

citing art history chicago style

Mastering Citing Art History: A Comprehensive Guide to Chicago Style

citing art history chicago style is a fundamental skill for any student, scholar, or enthusiast delving into the visual arts. Understanding and applying the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) correctly ensures academic integrity, allows readers to trace your sources, and lends credibility to your research. This comprehensive guide will illuminate the intricacies of citing artworks, exhibitions, and art historical texts according to CMS guidelines, covering both the notes-bibliography system and the author-date system. We will explore the specific elements required for different types of sources, from paintings and sculptures to digital images and journal articles, providing clear examples to solidify your understanding. By mastering these citation practices, you will enhance the rigor and clarity of your art historical research and writing.

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Understanding the Chicago Manual of Style for Art History

The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS) offers two primary citation systems: the notes-bibliography system and the author-date system. For art history, the notes-bibliography system is often preferred due to its ability to provide detailed information directly within the text through footnotes or endnotes, which is particularly useful for descriptive passages and analysis of visual works. This system involves numbered notes corresponding to citations in

a bibliography at the end of the work. The author-date system, while less common in traditional art history scholarship, is also a valid option, relying on parenthetical citations in the text followed by a reference list. Regardless of the system chosen, consistency and adherence to the guidelines are paramount for effective scholarly communication.

The CMS provides a robust framework for citing a wide array of sources, recognizing the unique nature of art objects and their documentation. It emphasizes clarity, completeness, and the accurate attribution of information and creative work. For art historians, this means carefully documenting not just textual sources but also the provenance, medium, dimensions, and location of artworks. The manual's flexibility allows for adaptation to new media and digital scholarship, ensuring its relevance in contemporary art historical practice.

Key Components of Art Historical Citations

Effective art historical citations require specific information to uniquely identify a source. For visual artworks, this typically includes the artist's name, the title of the work (italicized), the date of creation, the medium, the dimensions, and the current location or collection. For textual sources, standard bibliographic information such as author, title, publication date, publisher, and page numbers is essential. Understanding these core components is the first step in constructing accurate citations for any art historical research project.

The precise order and formatting of these elements can vary slightly depending on whether you are using the notes-bibliography system or the author-date system, and whether you are citing a note or a bibliography entry. However, the fundamental goal remains the same: to provide enough detail so that any reader can locate the original source or artwork with minimal difficulty. Accuracy in capturing these details is crucial to avoid misattribution or confusion.

Citing Visual Artworks in Notes and Bibliography

Citing visual artworks is a cornerstone of art historical writing. The Chicago Manual of Style provides specific guidance for how to represent these objects accurately in both notes and bibliography entries. When citing an artwork directly in a note, you will typically begin with the artist's name, followed by the title of the work in italics, the date of creation, the medium, dimensions, and finally, the collection or location where the work is housed. For example, a note might read: "1. Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*, c. 1503-06, oil on poplar panel, 77 x 53 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris."

In the bibliography, the entry for a visual artwork follows a similar structure but often omits specific page numbers unless referring to a particular detail or section of a larger catalog or exhibition. The bibliography entry for the same artwork would be presented as: "Da Vinci, Leonardo. *Mona Lisa*. c. 1503-06. Oil on poplar panel, 77 x 53 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris." The artist's last name is placed first in bibliography entries for alphabetical sorting. It is also important to note that if you are citing an artwork as it appears in a secondary source, such as a book or exhibition catalogue, you will cite the secondary source and then indicate the artwork within it, for example, "Plate 12, *The Persistence of Memory* by Salvador Dalí, in *Surrealism in the 20th Century* by Jane Smith."

Footnotes and Endnotes for Artworks

Footnotes and endnotes in the notes-bibliography system serve as the primary mechanism for citing artworks within the body of your text. Each note is keyed to a specific point in your writing and provides detailed bibliographic information for the source being referenced. When citing an artwork for the first time in a note, it is essential to provide all relevant information, including artist, title, date, medium, dimensions, and location. Subsequent citations of the same artwork can be shortened, often using the artist's last name and a shortened title, or simply a note number if the reference is clear from context.

Consider the following example for a first-time footnote citation of a sculpture: “² Auguste Rodin, *The Thinker*, modeled 1880, cast c. 1904, bronze, 186 x 118 x 118 cm, Rodin Museum, Paris.” For a subsequent note referencing the same work, a shortened version might be used: “⁵ Rodin, *The Thinker*.” This practice of providing full details upon first mention and then using shortened forms ensures clarity while also streamlining the citation process throughout your paper.

Bibliography Entries for Artworks

The bibliography section at the end of your paper provides a complete list of all the sources you have cited. For artworks, the bibliography entry mirrors the information presented in the first note but is arranged for alphabetical listing by the artist's last name. The order of elements is consistent: Last Name, First Name. Title of Artwork. Date of Creation. Medium. Dimensions. Collection/Location.

Here’s a bibliography entry example: “Picasso, Pablo. *Guernica*. 1937. Oil on canvas, 350.5 x 782 cm. Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid.” When citing an artwork found within a publication, the bibliography entry will focus on the publication itself, with a clear indication of the artwork being referenced. For example: “Kandinsky, Wassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Translated by Michael T. H. Sadler. New York: Dover Publications, 1977. Image 3, *Composition VII*.” This approach ensures that the reader can locate both the artwork and the publication where it is discussed or reproduced.

Citing Exhibitions and Catalogues

Exhibitions and their accompanying catalogues are vital resources for art historians, often containing essays by leading scholars, detailed provenance information, and high-quality reproductions. Citing these materials accurately is crucial for acknowledging the research and scholarship that informs your work.

Exhibition Catalogues in Notes and Bibliography

When citing an exhibition catalogue, the notes-bibliography system requires specific details to guide the reader. In a footnote or endnote, you would typically include the author of the catalogue essay (if applicable), the title of the exhibition (italicized), the exhibition dates and venue, the publication details of the catalogue (editor, place, publisher, year), and specific page numbers. For example: “³ Robert Rosenblum, ‘*The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle*,’ in *Victorian Painting*, exh. cat., National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1991,

156.”

The corresponding bibliography entry would be formatted as: “Rosenblum, Robert. ‘The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle.’ In *Victorian Painting*, exh. cat., 155–62. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1991.” Note the absence of the initial footnote number and the slight reordering of elements for alphabetical listing by the author’s last name. If the catalogue is edited rather than authored by a single individual, you would cite the editor(s) accordingly.

Exhibitions Themselves

Sometimes, you may wish to cite the exhibition itself as an event rather than solely the catalogue. In such cases, the citation in a note would focus on the exhibition title, dates, and venue. For example: “⁴ The exhibition ‘Impressionism: Art, Leisure, and Parisian Society,’ held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art from February 26 to May 27, 2018, offered a comprehensive look at the movement.” In the bibliography, this might be listed under the exhibition title if no specific author or editor is readily identifiable as the primary source for the exhibition’s conceptualization, or under the organizing institution.

Citing Art Historical Texts and Secondary Sources

Beyond artworks and exhibitions, art historians rely heavily on a vast array of secondary sources, including books, journal articles, essays, and scholarly websites. Properly citing these textual materials is fundamental to academic integrity and allows your readers to engage with the scholarly conversation surrounding your topic.

Books and Monographs

When citing a book in a footnote or endnote, you will include the author’s full name, the title of the book (italicized), the publication information (place, publisher, year), and the specific page number(s) being referenced. For example: “⁷ E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, 16th ed. (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 45.”

The corresponding bibliography entry would be: “Gombrich, E.H. *The Story of Art*. 16th ed. London: Phaidon Press, 1995.” For subsequent citations of the same book, shortened note forms can be used, such as “Gombrich, *Story of Art*, 45.” When citing a chapter in an edited volume, the format in the note would include the chapter author, chapter title (in quotation marks), followed by the edited book’s title, editor(s), and publication details, and page numbers. The bibliography entry would follow a similar structure but begin with the chapter author’s last name.

Journal Articles

Citing journal articles requires careful attention to detail, including the author, article title (in quotation marks), journal title (italicized), volume and issue numbers, publication year, and page range of the article. In a footnote: “⁹ Svetlana Alpers, ‘The Art of Describing: Dutch Genre Painting from Bruegel to Vermeer,’ *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 20–40.”

The bibliography entry would be: “Alpers, Svetlana. ‘The Art of Describing: Dutch Genre Painting from Bruegel to Vermeer.’ *Yale French Studies* 60 (1980): 20–40.” If the journal article is accessed online, you would include the URL and the date you accessed it, following specific CMS guidelines for digital sources.

Digital Images and Online Resources

In the digital age, citing online images and resources is increasingly common in art history. The Chicago Manual of Style provides guidance for these types of sources, emphasizing the need to provide enough information for the reader to locate the image or resource, even if it might change or be removed from its original location.

Reproductions of Artworks Online

When citing a digital reproduction of an artwork, it is important to identify the artwork itself and then provide information about the website where it is found. In a footnote, this might look like: “¹⁰ Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434, oil on oak panel, 82.2 x 60 cm, National Gallery, London, accessed May 15, 2023, **The National Gallery website**.” If you are citing the image from a museum’s online collection database, you would include the museum name and the database or collection name if applicable.

The bibliography entry would focus on the website and the specific artwork referenced: “National Gallery. *The Arnolfini Portrait*. Accessed May 15, 2023.

<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/jan-van-eyck-the-arnolfini-portrait>.” It is crucial to note that while some online platforms might present image URLs that are helpful, a stable, publicly accessible URL is preferred. Always aim to provide the most direct path to the image or information.

Websites and Online Publications

Citing websites, online articles, or digital archives requires a similar approach. In a footnote, you would include the author (if known), the title of the specific page or article (in quotation marks), the name of the website (italicized), and the URL, along with the date of access. For example: “¹¹ John Smith, ‘The Impact of Photography on Renaissance Portraiture,’ *Art History Today*, October 26, 2022,

<https://arthistorytoday.com/photography-renaissance>, accessed May 15, 2023.”

The bibliography entry would then list this under the author’s last name: “Smith, John. ‘The Impact of Photography on Renaissance Portraiture.’ *Art History Today*. October 26, 2022. Accessed May 15, 2023. **<https://arthistorytoday.com/photography-renaissance>**.” For institutional websites or pages without an individual author, cite the organization or institution as the author.

Common Pitfalls and Best Practices

Navigating the nuances of citing art history in Chicago style can present challenges. One

common pitfall is inconsistency in formatting, whether it's the capitalization of titles, the use of italics, or the arrangement of bibliographic elements. Another frequent error is the omission of crucial details, such as the medium or dimensions of an artwork, or the specific page numbers for textual references. These oversights can hinder a reader's ability to verify your sources or locate the original materials.

To avoid these issues, the best practice is to consult the latest edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* directly. Keep a citation guide or template for art history specific to your institution or professor's requirements. Double-checking every citation against your source material and your chosen style guide is essential. Developing a systematic approach to note-taking and source management throughout your research process will greatly simplify the citation task. Always prioritize clarity, accuracy, and completeness in your citations, ensuring that your scholarly work is both rigorous and easily verifiable.

Ensuring Accuracy and Completeness

Accuracy and completeness are the twin pillars of effective citation. This means meticulously recording all necessary details for each source as you encounter it. For artworks, this includes not only the artist, title, and date but also the medium, dimensions, and current location. For textual sources, ensure correct author names, titles, publication dates, and page numbers are noted. If you are unsure about a piece of information, it is better to investigate further than to leave it incomplete or inaccurate.

When dealing with digital sources, the challenge of link rot and evolving online content means that providing the most stable and accessible URL is crucial, along with the date of access. For exhibition catalogues, carefully identify the author of the specific essay you are citing, if distinct from the exhibition curator. By dedicating time to ensure each element is present and correct, you uphold the integrity of your research and respect the work of others.

Consistency in Formatting

Consistency in formatting is just as important as accuracy. Whether you are using the notes-bibliography system or the author-date system, apply the same formatting rules to all your citations. This includes the consistent use of italics for titles of artworks and books, quotation marks for article and chapter titles, and the correct punctuation and capitalization throughout. Inconsistent formatting can create confusion and detract from the professional appearance of your work.

Maintain a consistent style for abbreviations, such as for months or art terms, if you use them. If your instructor or publisher has provided specific guidelines that deviate slightly from the general CMS rules, adhere to those specific instructions. This attention to detail demonstrates a thorough understanding of scholarly conventions and a commitment to presenting your research in a polished manner.

Consulting the Chicago Manual of Style

The most authoritative resource for any questions regarding Chicago style is the official *Chicago Manual of Style* itself. It is continuously updated to reflect evolving scholarly

practices and new media. Familiarize yourself with the sections pertaining to humanities, art history, and digital sources. Many universities and libraries provide online access to the CMS, making it readily available.

When in doubt, always refer to the manual. It offers specific examples for a vast range of source types, including less common ones that might arise in art historical research. Understanding the principles behind the rules will enable you to apply them confidently to new situations and ensure your citations are always correct and comprehensive.

FAQ

Q: What is the primary difference between the notes-bibliography and author-date systems in Chicago style for art history?

A: The notes-bibliography system uses numbered footnotes or endnotes within the text to cite sources, accompanied by a bibliography at the end. This is often preferred in art history for its ability to provide detailed source information immediately alongside analysis. The author-date system uses parenthetical citations (Author, Year, Page) in the text, followed by a reference list.

Q: When citing a painting in a footnote, what are the essential elements I must include?

A: For a footnote, you must include the artist's full name, the title of the artwork in italics, the date of creation, the medium of the artwork, its dimensions, and its current collection or location.

Q: How does a bibliography entry for a painting differ from a footnote citation?

A: In a bibliography entry, the artist's last name comes first, followed by their first name. The title, date, medium, dimensions, and location follow, formatted for alphabetical listing. Unlike footnotes, bibliography entries typically do not include page numbers unless referencing a specific part of a publication where the artwork is discussed.

Q: I'm citing an artwork found in an exhibition catalogue. How should I format this in my notes and bibliography?

A: In a note, you would typically cite the author of the catalogue essay (if applicable), followed by the exhibition title, exhibition dates and venue, and then the publication details of the catalogue (editor, place, publisher, year), along with specific page numbers. The bibliography entry follows a similar structure, focusing on the catalogue's author/editor and

publication information.

Q: Is it necessary to include the URL and access date when citing digital images of artworks?

A: Yes, it is highly recommended to include the URL and the date you accessed the image or resource. This is crucial for digital sources because websites can change or disappear, and providing this information allows readers to attempt to locate the source.

Q: What should I do if I can't find the exact dimensions or medium of an artwork I'm citing?

A: If you cannot find the exact dimensions or medium after diligent research, it is acceptable to note that the information is unavailable or to provide the best approximation you can find, perhaps from a reputable source that might not have the full details. However, always strive for completeness and accuracy.

Q: Can I use shortened forms for citations after the first mention of a source?

A: Yes, in the notes-bibliography system, after the first full citation of a source, you can use shortened forms. For artworks, this might be the artist's last name and a shortened title. For books or articles, it would typically be the author's last name and a shortened title, or simply the note number if the reference is clear from context.

Q: How should I cite a website that doesn't list an author for its content?

A: If a website does not list an individual author, you should cite the organization or institution responsible for the website as the author. This ensures proper attribution for the content.

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