes in academic conventions, technology, and best practices for scholarly communication.

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