

chicago style examples for citing archival materials

Chicago Style Examples for Citing Archival Materials: A Comprehensive Guide

chicago style examples for citing archival materials are crucial for researchers navigating the complexities of historical documents. Accurately referencing sources, especially those found in archives, ensures academic integrity and allows others to locate and verify your work. This guide will delve into the nuances of Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) citation for archival holdings, covering everything from understanding the basic components of an archival citation to providing specific examples for various types of materials. We will explore how to correctly attribute letters, manuscripts, photographs, and other unique items, emphasizing the importance of clarity and completeness in your footnotes, endnotes, and bibliography entries. Mastering these citation practices is essential for any scholar engaging with primary source research in an archival setting.

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Understanding the Core Components of Archival Citations

When citing archival materials in Chicago style, several key pieces of information are essential for a complete and accurate reference. These components work together to guide a reader to the exact item you consulted. The primary goal is to provide enough detail that someone else could, in theory, retrieve the same document or collection. This often involves more granular information than citing a published book or article, due to the unique nature of archival holdings.

The fundamental elements typically include the author or creator of the material, the title of the specific item or collection, the date of the item, the name of the archive or repository, the location of the archive, and the specific reference number or call number. For unpublished materials, the nature of the item itself (e.g., letter, diary, report) is also often included. Understanding how these elements fit together is the first step to constructing effective Chicago style archival citations.

Citing Manuscripts and Personal Papers

Personal papers and manuscript collections are frequently encountered in archives. Citing these requires identifying the creator of the papers, the specific collection name, and then the individual item within that collection. The level of detail you provide will depend on how extensively you used the collection. If you consulted only one or two items, you will cite them specifically. If you drew heavily from an entire collection, you might cite the collection as a whole initially, with specific items referenced as needed.

Citing a Specific Letter or Document

To cite a specific letter or document within a larger collection, you will typically identify the author of the letter, the recipient, the date, the title of the collection, the archive name, and the relevant collection and folder numbers. Even if the letter itself doesn't have a formal title, describing it (e.g., "Letter from John Smith to Jane Doe") is crucial. The archive's finding aid is your best resource for identifying the precise identifiers.

Example:

John Smith to Jane Doe, October 15, 1925, John Smith Papers, Box 3, Folder 7, University Archives, University of Chicago.

Citing an Entire Collection

When you have used a substantial portion of a particular collection, it may be appropriate to cite the collection itself. This is often done in the initial citation or when referring to the general holdings of a specific collection. The citation will include the collection's title, the name of the repository, and its location. Subsequent references can be shortened.

Example:

John Smith Papers, University Archives, University of Chicago.

Citing Official Records and Institutional Archives

Official records, such as governmental documents, organizational minutes, or corporate reports, are often housed in institutional archives. The principles for citing these are similar to personal papers, but the "author" or creator is usually the institution itself. Identifying the specific record series and item within that series is paramount.

Citing Government Documents

Citing government documents requires careful attention to the issuing agency, the title of the document, the date, and the archive where it is held. If the document is published and has a widely known identifier like a serial number or publication date, that should be included. For unpublished governmental records, you will rely on the archive's cataloging information.

Example:

Record Group 12, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Schedule 1, Population, Enumeration District 1-100, Cook County, Illinois, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

Citing Organizational Records

For records from non-governmental organizations, such as the minutes of a historical society or the correspondence of a business, the process involves identifying the organization, the specific record type (e.g., minutes, reports), the date, and the archival location. The collection name under which these records are housed is also vital.

Example:

Minutes of the Board of Directors, January 10, 1955, Chicago Historical Society, Minutes Collection, Box 2, File 1.

Citing Audiovisual Materials

Archives often contain photographs, films, sound recordings, and other audiovisual materials. Citing these requires specific descriptors that convey the nature of the medium and its content, in addition to the standard archival information.

Citing Photographs

When citing a photograph, include a description of the image, the date it was taken or received, the photographer (if known), the collection name, the archive, and the specific identifier. If there is no formal title, a descriptive phrase is necessary.

Example:

Photograph of the construction of the Tribune Tower, circa 1922, Collection P-123, Chicago Tribune Photograph Archive, Chicago History Museum.

Citing Film or Video Recordings

For film or video recordings, provide a title if available, a brief description of the content, the date of the recording, the format (e.g., film reel, digital file), the collection name, and the archive. Note any relevant production information if known.

Example:

Interview with Studs Terkel, October 5, 1978, oral history recording, Studs Terkel Collection, OH 1978.01, Special Collections, University of Illinois Chicago.

Citing Digital Archival Materials

The increasing digitization of archival collections presents new challenges and opportunities for citation. While many principles remain the same, the inclusion of stable URLs or persistent identifiers (like DOIs) is becoming more important, where available. However, reliance on URLs alone can be problematic due to their potential for change.

Citing Digitized Manuscripts

When citing a digitized version of a physical manuscript, it is best practice to cite the original physical item and its location, and then provide information about the digital version. If the digital copy is the only accessible version, or the one you primarily used, you will emphasize the digital access point.

Example:

Albert Einstein to Max Born, December 4, 1926, Albert Einstein Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed December 1, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/albert-einstein-papers/articles-and-essays/einstein-letters-to-born/>.

Citing Born-Digital Archival Content

For materials that were created in a digital format and are now part of an archive, the citation will focus on the digital object itself. This includes the creator, title or description, date, the name of the repository, and the access point or collection identifier. If there's a persistent identifier, use it.

Example:

Website content, "The Great Chicago Fire," Chicago Historical Society Digital Archives, accessed November 15, 2023, <http://www.chicagohistory.org/digitalarchives/great-fire>.

Special Considerations for Archival Citations

Beyond the basic components, several special considerations can enhance the clarity and accuracy of your archival citations. These often relate to the unique characteristics of archival holdings and the practices of different repositories.

Using Finding Aids

Finding aids are crucial inventories for archival collections. They provide detailed descriptions of the contents and organization of a collection, including hierarchical structures, box and folder listings, and sometimes even item-level descriptions. When citing, referencing the finding aid itself can be useful, especially if it provides a unique identifier or a summary of the collection's organization.

Interfiled Materials

Sometimes, materials within a collection might not be strictly organized by date or author, leading to interfiled items. In such cases, descriptive notes within your citation or in the text can help clarify the provenance and context of the document.

Access Restrictions and Conditions

Some archival materials may have access restrictions or specific conditions for their use. It is good practice to acknowledge these, especially in footnotes or endnotes, if they are relevant to your research or could impact another researcher's ability to access the material.

Unpublished vs. Published Materials

The distinction between unpublished and published archival materials is important. Unpublished items, like personal letters or raw data, require more detailed citation to pinpoint their exact location within the archive. Published items found within archival collections might be cited more conventionally, but still require acknowledgement of their archival repository.

Common Pitfalls in Archival Citation

Researchers often encounter challenges when citing archival materials, leading to

common errors. Awareness of these pitfalls can help prevent inaccuracies in your scholarly work.

- Not providing enough detail: Failing to include collection names, box/folder numbers, or repository information makes it impossible for others to find the source.
- Over-reliance on URLs for digital sources: URLs can break or change, making the citation useless. Persistent identifiers or detailed archival locators are more reliable.
- Inconsistent formatting: Mixing citation styles or not adhering strictly to Chicago style guidelines for archival materials undermines credibility.
- Assuming identical access points: Different archives have different cataloging systems and finding aid structures. What works for one may not work for another.
- Vague descriptions of materials: Simply stating "a document" without any descriptive title or content summary is unhelpful.

Adhering to the principles outlined in this guide and consulting the Chicago Manual of Style, as well as the specific finding aids and policies of the archives you are using, will equip you to cite archival materials accurately and effectively, thereby strengthening the rigor of your research.

FAQ

Q: What is the most important information to include when citing a letter from an archival collection?

A: The most important information includes the author of the letter, the recipient, the date of the letter, the title of the collection it belongs to, the name of the archive or repository, and the specific box and folder numbers where the letter is located.

Q: How do I cite a document when I don't know the author or exact date?

A: If the author or exact date is unknown, use the most descriptive information available. For the author, you might note "Author Unknown" or identify the likely origin of the document. For the date, provide an approximate date or range (e.g., "circa 1910" or "1915-1920").

Q: What if the archival collection has a finding aid

available online? Should I include the URL in my citation?

A: While it can be helpful to include a URL for a finding aid, especially for rare or difficult-to-locate collections, it is often more robust to cite the archive and the collection name as the primary locator. URLs can change. If you include a URL, also provide the access date.

Q: How does Chicago style differ when citing published books versus archival manuscripts?

A: Citing published books typically involves author, title, publisher, and publication information. Citing archival manuscripts requires more specific information about the creator, the collection, the specific item within the collection, and the repository's exact location identifiers (box, folder, etc.).

Q: What is the best way to cite a photograph found in an archive?

A: A good citation for a photograph includes a description of the image content, the date it was taken or accessioned, the photographer (if known), the collection name, the archive's name, and any unique identifier or reference number assigned by the archive.

Q: Do I need to cite the archive every time I refer to a specific document from a collection?

A: In footnotes or endnotes, you generally need to provide the full citation the first time you reference a specific item. Subsequent references can be shortened to include only the author (or a concise description), a brief title, and the specific location (e.g., box and folder). The bibliography will list the collection and archive.

Q: What if the archival material is only accessible in a digital format?

A: When citing born-digital materials or digitized versions of physical items, you should provide information about the creator, title or description, date, the repository, and the access point. If a stable persistent identifier (like a DOI) is available, it is preferable to a standard URL.

Q: How do I handle interfiled materials in a collection when citing?

A: If materials are interfiled, your citation should reflect this and provide the clearest possible path to the item. You might mention "interfiled documents" in your description or note the specific folder where the item was found, even if it doesn't strictly follow the

collection's usual organizational scheme.

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