

Common Citation Mistakes Guide

Top 10 Citation Errors (And How to Fix Them)

1. Missing In-Text Citations

- ☐ **Wrong:** According to research, students learn better with practice.
- ☐ **Right:** According to research, students learn better with practice (Smith, 2023).

Fix: Cite EVERY borrowed idea, not just direct quotes.

2. Orphaned References

- ☐ **Wrong:** Reference entry exists but never cited in paper
- ☐ **Right:** Every reference entry has at least one in-text citation

Fix: Delete unused references or add citations in your text.

3. Missing References

- ☐ **Wrong:** In-text citation exists: (Jones, 2022), but no reference entry
- ☐ **Right:** Every in-text citation has a matching reference entry

Fix: Add complete reference entry for all in-text citations.

4. Incorrect Author Format

APA: - ☐ **Wrong:** Smith, John A. - ☐ **Right:** Smith, J. A.

MLA: - ☐ **Wrong:** Smith, J. - ☐ **Right:** Smith, John

Fix: Check your style guide for author name format.

5. Wrong Title Capitalization

APA: - ☐ **Wrong:** The Effects Of Social Media On Students - ☐ **Right:** The effects of social media on students

MLA/Chicago: - ☐ **Wrong:** The effects of social media on students - ☐ **Right:** The Effects of Social Media on Students

Fix: APA uses sentence case, MLA/Chicago use title case.

6. Missing DOI or URL

- ☐ **Wrong:** Ending reference without source location
- ☐ **Right:** Include DOI (preferred) or URL for online sources

Example (APA):

Smith, J. (2023). Article title. *Journal*, 15(3), 45-67. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx>

7. Incorrect Punctuation

Common errors: - Missing periods after initials - Wrong comma placement - Inconsistent use of parentheses - Missing italics for titles

Fix: Follow your style guide's punctuation rules exactly.

8. No Hanging Indent

☐ **Wrong:**

Smith, J. (2023). Long reference entry that continues onto second line without indent.

☐ **Right:**

Smith, J. (2023). Long reference entry that continues onto second line with hanging indent.

Fix: Indent all lines after the first line in each reference.

9. Citing Secondary Sources Incorrectly

☐ **Wrong:** Using "quoted in" without proper format

☐ **Right (APA):** (Smith, 2020, as cited in Jones, 2023)

Best practice: Find and cite the original source whenever possible.

10. Mixing Citation Styles

☐ **Wrong:** Using APA in-text with MLA references

☐ **Right:** Consistent style throughout entire paper

Fix: Choose ONE style and use it for everything.

Format-Specific Mistakes

APA Common Errors

- ☐ Forgetting publication year in citations
- ☐ Using "and" instead of "&" in parentheses
- ☐ Wrong date format (use YYYY or YYYY, Month Day)
- ☐ Missing "p." or "pp." for page numbers in quotes

MLA Common Errors

- ☐ Including publication year in in-text citations
- ☐ Forgetting page numbers in citations
- ☐ Wrong date format (use Day Month Year)
- ☐ Not using "and" between author names

Chicago Common Errors

- ☐ Inconsistent footnote/endnote formatting
 - ☐ Missing superscript numbers in text
 - ☐ Wrong footnote format (should be full citation first time)
 - ☐ Not distinguishing between Bibliography and References
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Plagiarism-Related Mistakes

1. Paraphrasing Without Citation

- ☐ **Wrong:** Rewriting someone's idea in your own words without citing
- ☐ **Right:** Always cite the source, even when paraphrasing

2. Patchwriting

- ☐ **Wrong:** Copying sentence structure with minor word changes
- ☐ **Right:** Fully rephrase in your own voice and cite

3. Self-Plagiarism

- ☐ **Wrong:** Reusing your old papers without citation
- ☐ **Right:** Cite your previous work or write fresh content

Quick Pre-Submission Checklist

Before you submit, verify: 1. ☐ Every in-text citation has a reference entry 2. ☐ Every reference entry is cited in text 3. ☐ Consistent citation style throughout 4. ☐ All URLs/DOIs work and are complete 5. ☐ Hanging indents on all reference entries 6. ☐ Alphabetical order in reference list 7. ☐ Correct title capitalization for your style 8. ☐ Proper author name format for your style 9. ☐ No missing commas, periods, or parentheses 10. ☐ Direct quotes have page numbers

When in Doubt

Can't find information? - No author → Start with title - No date → Use (n.d.) - No page → Use paragraph or section number

Still confused? - Check your instructor's requirements first - Consult official style manuals - Use citation generators carefully (always verify)

Download our complete citation guides for detailed formatting rules and examples.