



How to Cite a Site

Lesson Plan

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Essential Question: How do I cite different types of online source?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students reflect on the importance of citing all sources when they do research. They then learn how to **write bibliographical citations** for online sources.

Using the **Citing Online Sources Student Handout**, students learn the format for citing different types of online sources in a bibliography, based on the citation style recommended by the Modern Language Association. Students create citations for websites of their choice using the **Cite Your Site Student Handout**.

objectives

Students will:

- Understand the special challenges involved in citing online sources
- Learn the components of a correct bibliography citation for different types of websites
- Create bibliography citations for online newspaper and magazine articles, professional sites, and reference sites

Materials and Preparation

Materials

- **Citing Online Sources Student Handout**
- **Cite Your Site Student Handout**

Preparation

- Copy the two-page **Citing Online Sources Student Handout**, one for every student
- Review the **Citing Online Sources Student Handout** and be prepared to guide students through the components of a bibliography citation for three types of online sources
- Copy the two-page **Cite Your Site Student Handout**, one for every two students
- Preview the six sites listed in **Teach 2** below, together with the correct bibliography citation for each

Key Vocabulary

- **Citation:** Key information about a source used for a report or other research project, including its author, title, publisher, and date of publication
- **Bibliography:** A list of the sources used for a report or other research project, including books, article, videos, and websites
- **Update:** To revise a website to include the most recent information



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teaching plans

Introduce

Encourage students to name some books, magazines, newspapers, and websites they have used to do research and write reports. Remind them that these are called their “sources” of information.

ASK

Why would someone reading your paper want to know what sources you used?

Sample responses:

- *To make sure what I wrote is true*
- *To make sure I got my information from a trustworthy source*
- *In case they are interested in finding out more about the subject*

How do people reading your report figure out what sources you used? (Most students should be familiar with the term **bibliography**, but you may wish to define it again.)

DISCUSS with students what kinds of information they need to include in a bibliography. They may mention author, title, and the date that a book or article was published.

Point out that the bibliography for their report should include all sources of information – online sources as well as printed ones like books and newspapers. A **citation**, or bibliography entry, for a website is a little different from a citation for a printed source.

Teach 1: Citing Online Sources

DISTRIBUTE the Citing Online Sources Student Handout.

GUIDE students through the handout, which explains how to cite three types of online sources: online newspaper and magazine articles, pages from professional sites, and entries in reference sites. You may want to tell students that this citation format was created by the Modern Language Association, or MLA, an organization of college teachers in English and foreign languages. It is one of the most widely used and respected formats, so it’s a good one to learn. See <http://www.mla.org/style>.

HIGHLIGHT the following points:

- When the source has an author, the author’s name comes first. Otherwise, the title of the article or webpage comes first.
- The title of an article, webpage, or encyclopedia entry is placed inside quotation marks. The title of website is underlined.
- Periods follow most of the parts of a bibliography citation; however, there is no period between the date you visited the site and the URL.



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- Angle brackets (< and >) are used before and after the URL. These can be found on the comma and period keys of the keyboard.
- All the citations have two dates: the date the source was last updated or “published” and the date the student used the site for research.

ASK

Why do you think it is important to include the date you visited the site? (Information on a website can easily be changed. Later on, the site you used as a source might contain different information than it did on the day you visited.)

Why do you think there is no author’s name on the professional site? (The information was created by the staff of the Smithsonian Institution, rather than an individual author. Sometimes professional sites list individual authors, but often they don’t.)

Why do you think the date on the encyclopedia entry is a span of several years? (It takes a long time to create an encyclopedia! Parts of this one were published over several years.)

DISCUSS the **Use Common Sense!** tip at the end of the handout. Make sure students understand why it is so important – and so much easier – to compile their bibliography as they do their research. Remind them that they should write down all the information they need to create their citations, including the current date.

Teach 2: Citing Online Sources

GROUP students in pairs, and give each pair a copy of the ***Cite Your Site Student Handout***.

ASSIGN each pair of students one of the two research topics found on their handout – search and rescue dogs, or Mount Rainier National Park – or allow them to choose between the two.

ENCOURAGE students to use the examples on the **Citing Online Sources Student Handout** as a guide, along with the prompts on the ***Cite Your Site Student Handout***. Have them visit each of the three sites for their topic, find the required information, and then write a bibliography citation for that site. Share the following tips with groups as they work on their citations:

- On professional sites, sometimes it can be difficult to figure out which is the name of the site, and which is the name of the organization. Suggest that students fill in the organization first (For example, Federal Bureau of Investigation, or National Parks Service), and then look for the website name. Often, the website name is part of the URL.
- Sites do not always show the date they were last revised. Students should look carefully, especially at the bottom of the page, where this information often appears. However, if they cannot find a date (as in the case of the FBI Working Dogs site) they may use the initials “n.d.,” which stands for “no date.”
- Some reference sites, like Microsoft® Encarta® (found in the previous handout) or Questia’s encyclopedia (found under the Mount Rainier topic) are completed and then published. Their publication date is usually



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a year, and it doesn't change. Some online encyclopedias, like Wikipedia (found under the Search and Rescue Dogs topic) are constantly changing, so they should show a full date when the site was last revised.

The bibliography citations below show the complete, correct information for each source. (Dates the site was last revised and dates they visited the site will change.) Share these with students only after they have completed their own citations.

Research Topic: Search and Rescue Dogs

Online news article: Viegas, Jennifer. "Search and Rescue Dogs from Around the World Go to Haiti." Discovery News. 14 January 2010. 2 July 2010 <<http://news.discovery.com/animals/search-and-rescue-dogs-from-around-the-world-go-to-haiti.html>>.

Professional Site: "Search and Rescue Dogs." FBI Working Dogs. Federal Bureau of Investigation. n.d. 2 July 2010 <<http://www.fbi.gov/kids/dogs/search.htm>>.

Reference Site: "Search and Rescue Dog." Wikipedia. 1 July 2010. 2 July 2010 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_and_rescue_dog>.

Reference Database Sites:

Online news article: Doughton, Sandi. "Mount Rainier's Melting Glaciers create hazard." Los Angeles Times. 31 January 2010. 2 July 2010 <<http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/31/nation/la-na-rainier-debris31-2010jan31>>.

Professional Site: "Mount Rainier National Park: Nature and Science." nps.gov. U.S. National Park Service. 25 October 2006. 2 July 2010 <<http://www.nps.gov/mora/naturescience/index.htm>>.

Reference Database Site: "Mount Rainier National Park. *Questia*. 2004. 2 July 2010 <http://www.questia.com/library/encyclopedia/mount_rainier_national_park.jsp>.

Wrap Up and Assess

Use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK

What kinds of information should be included in a bibliography of online sources? (author; title of page, section, or article; website title; date updated or published; dates used by student; and the site's URL in brackets)

Why is it better to record your citations as you do research, rather than waiting until the report is finished? (If you wait, then you may forget what sites you visited, when you visited them, and what page in the site you used. Furthermore, websites change often, so it is better to capture a record of the site at the time you have retrieved the information.)



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DISCUSS the idea that the bibliography is a key part of any research project. It is the part that tells readers which sources you used to gather the information used in the project. It allows readers to decide for themselves whether those sources are trustworthy. The size and quality of your bibliography affects how people will judge your research project as a whole.



Extension Activity

Have students collaborate to create a bibliography on a theme of their choice. They should search for useful Websites, then organize their citations into a single bibliography to distribute to the class. Remind students that entries in a bibliography are placed in alphabetical order according to the first word in each entry. Sometimes this is the author's last name, and sometimes it is the first word in the title.



Homework

Have students use the guidelines provided on the Science Buddies website to review the format for bibliography citations of non-online sources. http://www.sciencebuddies.org/science-fair-projects/project_mla_format_examples.shtml. Ask them to focus on the format for bibliography citations for books. Have students find two favorite books at home or at the library, and write bibliography citations for them. After students have completed the homework assignment, you may wish to have a class discussion on some of the differences between citations for websites and for books. (You use book title instead of webpage and website title; you use the place and year of a book's publication instead of dates a website was updated and visited.)

Alignment with Standards - National Educational Technology Standards for Students[®] 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

3. Research and Information Fluency

- b. locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media
- c. evaluate and select information sources and digital tools based on the appropriateness to specific tasks
- d. process data and report results



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Common Sense Media is an independent, nonprofit resource that helps families and educators teach kids how to be safe and smart in today's 24/7 media world. Go to www.commonsensemedia.org for thousands of reviews and expert advice.

