

SOURCE DOCUMENTATION SYSTEMS

Source Documentation refers to the way writers document their sources. Oftentimes, when a writer writes a report or some other document, they typically gather different sources of information (e.g., books, articles, newspapers, websites, wikis, videos, podcasts, etc.). The source documentation system provides a way for the reader to see where the sources originate.

Let's say, you are reading a book, and you stumble across something fantastic (like a shocking fact, which seems almost too good to be true). Oftentimes, you'll ask yourself, where did this information come from? Typically, you can find an in-text note or parenthetical note or footnote containing this information. This in-text note or footnote may point you to the bibliography, which lists the sources of information that the author used to inform their writing.

Thus, it is typical for a source documentation system to have three things:

- 1) A very specific format or page setup for the paper (e.g., how the first page will appear along with necessary information like the author, the title, date, etc.).
- 2) A bibliography (a list of sources typically at the end of the document)
- 3) In-Text Citations (sometimes called Parenthetical Citations) or Footnotes (these link to the list of sources at the end of the document).

Oftentimes, the format or page setup is very specific. The source documentation system will require specific places for the page number to be located, for the title, for the header or footers, and for the bibliographic elements. In addition, there might be specific information on how to write the bibliography and even details on how to place pictures with the text. Most source documentation systems specify how the language (the written language) is treated.

Source Documentation and Formats different from system to system. The guidelines may be different also.

As each source documentation system is specific to a discipline, knowing the difference is important.

The most popular systems used in college are: The Modern Languages Association system, the American Psychological Association, the University of Chicago system (also called just "Chicago"), and the Council of Science Editors system.

Each of these organizations/associations maintains their system from year to year and publishes the newest updates to their system in a manual, which is available for purchase just about anywhere.

For English courses, the humanities, foreign languages, and other arts, most professors require the use of the Modern Languages Association (MLA) format and source documentation system.

For psychology courses, sociology, archaeology, anthropology, and education, most professors require the use of the American Psychological Association (APA) format and source documentation system.

For history courses, business, and some science disciplines, the use of the Chicago system is required.

For information technology and computing, most professors defer to the use of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineer (IEEE) system, which maintains an “offshoot” of the Chicago system.

Journalism courses may use the Associated Press system.

Most medical fields use the American Medical Association format and source documentation system.

Fortunately, quite a few professors allow students to use whatever system they prefer; however, with the “freedom” comes the demand that the system is used correctly and the formatting is correctly observed.