

chicago style legal citations for personal communications

Understanding Chicago Style Legal Citations for Personal Communications

chicago style legal citations for personal communications, while perhaps less common than citing published cases or statutes, are essential for academic legal writing, scholarly articles, and even some professional memos. Accurately documenting information obtained from sources like emails, interviews, or conversations ensures transparency, allows for verification, and upholds academic integrity. This article delves into the intricacies of citing personal communications in Chicago style, covering the fundamental principles, specific formatting requirements for various types of exchanges, and best practices for maintaining clarity and credibility in your legal scholarship. We will explore the nuances of distinguishing between published and unpublished sources and the specific elements needed to create a complete and accurate citation.

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Key Principles of Chicago Style for Personal Communications

When citing personal communications in Chicago style for legal matters, the primary goal is to provide enough information for the reader to locate the communication or understand its nature and origin. Unlike published works, personal communications are generally not readily accessible to the public. Therefore, the citation must clearly identify the sender, the recipient, the date, and the medium of the communication. The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) emphasizes precision and clarity, ensuring that the citation does not mislead the reader into believing the information is publicly available when it is not.

A crucial distinction to make is between personal communications that are archived and potentially retrievable by the recipient (such as emails or letters) and those that are ephemeral (like a brief phone call or an in-person conversation). For the former, you can provide more specific details to aid identification. For the latter, the emphasis shifts to summarizing the content and context of the conversation. Regardless of the medium, the underlying principle remains the same: attribute the information to its source accurately and comprehensively.

Citing Emails in Chicago Style

Emails are a frequent form of personal communication in legal practice and scholarship. Citing an email requires identifying the sender, the recipient, the date the email was sent, and the subject line. Because emails are typically sent to a specific individual and are not published, they are treated as unpublished materials. In Chicago style, this usually means including the email address of the sender or recipient in the citation for clarity, though this can be omitted if privacy concerns are paramount or if the context makes it obvious.

When an email is cited in a footnote, the format typically begins with the sender's name, followed by their email address (if relevant and appropriate), then the recipient's name and email address (again, if relevant), the date the email was sent, and finally, a concise description or the subject line of the email. For instance, a footnote might read: "Email from Jane Doe (jane.doe@example.com) to John Smith (john.smith@example.com), October 26, 2023, Subject: Case Update."

In the bibliography, personal communications are generally not listed unless the author has obtained permission to include them or they are particularly central to the argument and have been formally archived. If they are included, the format is similar but often slightly more condensed, focusing

on the essential identifying details. The key is to ensure that the bibliography entry, if used, corresponds precisely to the footnote citation. Always consider the audience and the purpose of your writing when deciding whether to include personal communications in your bibliography.

Citing Interviews in Chicago Style

Interviews, whether conducted in person, by telephone, or via video conference, are a vital source of information. Citing an interview in Chicago style requires identifying the interviewee, the interviewer (which is usually you, the author), the date of the interview, and the format in which it was conducted. If the interview was recorded, noting the existence and availability of the recording can be helpful, but it is not a requirement for basic citation.

The standard footnote format for an interview includes the interviewee's name, their affiliation (if relevant to the context), the type of interview (e.g., "interview by telephone," "in-person interview"), and the date. For example: "John Williams, Senior Partner at Legal Solutions LLP, interview by telephone with author, March 15, 2024." If the interview was conducted via video conference, you would specify that, such as "Zoom interview."

When citing an interview in the bibliography, the format is similar to the footnote, but it may be presented more succinctly. The interviewee's name is listed first, followed by their title and affiliation, the method of interview, and the date. For instance: "Williams, John. Senior Partner at Legal Solutions LLP. Interview by telephone with author. March 15, 2024." Again, the decision to include interviews in the bibliography depends on their significance and whether they have been formally archived or shared.

Citing Telephone Conversations and Other Oral Communications

Oral communications that are not formal interviews, such as brief telephone conversations or in-person discussions, are also personal communications. Citing these requires careful attention to detail, as they are inherently more ephemeral. The goal is to provide the reader with enough context to understand the source of the information without creating the impression that the conversation is readily verifiable by an external party.

In a footnote, you would typically identify the individuals involved in the conversation, the date, and the nature of the communication. For example: "Conversation with Professor Emily Carter regarding appellate procedure, April 10, 2024." If the conversation was particularly significant or lengthy,

you might add a brief note about the topic discussed. The emphasis here is on attribution rather than detailed identification of the specific utterance, as these are often not recorded.

Similar to other personal communications, brief oral exchanges are usually not included in the bibliography. Their presence is acknowledged in the footnotes where the information is first presented. This approach respects the private nature of such exchanges while still fulfilling the requirement of attributing information to its source. The key is to be consistent in how you document these types of communications throughout your work.

Citing Social Media and Digital Personal Communications

The digital age has introduced new forms of personal communication, including direct messages on social media platforms, private chats on messaging apps, and even comments within private online groups. Citing these requires a careful approach, as they exist in a gray area between public and private information. Generally, direct messages or private chats on social media are treated as personal communications.

When citing a direct message, for instance, you would identify the sender and recipient, the platform, and the date. For example: "Direct message from David Lee to Sarah Chen on Instagram, November 1, 2023." If the content is crucial, you might include a brief description of the message's subject matter. It's essential to be discreet and respectful of privacy when citing such communications, especially if you have not obtained explicit permission from the other party.

Comments or posts within private online groups that are not accessible to the general public should also be treated as personal communications. The citation would specify the group, the author of the post, and the date. For example: "Comment by Mark Johnson in the 'Legal Scholars Forum' Facebook group, December 5, 2023." As with other personal communications, these are typically not included in the bibliography.

Footnotes vs. Bibliography: Chicago Style's Dual System

Chicago style employs a dual citation system, primarily using footnotes for in-text citations and a bibliography at the end of the work. This system is particularly relevant when citing personal communications. Footnotes are ideal for personal communications because they allow for immediate

attribution of the information at the point it is used in the text, without disrupting the flow of the main argument. The detailed information required to identify the communication is thus presented in a discrete location.

The bibliography, on the other hand, is a comprehensive list of all sources consulted and cited in the work, excluding those that are typically not listed, such as personal communications. While some exceptions exist for highly significant or formally archived personal communications, the general rule is that personal communications are omitted from the bibliography. This aligns with the understanding that these sources are not publicly accessible and are primarily documented for the benefit of the author and their immediate audience.

Understanding this distinction is crucial for adhering to Chicago style. The purpose of the footnote is to provide immediate, specific attribution, while the bibliography serves as a broader overview of the research undertaken. For personal communications, the footnote carries the full weight of the citation, providing all necessary details for the reader to understand the origin of the information.

Common Pitfalls and Best Practices

One of the most common pitfalls when citing personal communications is the failure to provide sufficient detail. Readers need to know who communicated, with whom, when, and through what medium. Vague citations like "personal communication" are insufficient. Conversely, oversharing personal details or email addresses without considering privacy can also be an issue. Always prioritize clarity and accuracy while being mindful of confidentiality and ethical considerations.

Another pitfall is inconsistency in formatting. Adhering strictly to the Chicago Manual of Style guidelines for personal communications is key. This includes ensuring that the information presented in the footnote is accurate and complete according to the style guide. Best practices include:

- Always confirm the date of the communication.
- Clearly identify both parties involved.
- State the method of communication (email, phone call, interview, etc.).
- For emails, include a relevant subject line or brief description.
- When in doubt, err on the side of providing more detail.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality. Obtain permission if necessary before citing sensitive personal communications.

- Ensure your citations are consistent throughout your document.

By following these best practices and understanding the core principles of Chicago style for personal communications, legal scholars and writers can ensure their work is accurate, credible, and ethically sound.

FAQ

Q: What are the essential elements for citing a personal email in Chicago style?

A: The essential elements for citing a personal email in Chicago style include the sender's name, their email address (if appropriate), the recipient's name and email address (if appropriate), the date the email was sent, and the subject line or a brief description of the email's content.

Q: Do personal communications, like emails or interviews, need to be included in the bibliography in Chicago style?

A: Generally, personal communications such as emails, telephone conversations, and interviews are not included in the bibliography in Chicago style. They are typically cited exclusively in footnotes.

Q: How do I cite an interview conducted over Zoom in Chicago style?

A: An interview conducted over Zoom should be cited similarly to an in-person or telephone interview. The footnote should include the interviewee's name, their affiliation (if relevant), specify that it was a "Zoom interview" or "video conference interview," and include the date of the interview.

Q: Is it necessary to include the recipient's email address when citing an email in a footnote?

A: Including the recipient's email address is often helpful for identifying the communication but may be omitted if privacy is a concern or if the context makes it clear. The sender's email address is generally more critical for identification.

**Q: What if I spoke to someone on the phone briefly?
How should I cite that in Chicago style?**

A: For brief telephone conversations, you would cite it in a footnote by identifying the individuals involved, the date of the conversation, and briefly stating the topic discussed, for example, "Telephone conversation with John Doe regarding the contract revision, May 10, 2024."

Q: Can I cite a direct message from a social media platform as a personal communication in Chicago style?

A: Yes, direct messages on social media platforms are typically treated as personal communications. The citation should identify the sender, recipient, the platform, and the date of the message.

Q: What is the main purpose of citing personal communications in legal writing?

A: The main purpose of citing personal communications in legal writing is to attribute information to its source, ensure transparency, allow for potential verification by the reader (if applicable), and maintain academic and professional integrity.

Q: Should I ask for permission before citing personal communications?

A: It is highly recommended, and often ethically necessary, to obtain permission from the individuals involved before citing personal communications, especially if the content is sensitive or confidential.

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