

# chicago manual of style for geography

## Understanding the Chicago Manual of Style for Geography

**chicago manual of style for geography** provides a critical framework for scholars, researchers, and writers in the field, ensuring clarity, consistency, and professionalism in academic and cartographic works. This comprehensive guide addresses a wide array of stylistic considerations essential for effective geographical communication. From the precise naming of places and geographical features to the appropriate formatting of data and citations, adhering to the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) elevates the quality and credibility of geographical publications. This article delves into the core principles and specific applications of CMOS relevant to geography, covering everything from essential naming conventions and spatial data representation to the nuances of citation and referencing for maps and spatial information.

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## Nitty-Gritty Naming: Chicago Manual of Style for Geography Place Names

The accurate and consistent naming of geographical entities is paramount in geography. The Chicago Manual of Style offers guidance on how to handle the nomenclature of continents, oceans, countries, states, cities, rivers, mountains, and other significant landforms. Consistency in capitalization, the use of official versus common names, and the treatment of possessives are key areas addressed by CMOS. For instance, when referring to sovereign states, the official names should generally be used, while widely accepted common names are acceptable for well-known features. The manual also provides direction on whether to italicize or capitalize certain geographical terms when they become part of a proper name, such as "the Pacific Ocean" versus "pacific currents."

## Capitalization of Geographical Terms

Capitalization rules in CMOS are designed to distinguish between common nouns and proper nouns when referring to geographical features. Terms like "river," "mountain," "lake," or "ocean" are capitalized when they are part of a specific name (e.g., "Mississippi River," "Rocky Mountains," "Lake Superior," "Atlantic Ocean"). However, they are lowercased when used in a general sense or as common nouns (e.g., "the river flows south," "a large mountain range," "fishing in the lake," "navigating the ocean"). This

distinction is crucial for maintaining clarity and adhering to established conventions in geographical writing.

## **Possessives and Plurals of Place Names**

CMOS addresses the often-confusing use of possessives and plurals for geographical names. Generally, possessives are avoided in place names unless they are historical or officially recognized (e.g., "St. Louis's Gateway Arch" might be an exception, though "Gateway Arch National Park" is the preferred official name). Plurals are straightforward: if referring to multiple entities of the same type, use the plural form (e.g., "the Great Lakes," "the Andes Mountains"). The manual encourages consulting official geographic names databases for definitive guidance, especially for less common or disputed territories.

## **Foreign Place Names and Diacritics**

When dealing with foreign place names, the Chicago Manual of Style emphasizes using the established transliterations and spellings common in English-language scholarship. It also provides guidance on the use of diacritical marks. Generally, diacritics should be retained when they are part of the official or commonly accepted spelling of a name in its original language, as long as they are rendered correctly and consistently. For example, using "São Paulo" with the tilde and acute accent is preferred over "Sao Paulo." If a particular diacritic is problematic for typesetting or widely unfamiliar to the audience, CMOS suggests a consistent approach to omission or explanation.

## **Formatting Geographical Data and Measurements with CMOS**

The precise representation of geographical data and measurements is a cornerstone of robust geographical research. The Chicago Manual of Style offers detailed recommendations on units of measurement, numerical formatting, and the presentation of spatial coordinates, ensuring that data is communicated accurately and unambiguously to a global audience. Adhering to these guidelines is essential for reproducibility and for facilitating comparisons across different studies.

## **Units of Measurement and Abbreviations**

CMOS advocates for the use of the International System of Units (SI) as the primary system for measurements. This includes units for distance (meters, kilometers), area (square kilometers), elevation (meters), and temperature (degrees Celsius). When SI units are used, it is recommended to follow them with their U.S. customary equivalents in parentheses, especially for audiences accustomed to imperial units. Abbreviations for units should be

used consistently and follow established standards, such as using "km" for kilometers and "m" for meters, typically without a period.

## **Formatting Numerical Data**

The manual provides clear rules for formatting numbers, particularly when they relate to geographical data. This includes guidelines on when to spell out numbers and when to use numerals. For instance, large numbers representing populations or areas are typically rendered as numerals, often with commas for readability (e.g., 1,500,000 square kilometers). Precision in reporting numerical data is key, and CMOS suggests using an appropriate number of significant figures to reflect the precision of the original measurements. Scientific notation might be recommended for very large or very small numbers.

## **Spatial Coordinates and Datums**

When presenting spatial coordinates (latitude and longitude), CMOS advises clarity and consistency. The preferred format is degrees, minutes, and seconds (e.g., 34° 03' 15" N, 118° 14' 30" W). Decimal degrees are also acceptable but should be used consistently throughout a document. It is crucial to specify the datum used (e.g., WGS 84), as this affects the accuracy of the coordinates. The manual also suggests whether to include the cardinal directions (N, S, E, W) or use positive and negative signs, recommending a consistent approach.

## **Citation and Referencing in Geographic Research: A CMOS Approach**

Accurate and thorough citation is fundamental to academic integrity in any discipline, and geography is no exception. The Chicago Manual of Style offers two primary systems for citation: the notes-bibliography system and the author-date system. For geography, which often draws from diverse sources including maps, datasets, and field observations, the notes-bibliography system is frequently preferred for its flexibility in accommodating complex information. The meticulous recording of sources ensures that readers can locate and verify the information presented.

## **The Notes-Bibliography System for Geographic Sources**

In the notes-bibliography system, superscript notes are used in the text to refer to sources, with full bibliographic details provided in a bibliography at the end of the work. For geographical materials, this means accurately describing the source, whether it's a journal article, a book chapter, a government report, a dataset, or a map. When citing maps,

specific details such as the map title, scale, publisher, and date of publication are essential.

## **The Author-Date System in Geography**

The author-date system, while less common for some subfields of geography, is also supported by CMOS. In this system, brief parenthetical citations (author, year) appear in the text, and a corresponding reference list is provided at the end. This system can be efficient for certain types of research, particularly those with many in-text references to primary data sources or previous studies. Regardless of the system chosen, consistency is paramount.

## **Citing Geospatial Data and Datasets**

Geographers increasingly rely on geospatial data and datasets. CMOS provides guidance on citing these digital resources, which often lack the traditional elements of published works. Key information to include typically involves the dataset name, creator or provider, version, year of release or access, and a persistent identifier such as a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) or URL. The manual emphasizes that the goal is to enable the reader to find the exact data used in the research.

## **Map Conventions and Cartographic Style in Geographic Writing**

Maps are central to geographical understanding and communication. The Chicago Manual of Style offers specific recommendations for how maps should be referenced, described, and presented within scholarly texts, aiming for clarity and adherence to cartographic conventions. While CMOS itself does not dictate map design, it provides a framework for integrating cartographic information effectively into written geographical work.

## **Referencing Maps in Text**

When a map is referenced in the text, it should be done clearly, typically by its title. For example, "As depicted on the 'Geological Survey of California' map (USGS, 2019)..." or "The topography is evident in Figure 1, a topographic map of the region..." If the map is an illustration within the text, it will be referred to as a figure, requiring a figure number and caption. The citation details for the map itself would then appear in the notes or bibliography.

## **Map Titles, Scales, and Legends**

CMOS encourages consistency in how map elements are described. Map titles should be capitalized appropriately. When discussing map features, authors should refer to the map's scale and legend to ensure accurate interpretation. For example, a statement might read, "The distance between the two points, as measured on the map at a scale of 1:24,000, is approximately 5 kilometers." The presence and clarity of a legend are vital for understanding symbols and thematic elements presented on the map.

## **Types of Maps and Their Descriptions**

The manual implicitly supports differentiating between various types of maps, such as topographic maps, thematic maps, political maps, and historical maps. The descriptive language used when referring to these maps should be precise. For instance, when discussing a choropleth map, one might explain how the colors or shades represent statistical data for defined areas. CMOS emphasizes that the text should complement the map and vice versa, creating a cohesive presentation of geographical information.

## **Special Considerations for Geographic Terminology**

Beyond place names, the Chicago Manual of Style offers guidance on the consistent and precise use of a broad range of geographical terminology. This includes terms related to physical geography, human geography, and GIScience. Adhering to these conventions helps prevent ambiguity and ensures that specialized terms are understood by the intended audience.

## **Technical Terms in Physical Geography**

For terms related to landforms, climate, hydrology, and biogeography, CMOS emphasizes using standard, widely accepted terminology. For example, distinguishing between "erosion" and "weathering," or correctly using terms like "watershed," "glacier," or "permafrost." When introducing less common technical terms, it is often beneficial to provide a brief definition or context, especially if the readership may include those outside a specific subdiscipline.

## **Terms in Human and Economic Geography**

In human geography, terms related to population, culture, political organization, and economic activity require careful usage. CMOS supports the use of established terminology

for concepts like "urbanization," "migration," "sovereignty," or "globalization." The manual also implicitly encourages sensitivity and accuracy when discussing terms related to social geography, demographics, and indigenous territories.

## **GIS and Remote Sensing Terminology**

With the rise of GIS and remote sensing, specific technical jargon has become commonplace in geography. CMOS would expect consistent application of terms such as "georeferencing," "raster data," "vector data," "spatial resolution," and "spectral signature." When these terms are used, they should be employed correctly within the context of geographic information science, and their meaning should be clear to those familiar with the field.

## **Style for Data Visualization and Graphics in Geography**

While the Chicago Manual of Style is primarily a text-based guide, its principles extend to the presentation of visual elements in geographical works, including charts, graphs, diagrams, and photographs. The goal is always to enhance understanding and convey information clearly and effectively, mirroring the rigor applied to written content.

## **Captioning and Labeling of Visuals**

Every visual element, from a simple bar chart to a complex thematic map illustration, should have a clear and informative caption. According to CMOS principles, captions should be numbered sequentially (e.g., Figure 1, Figure 2) and provide a concise description of the visual's content, including its source if applicable. Labels within the graphic itself must be legible and accurately represent the data or features being depicted. Consistent formatting of labels, axes, and legends is crucial.

## **Consistency in Graphic Representation**

CMOS emphasizes consistency in stylistic choices across all visual elements. This means using the same fonts, color palettes (where appropriate for thematic consistency), and symbol types throughout a publication. For example, if different types of land cover are represented by specific colors on one map, those same colors should be used consistently for those land cover types if they appear on other visuals or in legends. This visual consistency aids reader comprehension and strengthens the overall professionalism of the work.

# Referencing and Attribution of Images and Graphics

Just as with textual sources, all images, photographs, and graphics that are not original to the author must be properly cited and attributed. This includes maps created by other organizations, satellite imagery, or diagrams. The caption should include the source, and a full citation should appear in the bibliography or notes. This practice respects intellectual property and allows readers to find the original source material.

## FAQ

### **Q: What are the main differences between the notes-bibliography and author-date systems in the Chicago Manual of Style for geography?**

A: The notes-bibliography system uses superscript numbers in the text that correspond to footnotes or endnotes, with full bibliographic information provided in a bibliography at the end. It is often preferred for its flexibility in accommodating complex sources like maps and datasets. The author-date system uses parenthetical citations (author, year) in the text, linked to a reference list at the end, which is more concise for studies with many in-text citations to previous research.

### **Q: How does the Chicago Manual of Style handle the capitalization of geographical terms like "river" or "mountain"?**

A: The Chicago Manual of Style dictates that terms like "river," "mountain," "lake," or "ocean" are capitalized when they are part of a specific proper name (e.g., "Amazon River," "Mount Everest," "Lake Michigan," "Pacific Ocean"). They are lowercased when used in a general sense or as common nouns (e.g., "the river is wide," "a tall mountain," "swimming in the lake," "sailing the ocean").

### **Q: What are the recommended units of measurement for geographical data according to the Chicago Manual of Style?**

A: The Chicago Manual of Style recommends the primary use of the International System of Units (SI) for geographical measurements. This includes kilometers for distance, square kilometers for area, meters for elevation, and degrees Celsius for temperature. It also suggests providing U.S. customary equivalents in parentheses for audiences accustomed to imperial units.

## **Q: How should geospatial datasets be cited when using the Chicago Manual of Style for geography?**

A: When citing geospatial datasets, the Chicago Manual of Style requires including essential information such as the dataset name, creator or provider, version, year of release or access, and a persistent identifier like a DOI or URL. The aim is to provide enough detail for readers to locate the specific data used in the research.

## **Q: Does the Chicago Manual of Style provide guidance on how to describe or reference maps within geographical texts?**

A: Yes, the Chicago Manual of Style offers guidance on referencing maps. Maps referenced in the text are typically identified by their title and described as figures if they are included as illustrations, requiring a figure number and caption. Full citation details for the map itself are then provided in the notes or bibliography, including title, scale, publisher, and date.

## **Q: What is the general advice from the Chicago Manual of Style regarding the use of foreign place names and diacritics?**

A: The Chicago Manual of Style advises using established transliterations and spellings common in English-language scholarship for foreign place names. Diacritical marks should generally be retained if they are part of the official or commonly accepted spelling in the original language, provided they can be rendered accurately and consistently.

## **Q: How does the Chicago Manual of Style address the use of possessives and plurals for geographical names?**

A: The Chicago Manual of Style generally discourages the use of possessives in place names unless they are historical or officially recognized. For plurals, standard English grammar applies; for example, "the Great Lakes" or "the Rocky Mountains."

## **Q: Are there specific rules in CMOS for formatting spatial coordinates (latitude and longitude)?**

A: Yes, the Chicago Manual of Style suggests using a consistent format for spatial coordinates, with degrees, minutes, and seconds (e.g., 34° 03' 15" N, 118° 14' 30" W) or decimal degrees. It is also important to specify the datum (e.g., WGS 84) used for the coordinates.

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