APA STLE: In-Text Parenthetical Citation Basics

APA style guidelines require that writers use in-text parenthetical citations to document sources that inform their research papers. Authors’ names, publication dates, and, sometimes, page numbers referencing published sources appear in APA-style in-text citations.

The information that follows explains four basics of APA in-text citations:

- how to use authors’ names within in-text citations
- where to place parenthetical citations
- how to compose parenthetical citations for electronic sources
- what to do about citing “non-recoverable” sources

The fifth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* offers more information about reference citations. You can find copies of this book in the reference section of Niagara University’s library as well as in the Writing Center, located on the first floor of Seton Hall.

*Include author’s name and date to cite ideas you summarize or paraphrase*

In APA style, only the author’s last name is used throughout the entire paper and within in-text citations. For instance, if you were to summarize an article written by Erica Glassmann, you would refer to the author as “Glassmann” and include only the author’s last name as part of the parenthetical citation.

**If the author’s name is used as part of a sentence that introduces the author’s ideas or words**

If you use an author’s last name as part of a sentence in your essay, the date of publication within parentheses should immediately follow the name:

Walker (2005) maintains that the problem requires a political solution.

**If the author’s name is not used as part of a sentence**

If you do not use the author’s name as part of a sentence in your essay, you must include the name within a parenthetical citation followed by a comma and the date of publication:

The problem may require a political solution (Walker, 2005).
If you refer to the same source several times

If you cite the same source more than once within a paragraph, you may omit the year of publication in the second and subsequent citations within that paragraph.

When a source has two authors

If you refer to a source that has two authors, always cite both names each time you cite the source in your paper:

Bischkopf and Luen (2003) assert that technology, particularly cell phones and email, has had a profound impact on parent-child relationships.

Use the word “and” to connect authors’ names if they are part of the sentence; use and ampersand (&) to connect the names when they appear within a parenthetical citation.

Technology, particularly cell phones and email, has influenced parent-child relationships in significant ways (Bischkopf & Luen, 2003).

If there are three, four, or five authors

The first time you cite a work with three, four, or five authors, cite all authors:


Some scholars argue that the concept should be redefined (Moe, Shemp, Curleigh, & Lar, 2004).

For the second and all subsequent citations, use the name of the first author only followed by et al. which is the abbreviation for the Latin phrase meaning "and others."

Moe et al. (2004) assert that the concept should be redefined.

If there are six or more authors

If you cite a source with six or more authors, cite the last name of the first author followed by et al., whether the authors’ names are part of the sentence or part of an parenthetical citation

Dobson et al. (2003) examined the response time of impaired drivers between the ages of 21-57.
A team of researchers examined the response time of impaired drivers between the ages of 21-57 (Dobsob et. al, 2003).

**If two authors have the same last name**

If you refer to sources by two authors with the same last name, include the first and middle initial of each author, whether the authors’ names appear as part of the sentence or within a parenthetical citation.


According to some researchers, early intervention leads to the best outcome (J. K. Pearson & L. C. Pearson, 2005).

**If two or more sources are cited**

If you refer to multiple sources by different authors, alphabetize the authors’ names within the parentheses and place a semi-colon between each author/date citation.

Several attempts to isolate the gene have been made over the years (Rupert, 2004; Sacowicz, 2001; Underwood, 2003).

**If no author is identified**

If you refer to a source for which no author is identified, use a portion of the source’s title in place of the author’s surname, followed by the date. Be certain to punctuate the abbreviated title as you normally would. For instance, underline book titles, set titles of articles off with quotation marks, and so on.

Good pedagogy is grounded in an understanding of the variety of ways in which people learn ("Understanding Learning Styles," 1999).

**Include author's name, date, and page number when you quote sources**

When you quote a source directly, you must also include a page number within the parenthetical citation. Placement of final quotation marks, the parenthetical citation, and end punctuation depends upon where the direct quotation occurs in
your essay and how many words the direct quotation contains. The examples that follow illustrate three possibilities:

**Quote inserted in mid-sentence; parenthetical citation immediately follows the direct quotation**

At the core of the debate are “deeply held convictions about best ways to liberate people from tyranny” (Hertog, 2001, p. 78) that point to very different kinds of interventions.

**Quote inserted at the end of the sentence; parenthetical citation immediately follows the direct quotation but precedes the sentence’s end punctuation**

Hertog (2001) asserts that very different kinds of interventions will likely be proposed because at the core of the debate are “deeply held convictions about best ways to liberate people from tyranny” (p. 78).

**A lengthy quote of more than 40 words is included in the paper; the quote must be set off in a free-standing block quotation without quotation marks and with the parenthetical citation appearing after the quotation’s end punctuation**

Nilton and Teamo (2003) have found that participation in the program increased dramatically when subjects met three conditions:

Subjects who were first-time offenders were more likely to be retained. In addition, those who grew up in households where both parents were present also persisted in the program longer. Finally, gender appeared to play a role, with females participating until the program’s end much more frequently than did males. (p. 457)

**Citing Electronic Sources**

When you cite an electronic source, such as information from a Web site, include the author’s last name, the date of publication, and the page number, if the source provides that information.

If the source does not use or provide page numbers, then use paragraph numbers to locate information for readers. You should use the abbreviation “para.” or the paragraph symbol (¶) followed by the paragraph number in the parenthetical citation.

If the source provides no date of publication, use the abbreviation “n.d.” to indicate this. (Also, consider whether you should use such sources to inform your
paper; the lack of a publication date could indicate that the source is not as credible as you might wish to use.)

Bacteria levels were reported to be ten times more than the EPA’s recommended standard (Gerber, 2005, para. 18).

Citing Personal Communications

The APA style manual defines personal communications, such as interviews, as non-recoverable sources. Non-recoverable sources include any information source that cannot be retrieved by readers because no public, extant records of the information exist. For instance, writers who conduct telephone interviews with informants may have their own interview notes or possibly a recording of the interview, but these notes and recordings are not “recoverable” by readers.

You should refer to non-recoverable sources such as personal communications within in-text parenthetical citations. However, you should not include non-recoverable sources in your paper’s reference list.

When you compose in-text citations for non-recoverable sources, include the initials and the last name of the sources. When citing an email or letter, provide the date the communication was sent. When citing an interview, provide the date the interview occurred:

D. J. Creed (personal communication, September 3, 2005) demonstrated that composites containing steel and graphite offered the best combination of strength and portability.