

# 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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>

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### 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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## 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.

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# 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
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## 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

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## 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)

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