

## Description

# Can't We All Just Get Along?

The three most commonly used text format and citation styles used in the United States are:

- Modern Language Association (MLA) – <http://www.mla.org>
- American Psychological Association (APA) – <http://www.apastyle.org>
- Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) – <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>

New academic researchers might be forgiven for thinking that the separation of different types of text formatting originated in some sort of Hatfield's & McCoy's family feud where a family of writers went their separate ways, never to agree again. In fact, the differences are not feud related in any way.

They have developed over time as different academic disciplines have identified specific formats to meet both content and [audience needs](#).

The academic research journals in those respective disciplines have made their own contribution to the confusion by taking a very traditional stance on the issue, such that two journals in the same discipline can sometimes end up requiring different styles in [manuscript formatting](#).

## Different Styles for Different Purposes

Upon further examination of the disciplines in which each style is used, the differences will start to appear more logical:

- MLA is used primarily in the humanities, and the style of citation reflects the wide use of literature and archival sources.
- APA is used primarily in the social sciences, which are dominated by quantitative analysis, and the citation style reflects that.
- [CMOS](#) is actually a combination of two citation styles, one with an author-date system (AD) and one with a notes and bibliography system (NB). The AD system has a definitive structure for the citation of scholarly books and research articles, and is therefore more prevalent in the sciences. The NB system uses footnotes or endnotes from a wide range of sources, and is therefore more prevalent in the humanities.

## Endless Updates

Users of only one or two of the styles complain about an additional frustration: "No sooner do they get to grips with the current edition of the style guide, than another one is released that changes everything."

Given that the current edition of the APA style guide (the 6th edition) was published in 2009, eight years after the 5th edition, and after 4 years of intensive development (including some embarrassing retractions), the argument of too frequent updates seems a little weak, unless it really does take eight years to figure out all the rules and regulations.

## What's an Overwhelmed Researcher to Do?

If your research work is likely to get published in journals that require different text and citation formats, attempting to learn two or even all three styles would not be the best use of your time.

Unless your limited research budget precludes it, the most expedient solution would be to seek out the services of an expert in the respective styles – either within the institution, or through a freelance [academic work service](#).

Do not, under any circumstances, make the naïve assumption that two different styles are “close enough” for you to “wing it” and make the changes yourself. That one decision alone would guarantee you an [automatic rejection](#) after many hours of effort devoted to your research.

### Category

1. Journal Guidelines
2. Reporting Research

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