

chicago style examples for quoting personal correspondence

chicago style examples for quoting personal correspondence, understanding how to properly cite personal letters, emails, or even digital messages is crucial for academic and professional writing. The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) provides specific guidelines to ensure clarity and consistency when incorporating these primary sources into your work. This article delves into the nuances of quoting personal correspondence in Chicago style, offering detailed examples and explanations for both notes and bibliography entries. We will explore how to handle different types of correspondence, the information required for citation, and the stylistic considerations that ensure your citations are both accurate and compliant with CMOS standards. Mastering these principles will enhance the credibility and scholarly rigor of your writing.

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Understanding Personal Correspondence in Chicago Style

Chicago style, also known as The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), offers a robust framework for citing a wide array of sources, including those that may not have a traditional publication history. Personal correspondence falls into this category, encompassing letters, emails, interviews (which can be considered a form of personal correspondence), and other direct communications between individuals. The primary goal of citing personal correspondence is to provide sufficient information for your reader to locate the source, if possible, or at least to understand its nature and provenance. This is especially important when the correspondence is unpublished, as it may not be readily accessible to the general public.

When dealing with personal correspondence, the Chicago Manual of Style emphasizes accuracy and completeness. Unlike published works where standardized bibliographic information is generally available, personal correspondence often requires a more descriptive approach. This means identifying the author of the correspondence, the recipient, the date of the communication, and the current location of the original document or a reliable copy. The exact format for notes and bibliography entries will vary depending on whether the correspondence is unpublished or has been published in some form, and whether it resides in an archive or a private collection.

Types of Personal Correspondence for Citation

The category of personal correspondence is broad and can include various forms of direct communication. Recognizing these different types is the first step in correctly citing them within Chicago style. Each type may present unique challenges regarding accessibility and the information available for citation.

Letters and Postcards

Traditionally, letters and postcards have been the most common forms of personal correspondence. These can range from handwritten notes to typed, lengthy epistles. When citing letters, the key elements remain consistent: sender, recipient, date, and location. If the letter is housed in a special collection or archive, that information becomes critical.

Emails and Digital Messages

In the digital age, emails, direct messages on social media platforms, and other forms of electronic communication have become prevalent. Chicago style provides guidance for citing these as well, often treating them similarly to letters but with adaptations for the digital medium. The subject line, sender's email address, recipient's email address, and the date and time of transmission are vital pieces of information.

Unpublished Manuscripts and Drafts

While not strictly correspondence, unpublished manuscripts, drafts of articles, or personal notes that are shared directly between individuals can sometimes be treated as personal correspondence, especially if they are part of an ongoing dialogue or exchange. The focus remains on their unpublished nature and the specifics of their location.

Oral Communications (Interviews)

Though often cited differently, interviews, particularly informal ones or those conducted in a private capacity, can share characteristics with personal correspondence. Chicago style typically provides distinct guidelines for interviews, but the principle of direct communication and personal exchange is similar. For the purposes of this discussion on personal correspondence, we will focus on written and digital forms.

Citation Components for Personal Correspondence

Regardless of the specific format of personal correspondence, certain core pieces of information are essential for a complete and accurate citation in Chicago style. These components allow readers to identify the source and, if necessary, understand its context.

Sender and Recipient Identification

Clearly identifying who sent the correspondence and to whom it was sent is paramount. This can be done by name, and sometimes by role or relationship if that adds crucial context. For example, citing a letter from "John Adams to Abigail Adams" is more informative than just "a letter."

Date of Communication

The precise date of the correspondence is crucial for historical context and chronological understanding. This should include the month, day, and year. If only a partial date is available, Chicago style dictates how to represent that (e.g., "circa" or an approximate date).

Description of the Document

A brief description of the item being cited is often necessary. This could include terms like "letter," "email," "telegram," or "postcard." For unpublished materials, this description helps distinguish it from other documents within a collection.

Location of the Source

This is a critical component, especially for unpublished correspondence. It includes the name of the archive, library, or personal collection where the document is held. For published correspondence, this would refer to the book, journal, or website where it can be found.

Access Information (if applicable)

If the correspondence is available online or through a specific repository, providing information on how to access it can be helpful. For private collections, this might involve noting it is held privately and not available for public access.

Notes-Style Citations for Personal Correspondence

In Chicago style, the notes-and-bibliography system uses footnotes or endnotes for citations. When quoting personal correspondence, the format in the note should be detailed enough to identify the specific piece of correspondence.

Citing Unpublished Letters in Notes

For unpublished letters, the note should clearly identify the sender, recipient, date, the nature of the document, and its repository. The first time a source is cited, the note is typically longer and more detailed.

- Example:
John Smith to Jane Doe, October 15, 1955, letter, John Smith Papers, Special Collections, University Archives, Anytown University, Anytown, USA.

Citing Published Letters in Notes

If the correspondence has been published, the note should include the standard bibliographic information for the published work, along with page numbers. The original sender and recipient might still be mentioned for clarity, especially in the first citation.

- Example:
John Smith to Jane Doe, October 15, 1955, in *Selected Letters of John Smith*, ed. Richard Roe (New York: Publisher Name, 2010), 45.

Citing Emails in Notes

Emails are generally treated as unpublished correspondence unless they are part of a published collection. The note should include sender, recipient, date, and a brief description.

- Example:
Jane Doe to John Smith, April 2, 2023, email, private collection of John Smith.

For subsequent citations of the same source, a shortened note format is used, typically including the author's last name and a shortened title or description.

Bibliography-Style Citations for Personal Correspondence

The bibliography, appearing at the end of the work, provides a concise list of all sources consulted. The entry for personal correspondence should mirror the information in the notes but be formatted for an alphabetical list.

Bibliography Entry for Unpublished Letters

The bibliography entry for unpublished correspondence typically lists the sender first, followed by the recipient, date, description, and location. The format is generally consistent with other manuscript citations.

- Example:
Smith, John. To Jane Doe, October 15, 1955. Letter. John Smith Papers, Special Collections,

Bibliography Entry for Published Letters

When citing published correspondence in the bibliography, the entry follows the standard format for a book or edited collection, with details about the correspondence within that publication.

- Example:
Smith, John. To Jane Doe, October 15, 1955. In *Selected Letters of John Smith*, edited by Richard Roe, 45. New York: Publisher Name, 2010.

Bibliography Entry for Emails

For emails, the bibliography entry usually includes the sender, recipient, date, and a description. The location is often stated as "private collection" or similar if not part of a larger, accessible archive.

- Example:
Doe, Jane. To John Smith, April 2, 2023. Email. Private collection of John Smith.

Quoting Unpublished Personal Correspondence

Quoting unpublished personal correspondence requires careful attention to detail, as the source is not readily available to the reader. The primary goal is to provide enough information to establish the authenticity and provenance of the quote.

Establishing Provenance

When quoting unpublished correspondence, it's essential to establish its provenance, meaning its origin and ownership. This is typically done in the note by identifying the collection, archive, or private ownership. For instance, stating that the letter is part of the "Smith Family Papers" at a specific university library lends credibility.

Accuracy in Transcription

While Chicago style permits minor editorial corrections for clarity in quotations, it's generally best to be as faithful as possible to the original text of unpublished correspondence. Any significant alterations or omissions should be indicated with bracketed notes (e.g., [sic] for errors, [...] for omissions).

Handling Personal Names and Relationships

When quoting from personal correspondence, it's often helpful to clarify the relationship between the sender and recipient, especially if it's not immediately obvious from the names. This can be done within the descriptive text or in the citation itself.

Quoting Published Personal Correspondence

Quoting from correspondence that has been published is more straightforward because the source is accessible to readers. The citation process here aligns more closely with citing other published materials.

Referencing Published Collections

If the correspondence appears in a published collection of letters, a biography, or an edited volume, the citation should refer to that published work. This involves providing the author of the correspondence, the title of the collection (if applicable), the editor, publisher, and page number(s).

Identifying Original Correspondents

Even when citing published correspondence, it is good practice in the initial note to mention the original sender and recipient. This provides immediate context and clarifies the specific piece of correspondence being quoted from the larger collection.

When Correspondence Appears in Other Works

Sometimes, a letter might be quoted in its entirety or in part within another author's published work, such as a historical monograph or journal article. In such cases, you would cite the secondary source where you found the quotation, as this is the immediate source of your information.

- Example:

If a letter from Abraham Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln, dated July 10, 1863, is quoted in a biography by historian David Miller, your citation would point to Miller's book, not directly to the original letter unless you had independently accessed it.

Digital Personal Correspondence (Emails and Social Media)

The rise of digital communication necessitates updated citation practices. Chicago style adapts its principles to these new forms of correspondence.

Citing Emails

For emails, the essential elements are the sender, recipient, subject line (if significant), date, and time. The location would typically be the sender's or recipient's private email archive, or if part of a specific collection, the repository holding those digital records. The format in notes and bibliography is similar to that of unpublished letters.

- Example Note:
John Doe to Jane Smith, April 2, 2023, Subject: Project Update, email, private collection.
- Example Bibliography:
Doe, John. To Jane Smith, April 2, 2023. Subject: Project Update. Email. Private collection.

Citing Social Media Messages

Direct messages on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram are treated similarly. The sender, recipient, date, and platform are key. Privacy settings and the potential for message deletion mean these can be tricky. If possible, a screenshot or saved message is preferable evidence. The location would usually be described as "private message" or similar.

- Example Note:
Jane Smith to John Doe, April 3, 2023, direct message, Twitter, private collection.

Archiving Digital Correspondence

When citing digital correspondence, especially if it is ongoing or from a private account, it is good practice to have a stable copy or archive of the communication. This ensures the source remains accessible for verification. For published digital correspondence (e.g., an open forum or public blog comment), the citation would reflect the online publication details.

Special Considerations for Personal Correspondence Citations

There are several unique situations and considerations when citing personal correspondence that warrant specific attention to ensure adherence to Chicago style standards.

Privacy and Permissions

When dealing with unpublished personal correspondence, especially from living individuals, it is crucial to consider issues of privacy and obtain necessary permissions before quoting. The archival description might indicate restrictions on access or use. Always respect these limitations.

Handling Fragile or Damaged Materials

If citing correspondence that is fragile or in poor condition, you may need to note this in your citation. If a more stable copy or microfilm exists, it's often best to cite that accessible version while still crediting the original source.

Correspondence with Multiple Authors

In cases of jointly authored letters or multi-party email threads, Chicago style advises listing all authors or participants to the extent practical. For extensive email chains, you might cite the primary sender and key participants, or describe the thread generally if specific attribution is cumbersome.

When the Document is a Copy

If you are citing a photocopy or a digitized version of a letter, it is important to indicate this. For example, "photocopy of original letter" or "digitized image from [Archive Name]." This clarifies that you are not citing the original artifact directly.

Adhering to these guidelines ensures that your citations of personal correspondence are both accurate and professional, upholding the integrity of your research and respecting the nature of the sources you employ.

Frequently Asked Questions About Chicago Style Personal Correspondence

Q: How do I cite a personal letter that is in my possession but not in an archive?

A: For a personal letter in your possession, you would cite it as unpublished correspondence. The note would typically include the sender, recipient, date, a description (e.g., "letter"), and then state "private collection of [Your Name]" or similar. In the bibliography, you would list it under your name as the owner of the collection.

Q: What is the best way to cite an email exchange with a colleague?

A: For an email exchange, cite the specific email you are quoting. Include the sender, recipient, date, and subject line. Indicate that it is an "email" and note its location, such as "private collection of [Your Name]" or "private collection of [Colleague's Name]."

Q: Do I need to get permission to quote a letter written by a deceased relative?

A: While copyright laws may apply for a period after the author's death, generally, personal correspondence becomes public domain or falls under fair use for academic purposes once the author is deceased. However, if the correspondence is held in an archive, you may need to adhere to their specific access and usage policies. It's always wise to err on the side of caution and research copyright and privacy considerations.

Q: How do I cite correspondence that has been published online on a historical society's website?

A: If correspondence is published online by a reputable source like a historical society, treat it as a published source. You would cite the website title, the specific page or document title, the organization hosting it, and the URL along with an access date. The note should also indicate the original sender and recipient and the date of the correspondence.

Q: What if I can only find a partial date for a letter?

A: If only a partial date is available, Chicago style allows for approximations. You can use "circa" (c.) before the date (e.g., c. 1955) or provide the most specific date known (e.g., October 1955). In the note, you can add a parenthetical clarification such as "(date approximate)" or similar.

Q: Should I include the recipient's name in the bibliography entry for a letter?

A: Yes, it is generally advisable to include the recipient's name in the bibliography entry for personal correspondence, especially for unpublished materials. This provides clarity and helps distinguish between multiple correspondences from the same sender. The format is typically Sender, To Recipient, Date.

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