

Documentation: Narrative citations are your friends!

In the documentation systems you are likely to use as an undergrad, the in-text citations take two forms: parenthetical and narrative citations. (*These exact terms may not be used, but they work best to describe the two forms.*)

In a narrative citation, the writer “introduces” the source by name *as part of the sentence*. (This is sometimes referred to as “attribution.”) Different disciplines may be more or less likely to use narrative citations, but students should be sure to learn how to use them.

Narrative citation has several benefits; here are three to consider:

1. Narrative citation makes clear when source material is being introduced, which helps show that information from sources isn’t being used without citation.

With parenthetical citation:

Art can be used to uncover many problems that children have at home, in school, or with their friends. For this reason, many therapists use art therapy extensively. Children’s views of themselves in society are often reflected by their art style. For example, a cramped, crowded art style using only a portion of the paper shows their limited role (Alschuler, 2005).

→ *How much of the information before the citation comes from the source? All of it? Only the last sentence? Is the information from the first few sources not cited?*

With narrative citation:

Art can be used to uncover many problems that children have at home, in school, or with their friends. For this reason, many therapists use art therapy extensively. **According to Alschuler (2005)**, children’s views of themselves in society are often reflected by their art style. For example, a cramped, crowded art style using only a portion of the paper shows their limited role.

→ *In this example, the narrative citation (in bold) makes clear to the reader when information from the source begins (and makes clear that information from sources isn’t being used without citation!).*

The example above uses APA documentation. Here’s how it would look using MLA documentation:

Art can be used to uncover many problems that children have at home, in school, or with their friends. For this reason, many therapists use art therapy extensively. **According to Alschuler**, children’s views of themselves in society are often reflected by their art style. For example, a cramped, crowded art style using only a portion of the paper shows their limited role (127).

2. Narrative citation helps you communicate how the information was used in the source.

Using the author or authors' names with a **verb** lets you indicate how the information was presented or what kind of information it is. This can help you concisely synthesize your source support.

Examples: Here, you can see that the verb indicates something very different in each case:

(APA style):

- Basterton (2021) *argued that*...
- Basterton (2021) *also found*...

(MLA style):

- Basterton *disregarded*... (78).
- Basterton *reported*... (393).

Now check out these comparisons:

With parenthetical citation (APA):

Early reports of this phenomenon tended to follow the same narrative structure (Esterson, 2018).

With narrative citation (APA and MLA examples):

- **Esterson (2018) argued that** early reports of this phenomenon tended to follow...
- **Esterson (2018) also found that** early reports of this phenomenon tended to follow ...
- **Esterson described how** early reports of this phenomenon tended to follow ... (1011).
- **Esterson emphasized that** early reports of this phenomenon ... (1011).

3. Narrative citation helps you establish relationships among the pieces of source support you use. This can improve synthesis—how you draw source material together to support your writing.

Examples (APA and MLA):

- Edgers et al. (2012) **looked at how** elementary school children... Basterton (2021) **found similar results** with college sophomores....
- According to Edgers et al., the problem was... (564). **However, studies by Basterton** showed it was actually only an indicator that ... (26).

More help with citations

For more help with...	...see this Writing Guide:
... parenthetical and narrative citations →	“APA doc: Parenthetical & narrative citations” “MLA doc: Parenthetical & narrative citations”
... how to format citations with more than one author →	“APA Documentation: Author’s names”
... how to cite when drawing from the same source for several sentences →	“Documentation: Using running attribution”