

How To Write a Bibliography (With Examples)



[Image by Christin Hume via Unsplash](#)

By: Zeniya Cooley

Even though a bibliography is only a collection of sources an author has used, some students spend hours creating one. They may not know what to include in a bibliography. Or, they may experience confusion when faced with the detailed formatting rules of different style guides.

Rest assured, writing a bibliography doesn't have to be complicated. You only need a clear, comprehensive guide with simple directions and examples. And this blog post provides just that.

In this article, we'll break down what a bibliography is, explain how it differs from other lists of sources, and provide directions on how to write a bibliography for different citation styles.

What is a Bibliography?

A bibliography is a list of sources an author uses while creating a work. Possible sources include books, magazines, online articles, websites, videos, images, and primary documents.

Bibliographies are commonly used in [academic writing](#). For example, students, teachers, historians, and other professionals use them for essays, research papers, and scholarly articles.

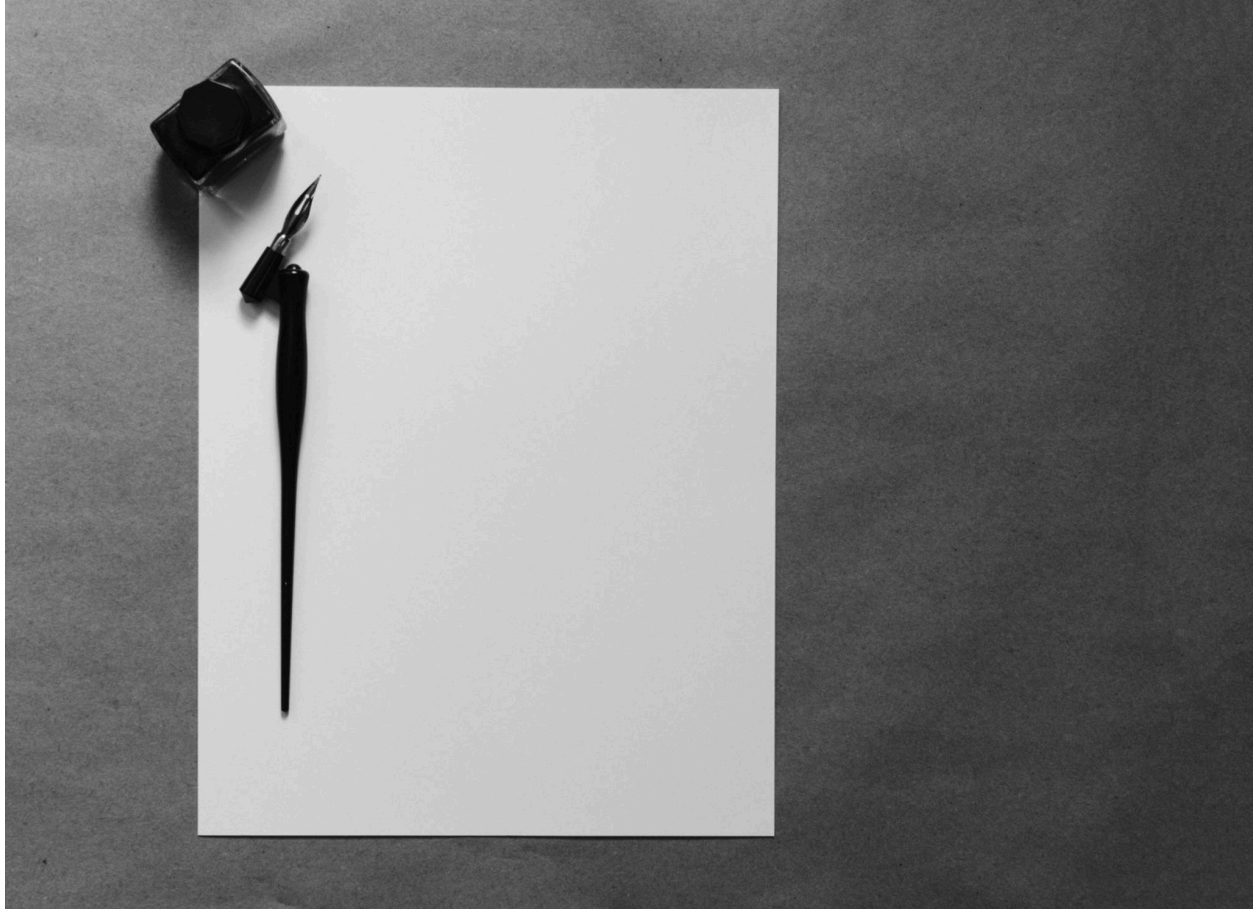
Bibliographies are usually found at the end of a work and have the following structure:

- A header conforming to a particular style guide
- A title labeled “Works Cited,” “References,” or “Bibliography”
- A list of entries alphabetized by the author’s last name or the title of the work
- Double spacing
- A legible and consistent font like Times New Roman, Arial, or Calibri

Including a bibliography with your work ensures you don’t commit [accidental plagiarism](#). It allows you to credit authors whose research you’ve cited or consulted instead of passing off their material as your own.

When you use a bibliography, you also make it easier for readers to locate your sources. They can then use those sources to aid their own research efforts.

What’s the Difference Between a Bibliography, Works Cited, and References?



[Image by Kelly Sikkema via Unsplash](#)

A bibliography is often used interchangeably with a [Works Cited page](#) and [Reference list](#). However, there are a few differences. The most notable one is that a bibliography lists all the sources you used or reviewed while creating your work, whether or not you cited them directly.

Meanwhile, a Works Cited (MLA style) and Reference page (APA style) only list the sources you cited in the work, including quoted and paraphrased material.

Say you're writing a research paper on the representation of women in 19th-century literature. Before writing the paper, you read an article published by the *Smithsonian Magazine* to learn about women's literature during that period.

Even if you don't quote or paraphrase the article in your work, you'd still need to include it in your bibliography because you consulted the source for your research. However, you wouldn't have to include the article for a Works Cited or References. This is because those two lists only include sources you cited directly in the work.

Your instructor should specify which of the three to use. However, if they don't, opt for a traditional bibliography. Make sure to show all the sources you used to inform your writing, regardless of whether you directly referenced them in your paper. This will prove to your instructor that you've conducted comprehensive research.

What Are the Different Kinds of Bibliographies?

Several bibliographies exist, and choosing the most appropriate one depends on the discipline or field of study you're creating the work for. Here are a few examples:

Analytical Bibliography

An analytical bibliography gives detailed information about different items like books and articles to show their transition from manuscripts to published works. It includes the name of the work, publication details, and physical characteristics like the type of binding used.

For example, an analytical bibliography entry for F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* would include information about the book's publisher, the number of pages, whether it was a hardcover or paperback, and other details.

Annotated Bibliography

This type of bibliography features short notes about why the author chose a particular source. It also summarizes the source and explains how it supports an author's overall research.

You could use an annotated bibliography while writing a research paper on the relationship between social media usage and mental health. For each entry, you would summarize and evaluate sources like scholarly articles, research studies, and news articles.

Enumerative Bibliography

The most basic type of bibliography is an enumerative bibliography. It lists all the sources you used during your research. Each source is organized alphabetically by the author's last name or the title of the work. Unlike an annotated bibliography, an enumerative bibliography focuses on listing items you consulted or cited without explaining their relevance.

Scholarly articles, for example, list the sources used to create the article. This helps readers locate sources that could support their own research. Since the sources lack annotations, readers can evaluate them independently and come to their own conclusion about a source.

Enumerative bibliographies can be broken down into four subtypes: national, personal, corporate, and subject.

National

National bibliographies describe what has been published in a particular region of the world. Entries are organized alphabetically by the author's last name, chronologically by publication date, or thematically by topic.

One example is the [American Bibliography](#) by Charles Evans. The bibliography compiles books, pamphlets, and periodical publications printed in the United States from 1639 to 1820.

Personal

This subtype lists works by, about, or owned by a person or group of people. These individuals are usually historically significant. Personal bibliographies include unknown works like those that haven't been published or those published in a non-book format.

A book documenting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s writing—including books, essays, letters, speeches, and more—is an example of a personal bibliography.

Corporate

Corporate bibliographies group entries based on their relationship with a corporation. Sources could be about an organization, published by an organization, or owned by an organization.

A corporate bibliography on The Walt Disney Company might list company documents made available to the public, news articles about the company, and films created by the company.

Subject

The subject bibliography is the most common enumerative bibliography. It groups sources by the subjects they cover and includes [primary sources](#), [secondary sources](#), or both.

A subject bibliography on the Holocaust might include primary sources like survivor testimonies and secondary sources like scholarly articles on the subject.

What are the Different Bibliography Styles?



[Image by Oli Dale via Unsplash](#)

Before you prepare your bibliography, you must select a style guide. The most common style guides for academic writing are the Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), and Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS).

MLA is used to cite sources in the humanities and liberal arts. You would use this style in your literature classes. Meanwhile, APA is used in education, psychology, and the sciences. Finally, the business, history, and fine arts disciplines would use CMOS.

Normally, your instructor will specify which one to choose. If they don't, select your own style. Just remember to remain consistent, as style guides provide guidelines for the entire work, not just the bibliography, Works Cited page, or Reference page.

Also, keep in mind that each style guide has various editions. If your writing doesn't conform to the rules of the most recent edition, you could receive a lower grade on your paper and lose credibility among readers. To prevent this, keep up with style guide updates and use the latest edition of your chosen style guide: MLA 9th edition, APA 7th edition, and CMOS 17th edition.

How to Write a Bibliography

Below are guidelines for how to write a bibliography for MLA, APA, and CMOS. We've also included examples and screenshots so you can compile your sources with confidence.

MLA Works Cited Page

MLA style uses a Works Cited page. Remember that a Works Cited differs from a bibliography. Instead of citing all sources you reviewed, you'd only cite the ones you quoted or referenced in the paper.

To create a traditional bibliography, you'd need to add a [Works Consulted](#) section, which includes sources you consulted but didn't cite in your work.

Before preparing your bibliography, clarify with your instructor whether you should only use a Works Cited or both a Works Cited and Works Consulted.

The following guidelines will help you prepare both:

- Use a new page for your Works Cited. If you add a Works Consulted list, put it on a new page after the Works Cited section.
- Label the page "Works Cited" or "Works Consulted" and center the title at the top of the page. Don't use italics or quotation marks for the title.
- Align each entry to the left margin. Indent the second and subsequent lines of each citation by ½ inch ([hanging indent](#)).
- Alphabetize sources by the author's last name.
- Capitalize each word in the title except for articles (e.g. "the," "an," "and," etc.)
- Use double spacing for entries.
- End all entries with a period, including those with a URL.
- When citing online sources, delete "http://" from the beginning of a URL.

Citing a book

To cite a book in MLA format, you'd follow this structure:

- Author Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. City of Publication, Publisher, Publication Date.

Here's an example of a properly formatted entry:

- Ward, Jesmyn. *Let Us Descend*. Scribner, 2023.

Note that you should only use the City of Publication if the book was published before 1900, if the publisher has offices in more than one country, or if the publisher is unknown in the U.S.

Citing an online article

An online article would be formatted this way:

- Author Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Website Name*, Day Month Year, URL.

Now, take a look at an example:

- Christman, Phil. "Phil Christman on the Poetics of Place." *Literary Hub*, 26 July 2024, lithub.com/phil-christman-on-the-poetics-of-place/

Here's how the entries would appear on a Works Cited:

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|---|
| Cooley 1 |
| Works Cited |
| Christman, Phil. "Phil Christman on the Poetics of Place." <i>Literary Hub</i> , 26 July 2024, lithub.com/phil-christman-on-the-poetics-of-place/. |
| Ward, Jesmyn. <i>Let Us Descend</i> . Scribner, 2023. |

APA Reference Page

APA style requires a Reference page instead of a bibliography. So, if your instructor wants you to use this style, then only list the sources you directly cited in your work.

Here are a few guidelines to adhere to when preparing a list of references:

- Label the page "References" and center the title at the top of the page.
- Bold the title. Don't underline it or use quotation marks.
- Left-align each entry. Indent the second and subsequent lines of each citation by ½ inch.
- Alphabetize sources by the author's last name.
- Use initials for the author's first and middle names.
- If there are multiple authors, use an ampersand (&) before the final author.
- Put the date in parentheses.
- Capitalize the first letter of the first word for titles and subtitles, the first word after a colon or dash, and any proper nouns.
- Use the full site information for websites, including "http://" or "https://."
- For online sources, don't put a period after the DOI.

Citing a book

This is how you'd cite a book in APA format:

- Author Last Name, Initials. (Year of Publication). *Title of book: Full subtitle*. Publisher.

An actual APA entry would look similar to this:

- Lembke, A. (2021). *Dopamine Nation: Finding balance in the age of indulgence*. Dutton.

Citing an online article

Here's how you'd format an online article in APA format:

- Author Last Name, Initials. (Year, Month Date). *Title of article*. Site name. URL

And this is what an actual entry would look like:

- Dalfen, L. (2024, July 29). *Unpacking a dream of fours*. Psychology Today.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-dreams/202407/unpacking-a-dream-of-fours>

Now, let's look at how these entries would appear on the reference page:

| |
|--|
| 1 |
| References |
| Dalfen, L. (2024, July 29). <i>Unpacking a dream of fours</i> . Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-dreams/202407/unpacking-a-dream-of-fours |
| Lembke, A. (2021). <i>Dopamine Nation: Finding balance in the age of indulgence</i> . Dutton. |

CMOS Bibliography

Chicago Manual of Style offers two ways to format reference material: [Notes and Bibliography and Author-Date](#). The former is used in the humanities, and the latter is used in the social sciences.

Both guidelines require you to include a list of references at the end of your paper.

Here's how to format a *Chicago*-style bibliography:

- Bold the title “Bibliography” and center it at the top of the page.
- Add two blank lines between “Bibliography” and the first entry.
- Left-align each entry. Indent the second and subsequent lines of each citation by ½ inch.
- Single-space the list and leave a blank line between each entry.
- Include “http:// or https://” for URLs.

Citing a book

To cite a book in CMOS format, you'd use this structure:

- Author Last Name, First Name. *Title of Book*. Place of publication: Publisher, Year.

This is how an actual entry would look:

- Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste*. New York: Random House, 2020.

Citing an online article

In CMOS, an online article would be cited like this:

- Author Last Name, First Name. “Article Title.” *Publication Name*, Month Day, Year. URL.

A complete entry would look like this:

- Kiniry, Laura. “Six Innovative Ways Humans Have Kept Cool Throughout History.” *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 26, 2024.
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/six-innovative-ways-humans-have-kept-cool-throughout-history-180984749/>.

Here's how the entries would appear on a *Chicago*-style bibliography:

Bibliography

Kiniry, Laura. "Six Innovative Ways Humans Have Kept Cool Throughout History."
Smithsonian Magazine, July 26, 2024.
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/six-innovative-ways-humans-have-kept-cool-throughout-history-180984749/>.

Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste*. New York: Random House, 2020.

Conclusion

With all of this in mind, you're now prepared to write a bibliography. Simply use the tips and examples provided in this guide to make preparing a list of sources a straightforward process.

As a reminder, a bibliography compiles the sources you've used to create a work. However, it differs from a Works Cited page and Reference page. The other options only list sources you've cited throughout your paper. Meanwhile, a bibliography includes sources you've cited as well as the ones you consulted while researching.

Additionally, the style guide you use—MLA, APA, or CMOS—will dictate how you format the bibliography. Select the appropriate style based on either your instructor's directions or your own preferences. And make sure the format for each entry is appropriate for the type of source.

For additional tips on academic writing, check out our guide on [writing a research paper](#).

FAQs

What is a bibliography?

A bibliography is a list of sources that an author uses to create a work. It's usually found at the end of research papers, essays, scholarly articles, journalistic pieces, and other works.

How do you write a bibliography for a project?

Before preparing a bibliography for a project, decide which style guide you'll use: Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), or Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS). Then, organize and format your sources based on your chosen style guide.

How do you write a bibliography for a website?

Your bibliography will depend on the type of style guide you use. When citing a website, you'll also need to determine whether you're citing the entire website or a specific webpage.

For example, to cite an entire website in MLA format, you'd use the following structure: "*Website Name*. Day Month Year, URL." The format for a specific webpage is: "Author Last Name, First Name. "Title of Article." *Website Name*, Day Month Year, URL."

Remember to use a hanging indent and other formatting guidelines unique to your style guide.