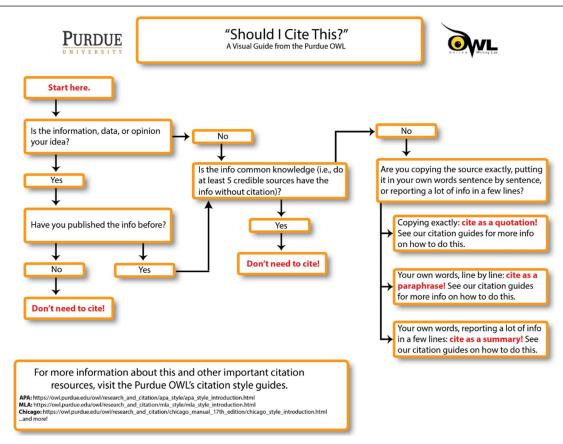# Beginning Guide to Formatting Styles

Most people know style guides as rules for citation formatting. Style guides, however, are not just for citation. They include a wide range of rules and guidelines for works in their respective fields, from grammar and language use to the font and size of headings in a work. Generally, style manuals include everything a writer needs to know in order to make their work look and read just like every other work written in that style — the look of the page, the way other authors are referenced in the body of the work, and even the tone of the writing. In the corporate sphere, "style guide" is often synonymous with "branding guide," and in a way academic style guides can be thought of similarly. APA style brands papers with specific guidelines in the same way Apple's style guide brands their websites, advertisements, products, documentation, and even stores: you know an APA paper when you see one, just like you know an Apple device when you see one.

In other words, **style guides are used as a way of making common elements consistent** across documents written by many writers, in many places, and in many circumstances; as a result, readers from any university (or other audience groups) can read a paper written in APA style and know immediately how to navigate the headings of the paper, which details will be listed in the abstract, how quotes will be introduced and marked, where to look for important citation information, and what each citation element represents.

For more information about MLA, APA, and other formatting styles, visit the Purdue OWL Online Writing Lab.

Credit to: Style Guide Overview - Purdue OWL® - Purdue University. (n.d.). https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding_plagiarism/guide_overview%20.html

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"Should I Cite This?"
A Visual Guide from the Purdue OWL

OWL Online Writing Lab

Start here.

Is the information, data, or opinion your idea?

→ No

→ No

Yes

Have you published the info before?

Is the info common knowledge (i.e., do at least 5 credible sources have the info without citation)?

Are you copying the source exactly, putting it in your own words sentence by sentence, or reporting a lot of info in a few lines?

No   Yes

Yes

Copying exactly: **cite as a quotation!** See our citation guides for more info on how to do this.

Don't need to cite!

Don't need to cite!

Your own words, line by line: **cite as a paraphrase!** See our citation guides for more info on how to do this.

Your own words, reporting a lot of info in a few lines: **cite as a summary!** See our citation guides on how to do this.

For more information about this and other important citation resources, visit the Purdue OWL's citation style guides.

APA: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html
MLA: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_style_introduction.html
Chicago: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition/chicago_style_introduction.html
...and more!

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