

Puzzling over citations

Teaching multiple citation styles to multiple students at the same time

Description:

Participants focus on identifying the key information needed for constructing and reading citations for resources used in research, including websites, course lectures, interviews, encyclopedias, white papers, podcasts, material objects, and books and journals. Participants use the citation style of their choice (SBL, Turabian/Chicago, MLA) in order to gain immediately applicable skills.

Goals & Objectives:

Bibliographic management tools, while helpful, do not eliminate the need for careful checking of complete citation information, particularly for nonstandard material types or in-depth research. Direct instruction regarding the elements of citation helps students develop good eyes for complete and incomplete citations. This lesson emphasizes citation as a framework for scholarly conversation rather than focusing on the fear of plagiarism. Accurate citation is presented as an important component of scholarly work.

Objectives

By the end of this workshop, the participant will:

1. Understand the importance of citation as a means of marking the scholarly trail and joining the conversation
2. Demonstrate understanding of the reasons for standardization and the need for flexibility in writing citations
3. Be able to compose standard citations like those for books and articles
4. Identify and use authoritative sources to check for more complicated types of materials

Main Instructional Technique:

Group discussion, individual or small-group practice and peer assistance

Length of session: 50 minutes

Audience/Class size:

Depends on number of style guides available; up to 30 would be workable

Materials needed:

1. Examples of works that would need citations in student projects, including books, reference works, pamphlets, online resources, working papers, and rare objects from special collections

2. Style manuals
3. Note cards with correct citations, color-coded by citation style
4. Laptops or desktop computers for web-based sources
5. Slide software
6. An instructor's station with projector
7. Handouts or an online guide for future reference

Preparation:

1. Find examples of different types of works for students to use to create citations. To preserve continuity, we tried to find a common theme as much as possible among the resources.
2. Create note cards with the correct citations using each citation style for each example presented. We used color-coded cards to make selecting the correct card easier for students.
3. Create presentation slides of basic information about the purpose of citation and common elements used.
4. Create a handout about style manuals and citation preparation for further reference.
5. Before class, load the slides, and create stations with style manuals and different types of resources among which students can circulate.

The Instruction Session:

1. Review the goals for the workshop.
2. Why do we cite? Discuss scholarly discourse as a conversation in space and time, and citation as a means of respectfully noting the participants.
3. What makes a citation? Discuss citation as a complete string of information comprised of puzzle pieces.
4. Introduce fundamental elements of citations, such as title and author, and show examples of citations using these elements. Choose simple citations such as a book and journal article. Ask students to identify the necessary information from a print copy. Explain where each piece of information is found on the item in hand.
5. Depending on class size, break students into assigned groups or allow them to individually select stations of particular interest to practice creating citations with a chosen example and style. The cards are present for checking answers, and instructors float around the room to answer additional questions. On average, allot around 25 minutes for this practice.

Ask the class what they learned from the exercise, and for any remaining questions they might have. Allow approximately 10 minutes for this discussion. Provide the handout with information about using citation styles, and perhaps additional information about journal abbreviations, for future reference.

Assessment:

Each student was emailed a short electronic survey with three objective questions that tested their understanding of the material that was taught and four subjective questions that ascertained their opinions about the workshop.

Collaborators:

Sally Fortin and Tracy N. Powell co-taught this workshop at Pitts Theology Library at Emory University and adapted the lesson plan for the S.O.S. website.