Description

In academic writing, footnotes, endnotes, and headnotes provide additional information on a particular topic. They are placed in the document as a supplement to the main text. These notes can be inserted into the document as a footer or at the end of a chapter.

The notes should be kept as brief as possible. The objective is to provide more information without distracting the reader. We discuss the different types of notes, how to use them, and their pros and cons.

What Are They and Why Use Them?

Footnotes

A footnote is a reference placed at the bottom of a page or footer. They are referenced in the text in the same way as a citation i.e. the referenced text is followed by a superscript numeral (^{1}), which corresponds to the numbered footnote at the bottom of the page. When writing your research paper , you would use a footnote for two major reasons:

1. To cite sources of facts or quotations
2. Provide additional information

The two types of footnotes are:

- *Content*: Supplements or simplifies substantive information; not detailed.
- *Copyright permission*: Cites quoted text and any reprinted materials used in the text.

The format of footnotes is fairly standard (see below for specific rules) and is the same as that for references as follows:

> Adrian Johns. *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 623.

When citing the same reference again, the footnote can be shortened as follows:

Johns. *Nature of the Book*, 384–85.

Some older journals use "*ibid*" instead of a shortened version of the reference. Ibid is short for the Latin "*ibidem*", which means "in the same place." This format was previously used in most printed text but rarely used now.

Endnotes

Endnotes are much the same as footnotes except that they are placed at the end your research paper instead of at the bottom of a page. In books, they can be placed after each chapter or at the end of the book.

In many cases, the book publisher decides the best placement. Endnotes, as footnotes, are numerically noted in superscript. The format is the same as that for footnotes.

Headnotes

Headnotes are used as introductions in legal documents or as summaries of the text that follows them. In academic writing, headnotes are explanatory notes included with tables and figures. They are placed below the table itself or just below the figure title and typed in a font size that is smaller than the main text (e.g., 8- or 10-point font). Headnotes are used to define acronyms used, units of measure, significance, etc. Because tables and figures should be able to "stand alone" without the main text, headnotes should always be used.

Format for Footnotes, Endnotes, and Headnotes

Although the format for footnotes and endnotes is almost similar, there are specific rules depending on the journal where the paper is submitted. Most scientific journals use specific reference formats; however, some style guides do not allow footnotes and endnotes.

For example, the Modern Language Association (MLA), which deals specifically with disciplines in the humanities allows limited use of footnotes. These are to provide the reader with other sources for more information on the subject covered. The MLA style for these notes is shown in the example below and the number corresponds to the superscript number noted in the referenced text:

See [name of author], especially chapters 3 and 4, for an insightful analysis of this trend.

MLA suggests using "content" footnotes when necessary to avoid interrupting the text with an explanation or other details.

In contrast, the American Psychological Association (APA), the style for the behavioral and social sciences, does not usually allow footnotes. Your particular journal guidelines will provide that information.

A third style guide, the American Medical Association (AMA), is used mostly with papers in the biological and medical sciences. AMA also discourages the use of footnotes but allows them on the title page. The information on the title page would include the authors' names and affiliations, corresponding author, members of affiliated groups, etc.

Pros and Cons

Scientific papers do not usually include footnotes. Endnotes may be used sometimes, but sparingly. Other disciplines, such as law and history, still use them regularly. There are pros and cons to each.

The advantages of using footnotes are that they provide the reader with a fast reference and link to additional information. They are easy to insert and will automatically print. The advantage of using endnotes instead of footnotes is that their placement is less distracting. They also provide the reader with an easy reference list in one place.

According to the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), endnotes are preferred to footnotes simply because they don't clutter up a page. CMOS does caution that it can seem disconcerting to a reader to see pages of notes at the end of a chapter or book, so use them sparingly.

Again, another disadvantage to footnotes is that they tend to interrupt the flow of the text. The reader might feel that he must stop and look at the note before moving on, which can be very distracting. Some disadvantages to endnotes are that the reader must turn to the end of the text or chapter to find the additional information. In books with several chapters, this can be tedious, especially if the endnotes are renumbered in each chapter.

As for headnotes, there are really no drawbacks to using them in tables and figures. They offer the reader helpful information that is readily available as they read the data or interpret a figure.

Bottom Line

The style to which you conform when writing your paper will ultimately depend on the journal's guidelines. Pay careful attention to its protocols for citations and references and whether it will allow footnotes and endnotes. If allowed, be mindful of the disadvantages of both and consider either greatly limiting them or eliminating them altogether.

Category

1. Journal Guidelines
2. Reporting Research

Date Created
2017/11/15
Author
daveishan