

chicago manual of style footnotes for common errors examples

chicago manual of style footnotes for common errors examples serve as a crucial guide for academic and professional writers aiming for precision and clarity. Understanding and correctly implementing Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) footnote conventions is paramount for avoiding common pitfalls that can detract from the credibility of your work. This article delves into the nuances of CMOS footnotes, specifically focusing on frequently encountered errors and providing clear examples to illustrate proper usage. We will explore the foundational principles of Chicago-style footnotes, demystify the complexities of citing various source types, and pinpoint the most common mistakes writers make. By mastering these details, you can significantly enhance the scholarly integrity of your writing.

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Understanding Chicago Style Footnotes

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) offers two primary citation systems: notes and bibliography, and author-date. This article focuses specifically on the notes and bibliography system, which utilizes footnotes or endnotes to cite sources. Footnotes are typically placed at the bottom of the page where the reference appears, while endnotes are collected at the end of the document. The core purpose of a footnote is to provide the reader with immediate access to the source of a particular piece of information, whether it's a direct quote, a paraphrased idea, or a statistic. This allows for transparency, verifiability, and deeper engagement with the text by enabling readers to consult the original sources.

A key distinction in Chicago style is the treatment of the first citation versus subsequent citations of the same source. The first footnote for a given source is generally more complete, providing all necessary bibliographical information. Subsequent citations are typically shortened to include the author's last name, a shortened title, and the page number. This system aims to be both informative for the initial introduction of a source and concise for repeated references within the text, thereby improving readability without sacrificing accuracy.

Common Errors in Footnote Punctuation and Formatting

One of the most pervasive areas for error in Chicago-style footnotes lies in basic punctuation and formatting. Writers often struggle with the correct placement of commas, periods, and the use of italics. For instance, a common mistake is omitting the period at the end of a footnote. Every complete footnote entry, whether for a book, article, or website, requires a terminal period. Another frequent slip-up involves misplacing commas; they should typically separate elements within the citation, such as the author's name from the title or the title from the publication information.

The use of italics is also a point of confusion. Book titles, journal titles, and website titles should be italicized. However, article titles within journals or collections are generally enclosed in quotation marks. Incorrectly applying italics or quotation marks detracts from the professional appearance of the footnotes and can lead to misinterpretation. Furthermore, the spacing and indentation of footnotes can be inconsistent. While CMOS prefers full endnotes for the bibliography, footnotes typically do not require indentation for subsequent lines of the same entry, but each new footnote number should be distinct.

Incorrectly Citing Books in Footnotes

Citing books presents a rich landscape for potential errors. The first footnote citation for a book should ideally include the author's full name (first name first), the title of the book in italics, the publication information (city of publication, publisher, and year of publication), and the specific page number(s) being referenced. A common error is reversing the author's name to last name, first name in the footnote; this is reserved for the bibliography. For example, a correct first footnote for a book might look like this:

- 1. Jane Doe, *The History of Everything* (New York: Academic Press, 2020), 45.

Mistakes here can include omitting the year of publication, incorrectly formatting the publisher's name, or failing to italicize the book title. For subsequent citations of the same book, the format changes. A frequent error is to use the full citation again instead of the shortened form. A correct subsequent citation would be:

- 2. Doe, *History of Everything*, 78.

Another pitfall is citing a specific chapter or part of a book without clearly indicating the author of that specific section if it differs from the overall book author, or if the book is an edited collection.

Errors in Citing Articles and Periodicals

Citing journal articles, magazine articles, or newspaper articles also involves specific conventions that

are often mishandled. For journal articles, the first footnote should include the author's full name, the article title in quotation marks, the journal title in italics, the volume and issue number, the year of publication, and the page number(s). An example of a correct first footnote for a journal article is:

- 3. John Smith, "The Evolution of Ideas," *Journal of Modern Thought* 15, no. 2 (2021): 112.

Common errors include omitting the journal title, incorrectly formatting the volume and issue numbers, or failing to use quotation marks around the article title. For subsequent citations of the same article, the shortened format applies:

- 4. Smith, "Evolution of Ideas," 115.

When citing articles from magazines or newspapers, the format is similar but often includes the date of publication more prominently. Omitting the specific date for a newspaper article, for instance, would be an error, as the issue date is crucial for locating it.

Missteps in Referencing Online Sources

The digital age has introduced a new set of challenges for citation, and online sources are particularly prone to errors in Chicago-style footnotes. When citing a webpage, the essential components include the author (if known), the title of the specific page in quotation marks, the title of the overall website in italics, the publication or last updated date, and the URL. It is also highly recommended to include a retrieval date. A correct example might be:

- 5. Emily White, "Understanding Digital Archives," *The Archivist's Blog*, October 15, 2022, <https://www.archivistblog.com/digitalarchives>.

Frequent errors involve omitting the URL, failing to provide a publication or retrieval date, or incorrectly formatting the website title. For sources that are regularly updated or lack a clear publication date, this can be particularly tricky. Writers might also err by not specifying the exact page or section of a larger website being referenced, leading to ambiguity.

Problems with Subsequent Citations (Op. Cit., Ibid., Loc. Cit.)

The use of shortened forms for subsequent citations, such as *ibid.*, *op. cit.*, and *loc. cit.*, is a notorious source of confusion and errors. CMOS 17th edition generally discourages the use of *op. cit.* and *loc. cit.* in favor of shortened author-title citations, which are clearer and less prone to ambiguity. *Ibid.*, meaning "in the same place," is still accepted and used to refer to the immediately preceding footnote. However, even *ibid.* can be misused.

For example, if footnote 6 cites Doe, and footnote 7 also cites Doe but refers to a different page, the

correct citation for footnote 7 is "Doe, *History of Everything*, 80." If footnote 7 refers to the exact same source and page as footnote 6, then "Ibid." would be correct for footnote 7. A common error is using *ibid.* when the immediately preceding footnote cited a different source, or when referring to a source cited earlier but not immediately preceding. The clear author-title-page format for subsequent citations is the safest and most recommended approach to avoid such errors.

Footnotes for Direct Quotations vs. Paraphrases

A subtle but important distinction in footnote usage concerns direct quotations versus paraphrased information. When you use a direct quotation, the footnote must cite the exact page number from which the quote was taken. This is non-negotiable and crucial for scholarly integrity. For example:

- 8. Jane Doe, *The History of Everything* (New York: Academic Press, 2020), 55.

However, when you paraphrase or summarize an idea from a source, CMOS often allows for more flexibility. While citing the specific page is still good practice, especially for complex or debatable ideas, it is sometimes acceptable to cite the entire work or a range of pages if the idea spans multiple pages or is a general theme of the work. A common error is to treat a paraphrase exactly like a direct quote by always requiring a specific page number when it's not strictly necessary according to CMOS guidelines for general ideas. Conversely, a more serious error is failing to cite a paraphrase altogether, which constitutes plagiarism.

Handling Multiple Authors and Editors

Citing works with multiple authors or editors presents formatting challenges that often lead to errors. For works with two authors, both names are typically included in the footnote in the first citation, separated by "and." For works with three or more authors, only the first author's name is given, followed by "et al." (an abbreviation for *et alii*, meaning "and others"). This distinction is frequently overlooked.

When citing an edited book where you are referencing the work of a specific chapter author within the collection, the citation should clearly indicate both the chapter author and the editor(s) of the collection. For instance:

- 9. Robert Johnson, "The Impact of Technology," in *Modern Innovations*, ed. Sarah Lee and Mark Chen (Chicago: University Press, 2019), 120.

Errors can arise from failing to list all authors for two-author works, incorrectly using "et al." for two authors, or misrepresenting the role of editors versus chapter authors. Properly attributing contributions is vital for accuracy and avoiding misrepresentation.

Ensuring Consistency in Footnote Numbering

Finally, maintaining consistent footnote numbering throughout a document is a fundamental aspect of adherence to the Chicago Manual of Style. Footnote numbers should be sequential, starting from 1 and increasing with each new source or citation. They should not be repeated, and if a source is cited multiple times, the original footnote number should be referenced. Errors in numbering can occur when new sources are inserted without updating subsequent numbers, or when numbers are accidentally duplicated.

The numbering in the text should correspond precisely with the numbering at the bottom of the page. Footnote numbering is typically done using superscript Arabic numerals. Consistency also extends to the style of the numbers themselves – whether they are consistently superscripted and placed immediately after the punctuation of the sentence or clause they refer to. A consistent and logical numbering system is essential for a reader to easily navigate between the text and the corresponding notes, enhancing the overall clarity and professionalism of the work.

Q: What is the primary difference between a footnote and an endnote in Chicago style?

A: The primary difference lies in their placement. Footnotes are located at the bottom of the page where the reference appears in the text, while endnotes are compiled at the end of the document, typically before the bibliography. Both serve the same purpose of providing source citation.

Q: When should I use "ibid." in my Chicago style footnotes?

A: "Ibid." is used to refer to the immediately preceding footnote. It signifies that the source and page number are the same as the one cited directly before. If the source is the same but the page number is different, you would cite the author and new page number after "Ibid."

Q: Are there any circumstances where I would use "op. cit." or "loc. cit." in Chicago style footnotes?

A: The 17th edition of the Chicago Manual of Style generally discourages the use of "op. cit." and "loc. cit." in favor of shortened author-title citations, which are considered clearer and less prone to ambiguity. You are more likely to encounter or need to use shortened author-title citations for subsequent references.

Q: How do I format the first footnote citation for a book with two authors?

A: For a book with two authors, the first footnote citation includes both authors' full names, separated by "and." For example: 1. Jane Doe and John Smith, *A Comprehensive Study* (Publisher City: Publisher

Name, Year), Page.

Q: What is the correct way to cite a website in a Chicago style footnote if the publication date is missing?

A: If a publication date is missing for a website, you should use the abbreviation "n.d." (no date) in place of the publication date. It is still important to include the retrieval date. For example: 1. Author Name, "Page Title," *Website Title*, n.d., accessed Month Day, Year, URL.

Q: Can I use shortened titles in Chicago style footnotes for every subsequent citation?

A: Yes, generally, subsequent citations of a source use a shortened format that includes the author's last name, a shortened version of the title (italicized if it's a book or journal title), and the page number. This applies as long as the source is not immediately preceding (where "ibid." might be used).

Q: What is the correct way to cite a direct quote from a book that spans multiple pages in a Chicago style footnote?

A: When citing a direct quote, you must provide the specific page number from which the quote is taken, even if the quote itself is short. If you are quoting a passage that is several pages long, you can indicate the range of pages. For example: 1. Author Last Name, *Book Title*, Page range (e.g., 45-48).

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