

Citation Principles for Internet Sources

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Electronic sources have achieved parity with printed sources in many areas and surpassed them in some. Accordingly, these proposed principles minimize disparities between analogous printed and electronic sources.

These principles attempt to avoid, as far as possible, artificial distinctions in citation styles for essentially similar online sources. Accordingly, they don't begin with a high-level division into web pages, blogs, wikis, etc., each with a distinctive citation style. Instead, they provide a set of principles that aim for consistency across many different online sources.

Please send any suggestions or critiques to james.grimmelmann@nyls.edu.

Sites and Items

The basic conceptual apparatus of these principles is the distinction between web sites (entire sites sharing a domain portion of the URL), items (e.g., blog posts, forum threads, wiki articles), and subitems (e.g., comments to a blog post, edits to a wiki). Note that there may be more than one web item per web page (e.g., some blogs archive posts by week, rather than individually), or more than one web page per item (e.g., a forum thread split across multiple ages); cite as an item that level of abstraction which best reflects the site's division into a coherent, logical grouping.

The division between item and subitem may vary by site. If individual citable objects are untitled but some larger grouping of them is titled, treat them as subitems and the grouping as an item.

Emails to individuals should be treated as letters, but emails to listservs should be cited using the item/site framework. Treat instant messenger conversations as interviews.

Use a parenthetical to describe what a source is only when its format is not clear from the rest of the citation *and* no URL to the source is available.

Titles

All titles of web sites should be set in small caps. A site's URL may be used as a title where no other title is available (e.g., ISITCHRISTMAS.COM). Insert appropriate capitalization.

Set titles of items and subitems in italics. Omit titles where items and subitems lack them (e.g., blog comments, wiki edits). Use "to" (unitalicized) between a subitem and an item

(e.g., use “to” when citing a blog comment, post to a listserv, or edit to a wiki page). Do not use “to” or “in” between a web item and a web site.

Titles of listservs should be set in small caps; the titles of individual emails to listservs in italics.

Authors

Do not provide authors’ names for entire sites unless omitting them would be misleading. Similarly, omit authors names for items and subitems when the identity of the author would be clear from the site.

Provide authors using normal Bluebook rules and unitalicized type for items and subitems. When referring to an item that consists only of individual subitems (e.g., a forum thread), the authors are the authors of the subitems.

Cite items and subitems using the username of the poster. Real names may be added in brackets where relevant.

Do not provide email addresses when citing emails unless no other author’s name is available.

Dates and Times

Avoid last-visited dates in notes where possible; use a single last-visited date or date range for all sources in star footnote, with text, for example, “Unless otherwise indicated, all Internet sources were last visited Jan. 12–13, 2008.”

A date supplied without further explanation indicates the date content was last added or edited, according to information provided by the site. or another reliable source. No date supplied indicates that the site does not provide such information.

Provide dates for items and subitems, but not for sites.

Convert dates to local (American) format. Use times only if necessary to uniquely identify the item or subitem; if times are used, leave times as reported on the site. The form if times are used should be, e.g., (May 19, 2001, 1:21 AM), or (May 19, 2001, 20:41 EST).

URLs

URLs, like page references to case reporters, indicate that the material may be found at that location. Accordingly, use “*available at*” only to indicate that the material is no longer available at its original location but may be found at the alternate one provided.

Do not capitalize within URLs except to duplicate capitalization within URLs supplied by sites themselves in the location bar.

Give only one URL per citation (unless an *available at* reference is necessary because the material is no longer available at the original location). That URL should be the one that most closely corresponds to the most specific item or subitem cited.

Do not supply URLs that are explicitly temporary or that will not be accessible to a reader. Whenever possible, simply URLs using the mechanisms provided by the site being cited (e.g., use “<http://www.amazon.com/dp/B0017R5UAA/>” rather than “http://www.amazon.com/Fleet-Foxes/dp/B0017R5UAA/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1239207355&sr=8-1”). Do not use URL shortening services such as tinurly.

When citing material within a page, use relative links when available (e.g. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurrians#Metallurgy>).

Electronic and Printed Sources

Cite both printed and electronic versions of a source wherever possible.

Examples:

Initial post launching thread:

acidrabbitt, *Is It Possible that Kaycee Did Not Exist?*, METAFILTER, <http://www.metafilter.com/comments.mefi/7819> (May 19, 2001).

Entire thread:

acidrabbitt et al., *Is It Possible that Kaycee Did Not Exist?*, METAFILTER, <http://www.metafilter.com/comments.mefi/7819> (May 21, 2001).

Untitled post within thread:

sylloge [Stewart Butterfield], to *Is It Possible that Kaycee Did Not Exist?*, METAFILTER, <http://www.metafilter.com/7819/#84422> (May 19, 2001).

Listserv post:

Lloyd deMause, *Swiss View (Davos)*, PSYCHOHISTORY LIST, <http://lists.topica.com/lists/psychohistory/read/message.html?mid=1711891071> (Feb. 6, 2003), *quoting* e-mail from Laurie Garrett.

Blog post:

James Grimmelmann, *Rescuecom Oral Argument Report*, THE LABORATORIUM, http://laboratorium.net/archive/2008/04/04/rescuecom_oral_argument_report (Apr. 4, 2008).

Comment on blog post:

Richard Bartle, to James Grimmelmann, *Rescuecom Oral Argument Report*, THE LABORATORIUM, http://laboratorium.net/archive/2008/04/04/rescuecom_oral_argument_report#comment-5339 (Apr. 6, 2008).

Web site:

LAURIE GARRETT.COM, <http://www.lauriegarrett.com/>.

Web page:

Search History and Settings: Setting Google as My Homepage, GOOGLE, <http://www.google.com/support/websearch/bin/answer.py?answer=463>.

Wiki:

WIKIPEDIA, <http://en.wikipedia.org/>.

Wiki page:

Bluebook, WIKIPEDIA, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluebook> (Mar. 15, 2008).

Specific edit to wiki page:

ZimZalaBim, to *Bluebook*, WIKIPEDIA, <http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bluebook&oldid=170675648> (Nov. 11, 2007).

E-mail:

E-mail from James Grimmelmann to Elizabeth C. Reilly (Mar. 27, 2008).

Web Video:

Tay Zonday, *Chocolate Rain*, YOUTUBE, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=EwTZ2xpQwpA> (Apr. 22, 2007).

TV Video Available Online:

Numb3rs: Waste Not (CBS television broadcast Nov. 17, 2006), <http://www.veoh.com/videos/v1415887176KyxryF>.

MySpace Page (publicly accessible):

Weezer, MYSPACE.COM, <http://www.myspace.com/weezer>.

Facebook Page (not publicly accessible):

James Grimmelmann, FACEBOOK.

Flash Animation:

dragon, HOMESTARRUNNER.COM, <http://www.homestarrunner.com/sbemail58.html> (Jan. 13, 2003).

Usenet Post:

Mike Jittlov, *BIG.MONEY.FAST! NEW & IMPROVED!!*, ALT.FAN.MIKE-JITTLOV, <http://groups.google.com/group/alt.religion.kibology/msg/eeaed2850d883a01> (Apr. 2, 1994).