

chicago manual of style for art history

The Chicago Manual of Style for Art History: A Comprehensive Guide to Citation and Formatting

chicago manual of style for art history is an indispensable resource for scholars, researchers, and writers working within the field of visual arts. This authoritative style guide provides clear, consistent standards for presenting research, citing sources, and formatting academic work. Adhering to the Chicago Manual of Style ensures clarity, credibility, and professionalism in art historical discourse. This article delves into the nuances of applying the Chicago Manual of Style specifically to art history, covering citation methods, common art-specific challenges, and best practices for producing high-quality scholarly writing. Understanding these guidelines is crucial for any art historian seeking to communicate their findings effectively and ethically.

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Understanding the Chicago Manual of Style in Art History

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) is a widely adopted style guide that offers comprehensive rules for manuscript preparation and citation. For art history, its detailed guidelines on how to present complex information, particularly regarding visual culture and historical artifacts, are invaluable. The manual provides a framework for academic integrity, ensuring that all sources are properly acknowledged and that arguments are supported by verifiable evidence. Its application in art history requires a keen attention to detail, especially when dealing with the unique types of sources common to the discipline.

Art historians often grapple with diverse materials, from primary source documents and artists' writings to material culture and visual representations. The Chicago Manual of Style offers a robust system for navigating these varied sources, allowing for precise attribution and clear contextualization. By standardizing how information is presented, CMOS facilitates a deeper and more accessible scholarly conversation, enabling readers to easily trace the origins of ideas and research findings.

Chicago Manual of Style Citation Methods: Notes-Bibliography vs. Author-Date

The Chicago Manual of Style presents two primary citation systems: the Notes-Bibliography system and the Author-Date system. Both are acceptable for art history, but the choice often depends on the specific requirements of the publisher or academic institution, or the nature of the research. The Notes-Bibliography system is generally favored in the humanities, including art history, due to its flexibility in incorporating detailed commentary and source analysis within footnotes or endnotes.

The Author-Date system, more commonly found in the sciences and social sciences, uses parenthetical in-text citations keyed to a reference list at the end of the work. While less common for traditional art historical dissertations or books, it might be preferred for certain types of articles or digital publications.

Footnotes and Endnotes: The Notes-Bibliography System

The Notes-Bibliography system, utilizing footnotes or endnotes, is the most prevalent method in art history. This system allows for rich, detailed citation information while also providing space for

supplementary commentary or elaborations that might disrupt the flow of the main text. Footnotes appear at the bottom of the page, while endnotes are compiled at the end of the chapter or document.

First Reference

The first time a source is cited, the footnote or endnote should contain full bibliographic information. This includes the author's name, the full title of the work (italicized), publication details (city, publisher, year), and specific page numbers being referenced. For artworks, this often includes the artist, title, date, medium, dimensions, collection, and location.

Subsequent References

For any subsequent references to the same source, a shortened form is used. This typically includes the author's last name, a shortened version of the title (if longer than four words), and the page number(s). If citing the same source and page number consecutively, "Ibid." (ibidem, meaning "in the same place") can be used for the second consecutive citation, followed by the new page number if different.

Key Elements of a Footnote/Endnote

A comprehensive footnote or endnote for an artwork might include:

- Artist's full name
- Title of the artwork (italicized)
- Date of creation
- Medium (e.g., oil on canvas, bronze)
- Dimensions (height x width x depth, in that order, usually in centimeters or inches)
- Name of the collection or private owner
- City of the collection
- Accession number, if applicable
- Reference to where the artwork is reproduced or discussed, including page numbers

In-Text Citations: The Author-Date System

While less common in traditional art history, the Author-Date system provides a concise method for in-text attribution. This system is particularly useful for articles or shorter publications where the author wants to keep the main narrative uninterrupted. The parenthetical citation refers the reader to a full bibliography or reference list at the end of the work.

Parenthetical Citations

A typical parenthetical citation includes the author's last name and the year of publication, followed by page numbers. For example: (Gombrich 1995, 45). If the author's name is mentioned in the text, only the year and page numbers are needed in parentheses.

Incorporating Author-Date into Art History

When using the Author-Date system for art history, the challenge lies in concisely representing artworks and their creators within the parentheses. Often, a simplified identifier for the artwork or artist might be used, with full details reserved for the reference list. This system is less adept at handling the detailed descriptive elements that are crucial in art historical analysis.

Formatting Art Historical Works: Key Considerations

Formatting specific elements of art historical research requires careful adherence to Chicago's guidelines to ensure clarity and precision. These elements are crucial for identifying artworks and distinguishing them from other scholarly references.

Titles of Artworks

Titles of artworks should be italicized in both the text and bibliographical entries. For example, *The Starry Night*. If the title is in a foreign language, it should be presented in its original form. If a translation is provided, it typically follows in parentheses.

Artists' Names

Artists' names are presented in full, typically as first name followed by last name, in the text and in footnotes/endnotes. In the bibliography, the last name comes first.

Dates of Creation

Dates of creation for artworks should be presented clearly. Specific dates are preferred when known. For periods, use an en dash: 1905–1908. If a date is approximate, use “ca.” (circa) or “about”

followed by the date.

Medium and Dimensions

The medium of the artwork (e.g., oil on canvas, watercolor, bronze) and its dimensions (height × width × depth) are essential pieces of information. Dimensions are usually given in centimeters or inches, with the unit of measurement specified.

Collection and Location

The name of the institution or private collection where an artwork is housed, along with its city, is vital for identification and provenance. For example, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Exhibition Titles and Catalogs

Exhibition titles should be italicized. References to exhibition catalogs follow the same principles as book citations, with specific attention to editors, publishers, dates, and pagination.

Reproduction Credits (Image Credits)

If an image is reproduced from a published source or a museum, a credit line is required. This credit line typically follows the caption and provides information about the source of the image, often including photographer or archive details.

Citing Specific Art Historical Sources

The Chicago Manual of Style provides detailed instructions for citing various types of art historical sources, acknowledging the unique nature of each.

Books on Art

Citing a book involves the author's name, the full title of the book (italicized), publication city, publisher, year, and page number(s). For example, in a footnote: John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 10-15.

Journal Articles on Art

Citing journal articles requires the author's name, article title (in quotation marks), journal title (italicized), volume and issue numbers, year, and page numbers. For example, in a footnote: Svetlana Alpers, "The Art of Describing," *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 3 (March 1983): 473.

Exhibition Catalogs

Exhibition catalogs are often treated as books. Key information includes the exhibition title (italicized), names of editors or curators, publication details, and page numbers. For example, in a footnote: Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, eds., *High & Modern Art: Paris 1890–1990* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1991), 78–82.

Online Art Resources

When citing online resources, include the author or organization, title of the specific page or artwork, name of the website (italicized), publication date or last updated date, and URL. It's also recommended to include an access date. For example, in a footnote: "The Kiss," *The Met Fifth Avenue*, accessed May 15, 2023, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/487689>.

Museum Websites and Collection Databases

Museum websites and their online collection databases are increasingly important sources. They should be cited with as much detail as possible, including the specific artwork's entry, museum name, website name, and URL.

Archival Materials

Citing archival materials requires specificity. Include the name of the archive, collection name, box and folder numbers, and any relevant item numbers. For example, in a footnote: "Letter from Frida Kahlo to Diego Rivera, January 10, 1945," Frida Kahlo Papers, 1925–1954, box 12, folder 3, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Handling Visual Evidence: Images and Captions

The effective use and citation of images are fundamental to art history. The Chicago Manual of Style provides guidelines for integrating images into scholarly work and providing necessary attribution.

Placement of Images

Images should be placed as close as possible to their first mention in the text. They are typically numbered sequentially and referred to by their figure number in the text (e.g., "Figure 1").

Caption Formatting

Captions should be concise and informative, typically appearing below the image. Essential elements include the figure number, artist, title of the artwork (italicized), date, medium, dimensions, collection, and accession number. A credit line usually follows the caption. For example:

Figure 1. Vincent van Gogh, *The Starry Night*, 1889, oil on canvas, 29 × 36 1/4 in. (73.7 × 92.1 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York, acquired with funds contributed by the Vincent Astor Foundation, 1941. © 2023 Museum of Modern Art/SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

Image Rights and Permissions

It is crucial for authors to be aware of copyright and to obtain necessary permissions for reproducing images, especially for commercial publications. While the Chicago Manual of Style does not dictate the process of obtaining permissions, it emphasizes the author's responsibility in this matter.

Common Challenges in Art History Citation

Art history presents unique challenges for citation due to the nature of its subject matter. The Chicago Manual of Style offers guidance, but authors must apply judgment and thorough research.

Attribution Issues

When the attribution of an artwork is uncertain (e.g., "School of," "Follower of," "Attributed to"), this uncertainty should be clearly noted in the citation. The CMOS recommends using standard conventions for such attributions.

Works of Uncertain Origin

For works where the artist, date, or origin is unknown or debated, the citation should reflect this ambiguity using terms like "Unknown artist" or by providing the best available information with caveats.

Reproductions of Lost or Destroyed Art

When citing artworks that are lost or destroyed, the citation should indicate this, often relying on descriptions or early reproductions. The source of the reproduction becomes a primary reference point.

Citing Performances and Ephemeral Art

Citing performance art, installations, or other ephemeral works can be challenging. Sources might include documentation (photographs, videos), artists' statements, reviews, or scholarly analyses of the work. The citation should clearly identify the nature of the documented evidence.

Conclusion: Embracing Chicago for Art Historical Rigor

Mastering the Chicago Manual of Style for art history is an investment in the clarity, accuracy, and ethical integrity of scholarly work. By diligently applying its principles to the specific demands of art historical research—from citing artworks and exhibitions to handling visual evidence—writers can produce publications that are both authoritative and accessible. The Notes-Bibliography system, with its flexibility for detailed annotation and commentary, remains the preferred choice for many art historians, allowing for the rich contextualization of visual and historical information. Ultimately, consistent and careful adherence to the Chicago Manual of Style elevates the quality of art historical discourse and ensures that research contributes meaningfully to the ongoing conversation within the discipline.

FAQ

Q: What is the primary citation style recommended for art history by the Chicago Manual of Style?

A: The Chicago Manual of Style recommends the Notes-Bibliography system (using footnotes or endnotes) for art history, as it allows for detailed commentary and flexible citation of complex sources common in the discipline.

Q: How should titles of artworks be formatted in Chicago style?

A: Titles of artworks should be italicized in both the text and in bibliographical entries, for example, *Mona Lisa*.

Q: What information is essential when citing an artwork in a footnote or endnote?

A: Essential information typically includes the artist's name, the artwork's title (italicized), the date of creation, the medium, the dimensions, and the collection's name and location.

Q: Can I use the Author-Date system for art history research?

A: Yes, the Chicago Manual of Style permits the Author-Date system, although the Notes-Bibliography system is more traditionally favored in art history. The choice often depends on the publisher's or institution's requirements.

Q: How do I cite an exhibition catalog using Chicago style?

A: Exhibition catalogs are generally treated as books. You should include the exhibition title (italicized), names of editors or curators, publication details (city, publisher, year), and specific page

numbers.

Q: What is the proper way to cite an image reproduction credit in Chicago style?

A: Image credit lines typically appear after the caption and should provide information about the source of the image, such as the photographer, archive, or copyright holder, often including accession numbers or permission details.

Q: How should I format dimensions for artworks in Chicago style?

A: Dimensions are usually presented as height × width × depth, with the unit of measurement (e.g., cm or in.) clearly stated.

Q: What if the attribution of an artwork is uncertain?

A: When attribution is uncertain, the Chicago Manual of Style advises clearly noting this in your citation using standard conventions, such as "Attributed to" or "School of."

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