

What are in-text citations? When do I use them?

Swales and Feak (2004) explain that in academic writing, citations serve several purposes. They acknowledge other authors' work to avoid plagiarism (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019). They also recognize the previous history of the field and show respect for earlier research and ideas. Citations don't only pay lip service to other writers, however; they also give your own writing greater authority, provide evidence of your familiarity with the field, and highlight gaps in existing research to create space for your own contributions.

What does an in-text citation include?

In APA style, citations include the author's surname and the year the source was published. If you directly quote another author, you should also include a page or paragraph number. This can either be phrased as part of the sentence or in parentheses at the end of the sentence.

Examples:

Narrative Citation:

Tannen (1975) notes that conflicting needs for directness and politeness are "at the core" of many communication breakdowns (p. 209).

Parenthetical Citation:

Research shows that language barriers can compound with differing cultural norms and expectations, contributing to misunderstandings (Labov, 1972; Mesthrie et al., 2009; Matthews & Yip, 2011).

Note that in both examples, end punctuation comes after the citation.

How do I know when I need a citation?

In general, you should cite any ideas, work, or research that is not your own. Still, finding the appropriate level of citation requires balance. Failing to cite another author will plagiarize their work, but on the other extreme, papers with too many citations can be distracting and difficult to read. The APA (2019) recommends that in paragraphs that repeatedly cite the same source, you only include a citation in the first relevant sentence. When using multiple narrative citations in the same paragraph, you only need to include the year in the first citation.