

How do you reference a web page that lists no author?

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When there is no author for a web page, the title moves to the first position of the reference entry:

Example:

New child vaccine gets funding boost. (2001). Retrieved March 21, 2001, from http://news.ninensn.com.au/health/story_13178.asp

Cite in text the first few words of the reference list entry (usually the title) and the year. Use double quotation marks around the title or abbreviated title.: ("New Child Vaccine," 2001).

Note: Use the full title of the web page if it is short for the parenthetical citation. Articles found on the web, like the example above, are not italicized in the reference entry and are not italicized but enclosed in quotations in the in-text citation, just like a newspaper or magazine article. Reports found on the web would be italicized in the reference list, as in *Publication Manual* (6th ed.) Examples 31, 32, and 33 on pp. 205–206. They would also be italicized in the in-text citation, just like a book.

When do you include a retrieval date in a citation?

When a citation includes a digital object identifier (DOI; see [Electronic Sources and Locator Information \[PDF\]](#)), no further retrieval information is needed.

When a DOI is not available, and a URL is included, do not include retrieval dates unless the source material may change over time (e.g., wikis).

How do you cite website material that has no author, no year, and no page numbers?

Because the material does not include page numbers, you can include any of the following in the text to cite the quotation (from pp. 170–171 of the *Publication Manual*):

- A paragraph number, if provided; alternatively, you could count paragraphs down from the beginning of the document.
- An overarching heading plus a paragraph number within that section.
- An short title in quotation marks, in cases in which the heading is too unwieldy to cite in full.

Because there is no date and no author, your text citation would include the title (or short title) "n.d." for no date, and paragraph number (e.g., "Heuristic," n.d., para. 1). The entry in the reference list might look something like this:

Heuristic. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary* (11th ed.). Retrieved from <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/heuristic>

I can't find the example reference I need in the *Publication Manual*. What should I do?

In general, a reference should contain the author name, date of publication, title of the work, and publication data. When you cannot find the example reference you need in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, choose the example that is most like your source and follow that format. Sometimes you will need to combine elements of more than one reference format.

<http://www.apastyle.org/learn/faqs/example-reference.aspx>

The Generic Reference

by Chuck (2009, November 5)

Whether you're proofreading a finished reference list or trying to cobble together a citation for a new or nonroutine communications format, understanding what information any reference should contain will help you in your task. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* is intended to be both explanatory and fairly comprehensive. Nonetheless, there is no way on earth it could set out examples for every possible type of reference. It does, however, offer an approach for the construction of new sorts of references beyond the various types it catalogues. That approach has been specifically illustrated in this blog already, by earlier postings about manufacturing reference entries for Twitter, Facebook, and Wikipedia. Now I'd like to teach you how to fish, as it were, by taking a more general look.

What is that approach? You just need to know the basic building blocks—namely, the generic elements that nearly all references in APA style contain—and then you can adapt them to your particular needs.

The sixth edition of the *Publication Manual* lays the requirements out pretty bluntly. “Each entry usually contains the following elements: author, year of publication, title, and publishing data—all the information necessary for unique identification and library search” (p. 180). Another way to think of these building blocks, a mnemonic to use in your own construction and review of references, is to remember four interrogatories: Who? When? What? Where?

To be less cryptic and more lengthy, the quartet of queries can be expanded thus: Who created this reference? When was this reference created? What is this reference called? Where does this reference come from (or, Where can my reader find this reference)? Let's look at these four questions one at a time.

Who created this reference?

The author component is pretty straightforward: the writer(s) of the article, anthology chapter, or book entire; the editor of a compilation; the producer and director of a motion picture; the writer of a letter, an e-mail, or a blog posting; and so on. On the rare occasion when no authorship is attributed and, per APA style, you revert to a title entry (e.g., *Publication Manual*, p. 200, example 9; p. 205, example 30), this initial whodunnit is still answered. The title entry implicitly tells your reader, “Authorship was checked for but despite the best efforts of the citer, no such information was either given or obtainable.”

When was this reference created?

In most cases, a year will suffice to answer this question. A few reference types require more: for instance, year followed by month for papers and poster sessions presented at conferences (*Publication Manual*, pp. 206–207), or year followed by month and day for newspaper articles (pp. 200–201) and e-mails and blog posts (pp. 214–215). When no year is available or can be ascertained by hook or by crook, this element is maintained by using the abbreviation n.d., for “no date” (p. 185; p. 203, example 20; p. 205, example 30).

What is this reference called?

Note that here I am referring to the title of the thing referenced itself, not to any larger “container” in which the specific thing referenced may reside. (Information about that container will be part of the fourth generic-reference element, discussed further on.) For instance, as regards a journal article, all of the “what” element is the title of the article, not the name of the journal in which that article appears. (As said above, that journal

name will be used later on.) So, too, with a chapter in an edited book: The “what” is the title of the chapter only. The name of the edited book in which the chapter resides is not the “what” described here.

If the item you are referencing does not have a formal title, APA style requires you to provide something to fill out this part of the reference. If no title exists, you must fill in the blank yourself. To indicate that this is your invention, not a formal title, your coined title should be enclosed in square brackets (*Publication Manual*, p. 209, example 47; p. 212, example 60).

Where does this reference come from (or, Where can my reader find this reference)?

Once you’ve given the author name(s), the year, and the name of the thing being referred to, anything and everything else in the reference entry constitutes the answer to this final question of “where.” References come in more varieties than Baskin-Robbins has ice creams, though, so this portion of a reference has the most permutations. It ranges from the basic journal name, volume, and page span for journal articles to the online versions where that information is supplemented with a DOI or URL. A book chapter’s “where” can be quite involved, what with listing editor name(s), the book’s overall title, a page span, and publisher location and name. References to books available online may dispense with the publisher information, replacing it with a DOI or URL. And books and journals are just the tip of the reference iceberg. There’s a host of new formats (podcasts, tweets, etc.) and a world of nonroutine formats that aren’t necessarily bleeding-edge new (e.g., cuneiform tablets in the British Museum).

<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2009/11/the-generic-reference.html>

The Generic Reference: Who?

by Chelsea Lee (2010, January 7)

When you need a reference citation but nothing in the *Publication Manual* seems to fit, it helps to understand [the generic template that all APA Style references follow](#). As discussed previously, the generic reference answers four interrogative questions: Who? When? What? and Where?

This post addresses the “who” or author element. Upcoming posts discuss the "[when](#)," "[what](#)," and "[where](#)" questions, as well as give advice on adding supplementary information in [brackets](#) and on [mixing and matching elements](#) of example references when what you need isn’t in the manual.

Who Is Responsible for This Content?

To determine authorship, ask yourself, “who is responsible for this content?” Most often, the “who” will be one person, or several people, who have served as authors or editors. But keep in mind that entities (governments, associations, agencies, companies, etc.) can also function as authors or editors. See pp. 196–197 of the *Publication Manual* for an index of the author variation examples available.

“No Author”: Are You Sure?

Oftentimes when it appears there is no author, a company or organization of some sort is actually responsible for the content. For example, if you are reporting on [H1N1/swine flu pandemic of 2009](#), one of your sources might be a [CDC brief](#) like the one cited below, which was authored by an entity (the CDC) rather than a specific person:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2009). *CDC recommendations for the amount of time persons with influenza-like illness should be away from others*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/guidance/exclusion.htm>

In other cases, there might be no author explicitly stated but you can be reasonably certain who it is. Example 67 in the manual shows an author name in square brackets to show that the author is “reasonably certain but not stated on the document” (p. 214). This is a new style guideline for APA, so we don’t have much practice in using it, but it’s available to you.

“No Author”: For Sure

In some cases, there truly is no way to pin down who the author is. We treat this as “no author.” In reference citations, we handle this by moving the content’s title into the author position (with no quotation marks around it). This most commonly occurs for wiki entries, dictionary entries, and unattributed website content. In the in-text citation, the title (put inside double quotation marks) likewise takes the place of the author’s name.

Other Resources on Authorship in References

Pages 196–197 in the 6th ed. of the *Publication Manual* list the author variations in the reference examples.

<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/01/the-generic-reference-who.html>

The Generic Reference: When?

by Jeff Hume-Pratuch (2010, January 14)

How do you determine what to do with the date element of your reference list entry? For most references, it’s pretty straightforward: The date element is the year of publication, found on the copyright page (for books) or the first page of the article (for journals); put it in parentheses and follow with a period.

However, as we’ve seen in previous posts, the basic reference pattern can sometimes have a few unexpected twists.

Online Documents

Online material can be tricky to date properly. If the date is not apparent at the beginning of the document you’re citing, look at the end (e.g., [APA Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services to Ethnic, Linguistic, and Culturally Diverse Populations](#) was finalized in 1990, so that’s the date to use).

But look out for a footer that says, “This page was last modified on [date].” This is not the date to use! It could be the date that the document was published, but it’s more likely to be the date it was put online or the date when the webmaster added code for a dancing Freud to the page.

Some sites place a copyright date for the website at the bottom of every page. Check a few pages on the site; if the identical statement appears on every page, it’s a site-wide footer, so that’s not the date you’re looking for either. (See “Zip, Zero, Zilch,” below, for the best solution.)

Periodicals

Dates for magazines, newsletters, and newspapers should include “the year and the exact date of the publication (month or month and day),” according to the *APA Publication Manual* (6th ed., 6.28, p. 185). This means that the month should be given for monthlies, and the month and day for weeklies. If the periodical uses a season with the year, put the year, a comma, and the season in parentheses (2008, Early Spring).

Some journals seem to straddle the line between journal and magazine (e.g., *Nature*, *Science*, and *The Lancet* contain peer-reviewed scientific research but are published weekly). Which date format should you follow for articles from these publications? The determining factor is not whether they’re called “journal” or “magazine” but how often they’re published. In the case of these and other weeklies, use month, day, and year.

Unpublished Documents

An unpublished document is one that has not yet appeared in its final form. If the final version has been accepted by a publisher but has not yet been released, use “in press” as the date. If the document has been submitted but not accepted, or it is under review, give the year the work was produced. Do not list the journal name, but include the sentence “Manuscript submitted for publication” immediately after the title. If the

document is still in draft form, use the year in which the draft you read was produced and include "Manuscript in preparation" as the final sentence (e.g., Example 59, pp. 211–212 of the *Publication Manual*).

The Double-Date Problem

If you are citing something that has been republished or reprinted, the entry in the reference list should use the date of the version you read. At the end, append the date of the original work or the source of the reprint (see Examples 21 and 26, pp. 203–204, for details on how to format the reference). In text, cite both dates: first the original version, then the version you read, separated by a slash (Freud, 1900/1953).

Sometimes publication of a multivolume work takes place over several years. In that case, use the span of years as the publication date both in the reference list and in text (Koch, 1953–1964).

The Odd Bunch

The sixth edition of the *Publication Manual* contains a new category for archival materials, such as letters, rare publications, manuscripts, photographs, cuneiform tablets, and apparatus (see 7.10, pp. 212–213). If they are dated, provide the date in parentheses (1935, February 4); if the date does not appear on the item but is known from other sources, put it in square brackets [1934]; if the date is not known but can be reliably estimated, use "ca." (the abbreviation for *circa*) before the date in square brackets [ca. 2307 B.C.].

Zip, Zero, Zilch

What if, after reasonably exhaustive efforts, there's no date to be found? Tell your readers that by entering "n.d." (for "no date") in parentheses where the date would otherwise go, and call it a day.

Do you have a thorny dating problem? (No, not that kind . . .) Post it in the comments section and we'll kick it around.

<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/01/the-generic-reference-when.html>

The Generic Reference: What?

by Sarah Wiederkehr (2010, January 21)

What Is a Title, and What if There Isn't One?

The "what" of the reference, namely, the title of the work, is arguably the least troublesome element of a reference. Most works have a title. For journal articles, the title is simply the title of the article. For book chapters, the title is the title of the chapter. For books, the title of the book is what is needed, and so on. If no title is present, you need merely describe the work, and to indicate that what you are providing is a description and not a formal title, you would enclose this information within brackets. For an example of this type of reference, see Example 60 on p. 212 of the *Publication Manual*.

When Do I Italicize a Title?

"So," you may be asking, "how do I know whether to italicize the title?" As a general rule of thumb, italicize the parent element of a publication only. What is contained in the title element of a reference is sometimes considered the parent element of a publication, but sometimes this is not the case. For example, when forming a reference for a journal article, the article (the child element) is contained within the journal (the parent element), so the article title would not be italicized, but the journal title would be. For book chapters, follow the same pattern—italicize the title of the book but not the title of the chapter. For books, reports, dissertations, motion pictures, and other works that are not published as part of a larger entity, however—that is, they are not part of a series, a film series, or any other kind of compilation—italicize the title of the work, which will appear in the title element spot (a.k.a. the "what" placeholder shown above). In a reference that contains both a child and a parent publication element, the parent element is considered to be part of the ["where" element](#), which will be explained in a later post.

Unusual Titles

Two slightly unusual occurrences that can affect the title element are worth mentioning here. The first, which will be explained in further detail in a forthcoming post, concerns the inclusion of [nonroutine information, within brackets](#), after the title. There are many examples of this throughout Chapter 7 of the *Publication Manual*, and the practice is described on p. 186. The second unusual occurrence worth mentioning is what happens when the author element is empty. As you may remember from [Chelsea's earlier post on the author element of the generic reference](#), in such cases, the title is simply moved into the author position. Using our skeleton reference from the beginning of this post, the end result would be as follows: [What](#). ([When](#)). [Where](#).

In such cases, all of the information contained in the title element, including any nonroutine information in brackets, would appear as the first element and would be followed by a period. In the reference list, alphabetize such entries by the first significant word in the title.

<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/01/the-generic-reference-what.html>

The Generic Reference: Where

by Jeff Hume-Pratuch (2010, January 28)

The last generic element in an APA reference is *where* a reader should go to locate the reference you used. (An alternate label for this element might be *how*—as in, “How can I locate that source?”)

Periodicals

For journals, newsletters, and magazines, the primary locator element is the volume number. It goes after the periodical's title, in italics, and the article's page range follows:

Elk, A. (1972a). My theory on brontosaurus. *Journal of the All-England Summarize Proust Competition*, 31, 12-27.

If (and only if) the journal is one that restarts the page numbering at 1 for each issue, include the issue number in parentheses after the volume number:

Elk, A. (1972b). The other theory on brontosaurus. *Journal of the All-England Summarize Proust Competition*, 31(4), 47-50.

Note that if the issue number is used, it is in roman (i.e., not italic) type, as is the comma following it.

Books, Reports, and So Forth

Give the name and location of the publisher (city and state or, outside the United States, city and country) for books, reports, brochures, and other nonperiodical publications.

Gumby, T. F. (1972). *The brain specialist*. Cambridge, England: Python.

Note that the name of the publisher is given in as brief a form as possible. Eliminate words such as *Publishers*, *Co.*, and *Inc.*, and use only the surname for publishing houses that are named after persons (e.g., *Erlbaum*, not *Lawrence Erlbaum*; *Wiley*, not *John Wiley*). The names of universities, associations, and so forth are given in full.

The “[well-known city rule](#)” is no longer in effect, so the state (or country, for non-U.S. publishers) is included for all publishers. However, there is one exception to this rule: If the publisher is a university whose name includes the name of the state, don't repeat the state in the publisher location.

Clark, D. T., & Schoomaker, P. J. *How not to be seen*. Tampa: University of Florida.

Electronic Sources

The digital object identifier (DOI) is the new gold standard for locating electronic publications. Through the magic of international concordats and computer programming, it will get you to the online version of the article every time, even if the publisher has changed Web addresses. Over the past few months we have devoted considerable space on the blog to the use (and the pros and cons) of DOIs, so I'll simply point you to Chelsea's [DOI primer](#) and handy [flowchart](#) for guidance on when to use DOI versus URL. You may also want to check out Tim's [video](#) on how to find those pesky DOIs, and Paige's discussion of [document URL versus homepage URL](#).

<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/01/the-generic-reference-where.html>

Using Brackets in APA Style References

by Timothy McAdoo (2010, February 4)

This post is part of an ongoing series about how references work. Check out an [introduction to the generic APA Style reference](#) and the posts on [the author or “who” element](#), [the date or “when” element](#), [the title or “what” element](#), and [the source information or “where” element](#). An upcoming post will give advice on [mixing and matching elements of example references](#).

Glancing through the references examples on pages 193–215 of the APA Publication Manual, you may notice that some references include information in brackets. These brackets always appear immediately following the title element (and any of its parenthetical information). Understanding this element of an APA Style reference can give you great flexibility when creating references.

As indicated on page 186, “nonroutine” information can be included in brackets. Fourteen of the most common notations are included on that page (including “Audio podcast,” “Data file,” “Computer software,” and others). But these are not the only possible notations. Any information that is “important for identification and retrieval” may be included in brackets.

This is useful when you need to clarify the type of source. For example, although Example 50 (p. 210) shows “[Audio podcast]” after the title element, “[Video podcast]” is another possibility. Likewise, in Example 53 (“Map retrieved online”) brackets are included to clarify that the title element refers to a “[Demographic map].” Brackets can also be used to indicate that the title element refers to more than one thing, as in Example 57, where “Eyelink II” refers to both the “[Apparatus and software].”

In short, if you’re referencing an unusual item, consider using brackets to clarify.

<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/02/the-generic-reference-using-brackets.html>

How do you cite an entire website (but not a specific document on that site)?

When citing an entire website, it is sufficient to give the address of the site in just the text.

Example:

Kidspsych is a wonderful interactive website for children (<http://www.kidspsych.org>).

[How to Cite Something You Found on a Website in APA Style](#)

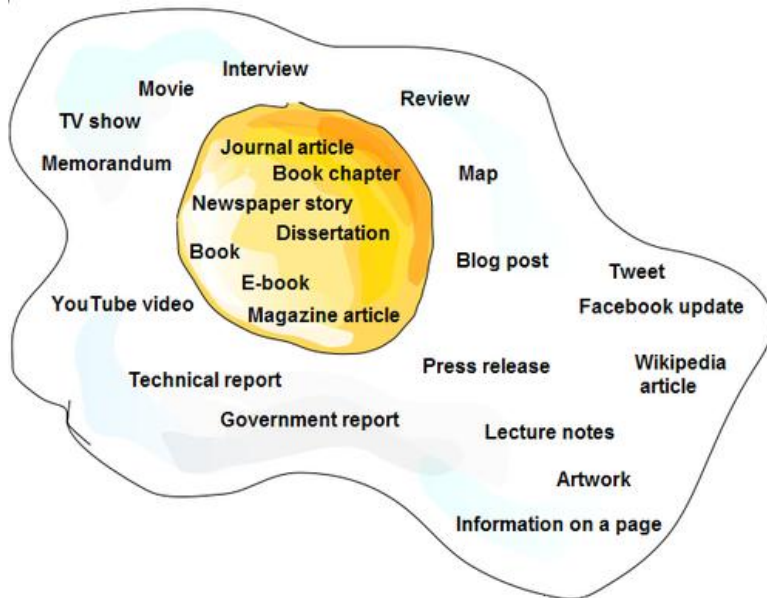
by Chelsea Lee (2010, November 18)

Perhaps the most common question we get about APA Style is “How do I cite a website?” or “How do I cite something I found on a website?”

First, to cite a website in general, but not a specific document on that website, see [this FAQ](#).

Once you’re at the level of citing a particular page or document, the key to writing the reference list entry is to determine what kind of content the page has. The *Publication Manual* reference examples in Chapter 7 are sorted by the type of content (e.g., journal article, e-book, newspaper story, blog post), not by the location of that content in a library or on the Internet. The *Manual* shows both print- and web-based references for the different types of content.

What seems to flummox our readers is what to do when the content doesn’t fall into an easily defined area. Sometimes the most you can say is that you’re looking at information on a page—some kind of article, but not a journal article. To explore this idea, imagine the Internet as a fried egg. The yolk contains easier to categorize content like journal articles and e-books. In that runny, nebulous white you’ll find the harder to define content, like blog posts, lecture notes, or maps. To wit, the egg:



Content in that egg white area may seem confusing to cite, but the template for references from this area is actually very simple, with only four pieces (author, date, title, and source):

Author, A. (date). Title of document [Format description]. Retrieved from <http://URL>

That format description in brackets is used only when the format is something out of the ordinary, such as a blog post or lecture notes; otherwise, it's not necessary. Some other example format descriptions are listed on page 186 of the *Publication Manual*.

Examples of Online References

Here’s an example (a blog post) in which we have all four necessary pieces of information (also see *Manual* example #76):

Freakonomics. (2010, October 29). E-ZPass is a life-saver (literally) [Blog post]. Retrieved from

<http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/29/e-zpass-is-a-life-saver-literally/>

Sometimes, however, one or more of these four pieces is missing, such as when there is no identifiable author or no date. You can [download a pdf chart here](#) that lists all the permutations of information that might occur with an online reference and shows how to adapt the reference.

Here's an example where **no author** is identified in this online news article:

All 33 Chile miners freed in flawless rescue. (2010, October 13). Retrieved from http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39625809/ns/world_news-americas/

And here's an example for a webpage where **no date** is identified:

The College of William and Mary. (n.d.). College mission statement. Retrieved from <http://www.wm.edu/about/administration/provost/mission/index.php>

We have also covered example references for [tweets and Facebook updates](#), [press releases](#), [interviews](#), [wikipedia articles](#), and [artwork](#) in other blog posts. Thanks for reading!
<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/electronic-references/>

<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/11/how-to-cite-something-you-found-on-a-website-in-apa-style.html>

What to Use—The Full Document URL or Home Page URL?

<http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2009/09/what-to-use-the-full-document-url-or-home-page-url.html>

by Paige Jackson (2009, September 24)

Following on from Annie's post yesterday on URLs, today I wanted to share some tips that might help in deciding what to use when. With the increasing predominance of electronic publishing, it's a challenge to know how best to cite documents you find online. The DOI is the gold standard, and eventually all documents will have their own DOIs. In the meantime, it's not always easy to know what to do. If you find a document on the Internet (but not from a database) that you want to cite for which there is no DOI, is it better to cite the full document URL or the publisher home page URL?

The question to ask before deciding which to include is, Which will be most helpful to the reader in locating the document? The following are some instances when the homepage URL would be most helpful (all examples refer to Chapter 7 in the Publication Manual):

- **Subscription wall**—If the document is available online only by subscription, the document URL would not be accessible by nonsubscribers. The homepage URL, however, lets the reader know who the publisher is and therefore what databases the reader might look to to access the document.
- **Unstable document URL**—If the publisher is one for which document URLs are subject to change, the home page URL is more likely to be helpful (see Examples 11 and 19a).

In the following cases, the full document URL is likely to take the reader to the source more reliably:

- **Publisher website that's difficult to search**—Some publisher homepages—such as those of government agencies or nongovernmental organizations—can be difficult to search, so citing the full URL for a document that takes the reader directly to the document may save time (see Examples 9, 31, and 33).
- **Message posted to a blog or other online forum**—Similarly, it can be difficult to locate a particular message on a blog website, so providing the URL that will lead the reader to the message would be the best choice (see Examples 74–77).

This list is not exhaustive—we hope it will give a sense of factors that should guide your decision. A URL is imperfect in pointing the reader to an electronic source, but for many sources, it's the best we can do. So don't belabor the issue—make an informed guess as to whether the publisher home page URL or the full document URL is more likely to lead the reader to the document in question, and move on!