

chicago style parenthetical citation for personal communication

chicago style parenthetical citation for personal communication is a crucial aspect of academic and professional writing, ensuring proper attribution for information gained through direct, unpublished interactions. Navigating the nuances of citing sources like emails, interviews, or conversations can be complex, but understanding the Chicago Manual of Style's guidelines simplifies the process. This article will provide a comprehensive guide to implementing Chicago style parenthetical citations for personal communication, covering its importance, the specific components required, and practical examples for various forms of interaction. We will delve into the essential elements that must be included in both the in-text citation and the bibliography entry, though for personal communication, a bibliography entry is typically not required. Mastering these rules allows writers to maintain academic integrity and provide readers with clear avenues to verify information.

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What is Personal Communication in Chicago Style?

In the context of the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), personal communication refers to any information exchanged directly between individuals that is not published or readily accessible to the public. This category encompasses a wide range of interactions, including but not limited to personal conversations, telephone calls, interviews (conducted in person or remotely), personal emails, private social media messages, and letters. The defining characteristic is that the information is not available in a printed or publicly archived format that a reader could independently consult. Therefore, the citation must provide enough information within the text to identify the source of this unique, often ephemeral, piece of data.

It is essential to distinguish personal communication from other forms of unpublished material. For instance, a personal letter that has been archived and made available through a library or repository would typically be treated

as an archival source, not personal communication. The key distinction lies in the accessibility and the expectation of privacy or direct, unmediated exchange. When in doubt about whether a source qualifies as personal communication, consider if a typical reader would be able to locate and access this information through conventional research methods. If the answer is no, it likely falls under the umbrella of personal communication in Chicago style.

The Importance of Citing Personal Communication

Citing personal communication is paramount for several reasons, all rooted in the principles of academic honesty and scholarly rigor. Primarily, it acknowledges the origin of specific information, giving credit where it is due and avoiding plagiarism. When you use an idea, a quote, or a fact that you obtained through personal interaction, you are ethically bound to attribute that information to the individual who provided it. Failing to do so misrepresents the source and can lead to accusations of academic dishonesty.

Furthermore, citing personal communication allows your readers to assess the credibility and context of the information. While personal communication might not have a formal bibliography entry in the same way a published book does, the parenthetical citation within the text serves as a vital locator. It informs the reader who shared this information, providing them with the means to potentially follow up or understand the nature of the source. This transparency is fundamental to the research process, allowing for verification and further inquiry, which strengthens the overall argument of your work.

Components of a Chicago Style Parenthetical Citation for Personal Communication

The Chicago Manual of Style, particularly in its Notes and Bibliography system (which is most common in humanities and history), requires specific information when citing personal communication directly within the text. Since personal communication is generally not included in a bibliography, all necessary attribution is handled through the parenthetical citation itself. This citation needs to be clear, concise, and informative enough for a reader to understand the origin of the information without needing further reference.

The essential components generally include:

- The full name of the communicator.

- The type of communication (e.g., email, personal interview, telephone conversation).
- The date the communication occurred.

For example, a common format would be (John Smith, email, October 26, 2023). The level of detail can be adjusted based on the context and the reader's potential need for further clarification, but these core elements ensure proper identification and attribution.

It is important to note that in some instances, if the communicator is already clearly identified in the text, you may only need to provide the date or a briefer identifier. However, to ensure maximum clarity and adherence to scholarly standards, it is always advisable to include the communicator's name, the type of communication, and the date whenever possible. This comprehensive approach mitigates any potential ambiguity and upholds the integrity of your research.

Citing Different Types of Personal Communication

The specific format for citing personal communication in Chicago style can vary slightly depending on the nature of the interaction. While the core components remain consistent, the phrasing might be adjusted to accurately reflect the method of communication. Understanding these variations ensures that your citations are precise and reflect the actual source of your information.

Personal Emails

When citing an email you received, the standard format is to include the sender's name, specify that it was an email, and provide the date it was sent. For example, if you received an email from Dr. Eleanor Vance on November 5, 2023, the parenthetical citation would be (Eleanor Vance, email, November 5, 2023). If you are the sender, you would refer to yourself or the context of your correspondence.

Interviews

For interviews, whether conducted in person, by telephone, or via video conference, the citation should clearly state the interviewee's name and the date of the interview. The method of interview (e.g., "personal interview" or

"telephone interview") can also be included for added clarity. A citation for an interview with Professor David Lee conducted on December 1, 2023, might appear as (David Lee, personal interview, December 1, 2023).

Telephone Conversations

Citing a telephone conversation follows a similar pattern. You would typically include the name of the person you spoke with, note that it was a telephone conversation, and provide the date of the call. For instance, if you spoke with Sarah Chen by phone on October 15, 2023, the citation would look like (Sarah Chen, telephone conversation, October 15, 2023).

Letters

Personal letters, if not part of an accessible archive, are treated as personal communication. The citation would include the sender's name, the fact that it was a letter, and the date it was written or sent. For a letter from Michael Brown dated January 10, 2024, you would cite it as (Michael Brown, letter, January 10, 2024).

Parenthetical Citation Examples for Personal Communication

To solidify understanding, let's look at a few more practical examples of how Chicago style parenthetical citations for personal communication would appear in your text. These examples illustrate the flexibility and precision required to correctly attribute information gained through direct interaction.

Imagine you are discussing a historical event and an expert shared a personal anecdote that clarifies a detail. You might incorporate it into your writing like this:

The exact number of participants in the initial protest remains a subject of debate, though eyewitness accounts suggest it was significantly larger than officially recorded (Maria Rodriguez, email, March 8, 2023).

In a scientific paper discussing a novel research methodology, you might refer to a conversation with a colleague:

The feasibility of scaling this technique was confirmed through discussions with Dr. Anya Sharma, who has extensive experience in similar laboratory

settings (Anya Sharma, personal interview, February 15, 2024).

When recounting a personal experience or obtaining a direct quote from someone you spoke with informally:

The community's response to the new policy was largely one of cautious optimism, as expressed by long-time resident Mr. Samuel Jones during our conversation last week (Samuel Jones, telephone conversation, September 21, 2023).

These examples demonstrate how to seamlessly integrate citations into your prose, ensuring that each piece of information derived from personal communication is properly attributed.

When is a Bibliography Entry Not Required for Personal Communication?

A key characteristic of citing personal communication in Chicago style is that, in most circumstances, it does not appear in the bibliography. This is because personal communication is considered unavailable to the general reader. Unlike published books, articles, or even archival documents that can be accessed by others, the information shared through personal contact is unique to that interaction and not meant for public dissemination or verification through a bibliography. Therefore, the entire citation is contained within the parenthetical note in the text.

The purpose of a bibliography is to provide readers with a list of sources they can consult to verify your claims or explore the topic further. Since personal communication, by its nature, cannot be consulted by a reader after the fact, it does not fit the criteria for inclusion in a bibliography. This principle applies to most forms of personal communication, including emails, private messages, interviews not published, and private conversations, as long as they are not part of a publicly accessible archive or published work.

However, there are rare exceptions. If a personal letter has been donated to a library or archive and is publicly accessible, it would then be cited as an archival source, and would likely appear in the bibliography. Similarly, if an interview is published in a journal or book, it is then cited as a published source. The distinguishing factor is always the accessibility of the source to your intended audience. If a reader can reasonably be expected to find and consult the source you are citing, it might warrant a bibliography entry.

Best Practices for Citing Personal Communication

To ensure accuracy and maintain scholarly integrity when citing personal communication in Chicago style, adhering to certain best practices is essential. These practices go beyond simply knowing the format and focus on the ethical and practical considerations of using such sources in your writing.

- **Obtain Permission:** Before quoting or paraphrasing information from personal communication, especially if it is sensitive or revealing, always seek permission from the communicator. This is an ethical courtesy that respects their privacy and their contributions.
- **Be Specific:** While the basic citation includes name, type, and date, add further clarifying details if necessary. For instance, if you had multiple conversations with the same person, specifying the subject matter or context can be helpful.
- **Use Clear Language:** Ensure your prose clearly indicates that the information comes from personal communication. Phrases like "according to an email from..." or "in a conversation with..." can introduce the citation smoothly.
- **Paraphrase When Possible:** While direct quotes are sometimes necessary, paraphrasing information from personal communication can often be more effective and less intrusive.
- **Be Consistent:** Once you establish a format for citing personal communication, maintain that consistency throughout your document.
- **Focus on Accessibility:** Always remember that the citation's primary role is to inform the reader who provided the information. If the information is readily available elsewhere (e.g., a public interview transcript), cite the public source.

By following these guidelines, you can effectively and ethically incorporate information from personal communications into your research, strengthening both the credibility and the clarity of your work.

FAQ

Q: What is the primary purpose of citing personal

communication in Chicago style?

A: The primary purpose of citing personal communication in Chicago style is to give credit to the source of information and to allow readers to understand the origin and context of that information, ensuring academic integrity and avoiding plagiarism.

Q: Do I need to include a bibliography entry for personal emails cited in my Chicago style paper?

A: Generally, no. Personal emails are typically considered unavailable to the public reader, so they are cited parenthetically within the text but do not appear in the bibliography.

Q: How detailed should my parenthetical citation for personal communication be?

A: The citation should include the communicator's name, the type of communication (e.g., email, interview), and the date. Additional context might be added if necessary for clarity.

Q: Can I cite a private social media message in Chicago style?

A: Yes, if the message is not publicly visible or part of a public forum, it is treated as personal communication and cited using the standard format: (Name, type of communication, date).

Q: What if the person I communicated with is already mentioned in the sentence?

A: If the communicator's name is already clear from the sentence, you might only need to include the type of communication and the date, for example, (email, October 26, 2023). However, including the name is often preferred for maximum clarity.

Q: How do I cite an interview that was conducted over video call?

A: You would cite it similarly to an in-person interview, specifying the interviewee's name, the date, and indicating it was a video interview, such as (Jane Doe, video interview, March 15, 2024).

Q: When would a personal letter require a bibliography entry in Chicago style?

A: A personal letter would require a bibliography entry only if it has been archived and is publicly accessible through a library or collection. Otherwise, it is cited parenthetically as personal communication.

Q: Is it acceptable to paraphrase information from personal communication, or must I use direct quotes?

A: It is acceptable to paraphrase information from personal communication. In fact, paraphrasing can often be more fluid within your text than direct quotations, but proper attribution is still required.

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