

WHY, WHEN, AND HOW TO CITE SOURCES

In academic papers, it is often necessary to use secondary sources. In biblical exegesis, our *primary* source is the biblical text¹ and *secondary* sources are those who talk about the text – whether commentaries, dictionaries, books, etc. This document is designed to introduce you to the concept of citations and explain, in brief, how to do it well.

Firstly – primary sources, particularly the biblical text, may be cited either in-line as part of your argument or parenthetically in the text.²

Example: “Genesis 1:1 tells us God was the one who brought the heavens and earth into existence”

Example: “We know that God was the one who created the cosmos (Gen 1:1).”

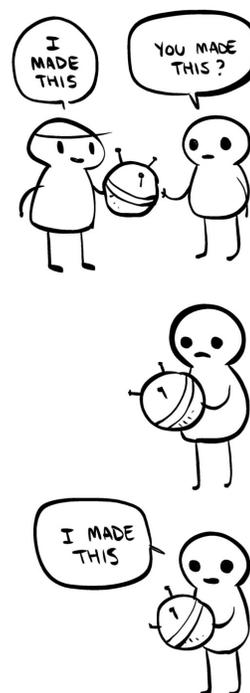
Why Do We to Cite our Sources?

To avoid plagiarism: Simply put, plagiarism is taking another person's ideas and claiming them as your own and it is rampant in the world today. Rather than belaboring the ethics of plagiarism, let us simply say that it demonstrates laziness and carelessness in the most benign cases, and it is tantamount to intellectual theft and dishonesty at the worst. By citing your sources you are acknowledging your conversations partners, people who have worked hard – *sometimes decades* – in the aim of helping people understand Scripture.

To allow others to follow up on your work: In many cases, a footnote may reference a topic that is only remotely connected to your overall thesis, but if your readers have enough interest, they may want to follow that thread. By exposing your research process, your work becomes much more valuable to your readers.

It also allows readers to follow up and see the context and argument that your sources make and make sure you are using your source's material accurately. If you particularly disagree with an author, that reader should at least be given the opportunity to rebut you with a fully formed argument, not just the portions you've selected.

To demonstrate that you have given adequate attention to different opinions: By no means can you expect to cover the whole of scholarship regarding your topic, but you should demonstrate at least some breadth and diversity in your research. If you chose to use only evangelical, Reformed writers, you will be presenting a relatively narrow view of your topic.



“The Internet,” Anthony Clark (nedroidcomics.tumblr.com) Jan 30, 2013. Retrieved 10/4/2017.

When Do We Cite Our Sources?

Anytime the material you present is not your original work, be prepared to give a citation. It is often

1 You may also use other sources such as historic creeds and confessions (eg. Westminster Standards) or extra-biblical material (eg. Deuterocanonical literature, Church fathers, etc.) which may be treated as primary sources.

2 See <https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/SBLHSSupp2015-02.pdf>, esp. § 1.2.

said: When in doubt, cite. Some specific examples are worth mentioning.

Direct Quotations: If you use an author's exact words, put quotation marks around the words and give a citation.

Example: One way that we can discern biblical authors setting up a narrative event is when “the narrative tempo slows down enough for us to discriminate a particular scene.”³

Paraphrase: When you rephrase an author's words, quotation marks are not needed, but the sentence should still be cited.

Example: The pacing of the events in biblical narrative is important; when they are slowed to the point that a discrete scene is evident, it indicates that the biblical author is presenting it as a narrative event.⁴

Summary: At times it may be worthwhile to summarize someone else's views in order to compare or contrast them with yours. In such a case, you may cite a range of pages.

Example: Robert Alter demonstrates that, while narrative events and reports of direct speech do share some similarities and are regularly interwoven with each other, it is essential to distinguish between them in Hebrew narrative, as it is often entirely intentional the reasons why the author chose one form over the other.⁵

How Do We Cite our Sources?

In biblical studies, Turabian/Chicago style is preferred. Keep three things in mind when constructing your citations: completeness, specificity, consistency. Your reader should be able to find what you are citing. Insert a footnote at the end of whatever material you need to cite, and at the bottom of the page, include the citation information. The citation should include Name of the Author, Name of the Publication, Publication Details, and specific location within the publication. A few of the most common examples:

Book:

Author Name, *Title of Book* (City of Publication: Publisher Name, Year of Publication), Page Number.

Note that the title of the book is italicized and the publication data is in parentheses. Pay attention to the small details to make sure you remain consistent. Once you have used a full citation in your paper, any subsequent citations can be abbreviated. (See the R. Alter examples in this document).

Name, *Title*, Page Number.

There are, understandably, a number of variations given the type of source you cite. Multiple authors, journal articles, multiple volumes, etc. can complicate things and mean that you have to devote a little extra time, energy, and attention to making sure that your reader can discern where you are getting the information you are using. Refer to the following style guides for more detail:

3 Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 79.

4 Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 79.

5 Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 79-110.

<https://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/pubs/SBLHSsupp2015-02.pdf>
<https://www.covenantseminary.edu/library/turabian/>

As a final thought: The care and detail you apply to your footnotes reflects the care and detail you put into your exegesis. If you demonstrate carelessness in referencing your sources, what does that say about your work with the text itself?