Maastricht University

UM Citation Guide

A Guide by FEM

Preface

This guide arises from a short (online) presentation that Sally Wyatt gave during a FEM Lunch meeting on 23 February 2021. It was called, "Holding ourselves accountable. Overcoming bias in citation practices". Over 50 people (mostly women) attended, and a lively discussion ensued. Afterwards, Aurélie Carlier invited anyone who was interested to join her and Sally in preparing this guide. Sharon Anyango, Nicole Basaraba, Lidwien Hollanders and Hang Nguyen generously offered their insights and their time. Pauline El-Khoury assisted with the references and the layout. Aurélie and Sally were interviewed about the presentation and our plans for this citation guide by Katie Digan in Science Guide on 23 April 2021 (Digan 20-04-2021).

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Background

Why do we cite?

Citing (by quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing) is a system used in the academic community to indicate where ideas, theories, quotes, facts, and any other evidence or information can be found and verified (Maastricht University Library 2020). Citing is also the mechanism through which attribution is accomplished. Attribution is a scholarly practice that all members of the scientific community (including students) should cultivate. Citing is how we engage in scholarly conversation and how we acknowledge sources of information and ideas. A proper citation is also how we avoid plagiarism. All university assignments that draw on the ideas, words, or research of other writers must contain citations.

Why are we writing this guide?

Several recent studies have highlighted the systematic under-citation of works by women and other marginalized groups in various research fields (Mott and Cockayne 2017; Maliniak, Powers, and Walter 2013; Wang et al. 2021; Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell 2018; Chakravartty et al. 2018; Thiem et al. n.d.; Caplar, Tacchella, and Birrer 2017; Dworkin et al. 2020). In this citation guide, we wish to draw attention to the ways in which citations can be used to make more visible the contributions of women and other underrepresented groups in the production of knowledge. Paying attention to whom we cite and how we do so can help to rectify the long-standing biases against and invisibility of the work and ideas of women and other marginalized groups (Chakravartty et al. 2018).

In most disciplines, "leaders in the field" are often quoted or referenced as foundational works, but we need to ask who those "leaders" are and how they emerged. With this guide, we want to encourage staff and students to reflect upon their citation practices, and think about how they could make more visible the work of women and other groups historically marginalized in the production of knowledge.

Citations are important for raising awareness of and providing proper acknowledgment to women's ideas, and perhaps to improving career chances. For example, in the sciences, the number of citations directly relates to a researcher's h-index, a metric of academic impact (Chatterjee and Werner 2021; Astegiano, Sebastián-González, and de Toledo Castanho 2019). Citation practices might be considered a rather narrow indicator of structures of gender, racial and other inequalities. However, citations contribute to the reproduction of (disciplinary) knowledge, which does serve to secure the social order and determines what knowledge counts.

Thus, citation is clearly important, and only time will tell if it makes a difference to **the visibility of women.** In and of itself, it is not a substitute for the work needed to ensure that the position of women and other groups is improved in universities. We also need to continue to pay attention to the structural features of education, labour markets, and childcare that have long hindered women's academic career prospects. In many countries, including the Netherlands, women's access to university education has increased enormously since the second half of the 20th century. Nonetheless, **women remain under-represented in higher academic positions**, such as full professors and in senior management positions (LNVH Dutch Network of Women Professors 2021).

Citation Styles

Academic writing styles and gender biases

Citation styles inevitably affect academic writing styles, and they can also help hide or reveal gender biases. This section starts with an overview of different citation styles and then discusses what they mean for attributing gender in the main text and acknowledging women's work via reference lists/bibliographies.

In the social sciences, two commonly used citation styles are APA (American Psychological Association) and Harvard. These styles highlight the author's last name and date of publication (i.e., last name, year). They signal to the reader that the author is drawing upon the statement/argument of the cited scholar or using the cited scholar as a point of contrast. The flow of the writing style can be rather seamless with APA and Harvard citation styles because the reader immediately sees when something is quoted or paraphrased by the author, and from which scholar.

The bibliography that appears at the end of a piece of writing in the humanities often uses either the MLA (Modern Language Association) or Chicago citation styles. These include both the first and last names of the author. Chicago gives a choice between initials and names but encourages the use of full names. It could be argued that the year of publication is given less priority because it appears at the end of the citation. Some disciplines favor newness, and thus emphasize dates; and in many disciplines, as knowledge claims become taken for granted, citations to the original sources may fade away (but this is not good practice).

The STEM (science, technology, engineering, medicine) disciplines often use a numbering system. For example, the scientific journal *Nature* uses numerical in-text citations, with no further contextual information about the author's name or the year of publication

appearing in the text. For such details, readers must refer to the reference list which includes the last name, initial of the first name, and the date of publication at the end.

The choice of citation style can affect the writing style for a paper. For example, not including the year of publication in the text means that an author has to do more work to convey the periodization of the work. Sometimes novelty is valued, and sometimes the weight of history is more appreciated. Converting a text from one style to another would require adjustments to the text if the visibility of the year of publication suddenly changes.

Another choice authors need to make when writing concerns the use of pronouns. Often, pronouns are used instead of the scholar's name to continue discussing the same work or argument. But this practice could lead to possible gender misattribution. Furthermore, the most often used pronouns of he/she and sometimes s/he do not include all gender identities (e.g., non-binary, transgender, queer). The use of pronouns should be considered carefully by authors. In the longer term, one solution is for citation styles to incorporate authors' preferred pronouns into the full reference, to help authors refer to others correctly. Although this does not help if people change pronouns over the course of their writing lives. Another solution is simply to repeat names and avoid pronouns altogether.

What do these citation conventions mean in the context of acknowledging women's contributions to the production of knowledge? For this, the reference lists/bibliographies are particularly important. Because APA and Harvard do not include first names (only the first initial) in the reference list, it is nearly impossible to guess or assume gender unless the cited work or author is known to the reader or the author goes to a great deal of effort to find out. In MLA and Chicago bibliographies, first names are usually included,

making it easier for readers to deduce the gender. However, this remains a deduction/assumption, because it can be difficult for authors/readers not familiar with the gendered names of different historical periods or cultures, and many names are gender-nonspecific.

In this citation guide, we (the authors) come from different academic backgrounds and thus have our own citational norms and practices. We struggled to find the "best" citation style. In the end, we decided on the Chicago citation style, in order to make the first name visible. This makes it easier to identify the gender of the authors, albeit with the above-mentioned limitations.

Good Practices

We offer the following good practices for citations, organized by academic role. These guidelines are neither comprehensive nor definitive. In fact, we hope that they will change over time and that this document will be revised accordingly. We also offer examples of good practices and for further reading in Boxes 1-3.

As authors

When to cite and when to quote?

In-text citations are required when you refer to, summarize, or paraphrase someone else's ideas, theories, or research in your paper or essay. The format of the citation depends on the citation style you use, which is standardized, and the way you weave the citation into your writing (Maastricht University Library 2020).

Two examples of in-text citations using the Chicago style:

Sara Ahmed (2017, 14) suggests that "feminism is at stake in how we generate knowledge; in how we write, in who we cite".

Challenging traditional citation practices and what they mean for how we write has been discussed by several feminist authors (Ahmed 2017; McKittrick 2021).

For every in-text citation in your paper, there must be a corresponding entry in your reference list. In-text citations are also required when you directly quote someone else's words. To quote a source, you must ensure (McCombes 2020):

- The quoted text is enclosed in quotation marks or formatted as a block quote.
- The original author is correctly cited.
- The text is identical to the original.
- The exact format of a quote depends on how long it is and which citation style you are using. Quoting and citing correctly is essential to avoid plagiarism.

See the previous section for a discussion of the implications of using different styles for recognizing and attributing gender. Note that for the example above, APA and Harvard would not have mentioned Ahmed's first name.

Who to cite?

Choosing works of others to cite is a key step in preparing a manuscript. Considering the wealth of scientific research available, this needs to be done in a mindful way. We would like to challenge you to reflect critically on your choice of citations and references. Some suggestions of questions that may help you with this process are as follows:

1. How did you find the resources you cite?
a. Are the resources a reflection of your own network, including collaborators, researchers you have met or heard at conferences? Keep in mind that the speaker and participant lists of conferences may not be diverse (enough). By using this as a source of citations, we may, purposefully or not, perpetuate existing biases over scientific generations (Shih n.d.).

b. Did you find your reference in the reference list of something you read?
    This type of the chain-like citation may magnify and perpetuate bias over scientific generations (Klein et al. 2017). Do you cite the work of authors because it is highly cited and well-known?
    If so, ask yourself if it really is the most relevant citation for your own work? Have you made an effort to look for other works?

2. Do you discuss the work of men and women differently? For example, look at those you paraphrase and those you cite directly.
3. Have you actively searched for works by other marginalized groups?
4. How do you cite the insights that you may have absorbed through discussion with peers and colleagues? Can you find ways to acknowledge their publications?

Self-citation

Self-citation, referencing your own previously published work, is important to give credit to your ideas, to convey the level of originality in a publication, and to enable readers to understand and trace the development of (your) ideas over time. As such, it shows the incremental, iterative advancement of your work (Noorden and Singh Chawla 2019). However, self-citation is not unproblematic. For example, excessive self-citation can inflate publication and citation metrics (Penders and Markel 2018), which are important metrics for making decisions on hiring, promotions and research funding. Excessive self-citation can also make you look arrogant and boastful. Research has suggested that male academics cite their own papers 56% more than female academics (Singh Chawla 2016), although a replication analysis suggested that this might be the result of higher self-citation of very productive authors, irrespective of gender (Mishra et al. 2018).

It is difficult to define an acceptable level of self-citation. It is very likely to differ between fields, with smaller fields (niche fields) likely to (legitimately) exhibit higher levels of self-citation. Fields where big research consortia are common, which publish multi-author papers that cite each other, are likely to have high (co-author) self-citation rates (Noorden and Singh Chawla 2019). As such, it is important to research citation profiles across fields to obtain median rates of self-citing and self-referencing to be used as a benchmark (Szomszor, Pendlebury, and Adams 2020).

One idea is to develop a self-citation index, or s-index, similar to the well-known h-index.

Box 1: Aspirational Metrics

Data Feminism (D'Ignazio and Klein 2020)

In this book, the authors argue that **the growing field of data science can learn from feminism to challenge power relations** in the world and to work toward justice. It presents a number of principles, including 'rethink binaries and hierarchies' and 'consider context' as reminders that classifications of data (and people and events) have real-world consequences and that numbers never speak for themselves. In preparing the book, Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein set themselves a set of 'aspirational metrics' to hold themselves accountable to their own values and commitments to intersectional feminism, equity and transparency, amongst others (pp.215-221).

For example, patriarchy is a structural problem, and they aimed to include 75% of all the citations and examples in the book from women and nonbinary people. Racism is another structural problem, and again they aimed to include 75% of citations from people of colour. On both of these metrics, the citations in the final book fell below their aspirations (62% and 32%, respectively). They reflect on this process, openly and honestly. They recognize their own position as scholars in the world of US higher education, a world that is dominated by white men. They acknowledge the time and effort it takes "to put those values into action and hold ourselves accountable time and time again. This constant emphasis on accountability is not easy, and it is not always successful." (D'Ignazio and Klein 2020, 221)

Good Practices

An h-index of 10 indicates that a researcher has published 10 papers, each with at least 10 citations. Similarly, an s-index of 10 would mean that a researcher has published 10 papers each with at least 10 self-citations (Flatt 2017). This method would offer transparency to self-citations. However, additional metrics may not solve the potential gaming of citation-based indicators, and they will have their own limitations. Another idea is to encourage editors and reviewers to check for unjustified self-citations.

As students

Students need to learn the same rules mentioned above for authors, about when and how to cite, especially as students' work is routinely checked for plagiarism (this is increasingly also the case for more established scholars as journals introduce plagiarism checks).

Students also have an important role to play in encouraging their tutors to become more aware of citation practices and how these are reflected in the course material.

An informal poll conducted among 16 UM students on 28 May 2021 provided the following suggestions:

1. **Create a peer dialogue in tutorials** and coursework about gender and other biases, and encourage reflection on how to change citation practices.
2. Demand that educational administrators (tutors, coordinators, curricula developers, professors) **formalize better**, more gender-balanced citation practices.
3. **Ask tutors to provide biographical information** about the authors of coursework materials, to raise awareness, provide context, and perhaps highlight biases.

As teachers and/or educators

As educators, we are committed to progressive education and accountability. According to Arif (Arif et al. 2021), scholarly and scientific innovation requires shifting perspectives and continuously reframing our ideas. This same mindset should be incorporated in our teaching strategies where our commitment to accountability and equity in education augments support historically underrepresented scholars "who are disproportionately affected by economic, social, or systemic barriers" (Arif et al. 2021, 10). As such, teachers and educators can play an important role in mitigating gender citation biases. Below are some suggestions that we gathered from some teachers and educators:

1. **Require a section** (of approximately 100 words) in coursework assignments in which students reflect on the references used. This could be an explanation of why the paper cites more men than women or other marginalized groups. With this explanation, some discrepancies may be brought to the discussion: do women publish less in a certain field, or is it that citing male authors is preferred for one reason or another? Both could be the result of bias, but of different sorts.
2. **Encourage students to reflect on their choices in citations.** APA7 now works with gender-neutral pronouns (they/them), which reflects increased inclusivity. But how this will affect the visibility of women's publications is an important question for future research.
3. **Select course readings to increase the visibility of women's work**. As teachers, we can help students to address gender and other imbalances in citations by providing more source materials to cite!
4. **Include reminders in** course materials and exam instructions to be mindful of citation bias. Considering that students often start with the course readings, the previous point is an important step towards helping to close this gap.

5. **Advocate for institutional gender audits** to help guide revisions of the curricula. Can the UM steer this initiative to set an example for other Dutch and international universities?

6. During reflection week, **require students to reflect on these biases** and how they can improve on their citation practices. This can be included in their reflection portfolios.

As peer reviewers and editors

Peer review is an essential part of the academic process, aimed at making the submitted manuscript scientifically more robust and clear. During this process, additional references are sometimes suggested by the reviewers to, for example, fill a gap in the introduction, compare the results with previously published work, and/or provide additional discussion. However, some reviewers may suggest their own work to improve their own citation metrics. Similar to self-citation, there are no clear rules or guidance on the desirability or acceptability of such practices. Reviewers are chosen because they are experts on the topic, and thus it is not surprising that they might expect to find their own work included (Wong 2019). Reviewers and editors are advised to read carefully, checking references for relevancy and bias. The Dutch *Code of Conduct for Research Integrity* (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) et al. 2018) explicitly warns against "citation pushing" (p.18), which it

defines as using peer review to promote one's own work. Authors are not obliged to agree with peer reviewers, and can always explain their choices in the rebuttal letter that accompanies the revised manuscript. Academic editors play an important role as they can flag and overrule reviewers who suggest irrelevant papers to cite.

Some publishers and professional associations provide guidelines to both editorial board members and to reviewers, about how to ensure scientific integrity and how to avoid (unconscious) bias (COPE Council 2017). The journals of the Biomedical Engineering Society, for example, recommend that authors should include citation diversity statements (Rowson et al. 2021). Our tips focus on diversity and avoiding bias, though we recognize that both of these are important elements of integrity. We do not include more general tips about other matters of scientific integrity, such as conflicts of interest and confidentiality. Nor do we discuss the variety of peer review systems as the tips provided are of more general applicability.

For editors

- Seek to achieve balance in reviewers. This may vary by field. Remember that if women and other minoritized groups are under-represented, and thus may be invited to undertake reviews more often.

Box 2: Where to find relevant articles by women?

For more senior researchers in a field, finding material by women is often not a problem as they know their colleagues well, have met them at conferences, and thus have a good overview of the field. However, for students, early-career researchers, or researchers exploring new areas of research, it might be difficult to know relevant articles by women, even if they aspire to make their bibliographies and syllabi more diverse.

We point to the following resources:

- Women Also Know Stuff
- Cite Black Women Collective
- Berlin 500 Women Scientists
- LGBT Scholar Network
- POC Expert
- Tech Up For Women
- Women Also Know History
- Women Also Know Law

- Women Also Know Stuff - Sociology
- Women Quants
- Cite Black Authors
- Women Leading in AI
- Women Know MENA

Good Practices

- If reviewers seek to promote their own publications in an excessive manner, remind the author that such suggestions can be ignored when revising their work.
- Do not pass on reviewer comments that are discriminatory or harassing of the work or of the author.

For reviewers

- "Do unto others...". Prepare your review with kindness and respect, remembering that the author has invested a great deal of time and energy. Even if it is not ready for publication, provide constructive feedback and do not make assumptions about the gender, age, or ethnicity of the author.
- Do try to suggest additional references that would strengthen the argument, especially references authored by marginalized groups.

Box 3: Gender Balance Assessment Tool

https://jlsumner.shinyapps.io/syllabustool/

The goal of this tool is to help scholars assess the gender balance of their bibliographies and syllabi. The tool automates the process of evaluating the gender of each name and providing an estimate of the gender balance. This tool ameliorates tedious counting and may reduce human error, but it does have some limitations. First, authors identified only by initials cannot be categorized using this method, and are thus eliminated from the estimation process (which excludes for example APA and Harvard citation styles). Second, names that are common among both genders can throw off the proposed estimates.

Finally, names that are not very common in reference lists are not retained in the estimation process (due to lack of data necessary to train the algorithm). This will particularly work against those with non-English names. As a result, bibliographies and syllabi with high levels of any of these three issues will be less accurate. The creators of the tool acknowledge that the tool will never be as accurate and as thorough as hand-coding and should not be used as a replacement for hand-coding. However, this quick and easy estimation tool will simplify assessing gender diversity, hopefully helping more scholars to reconsider their own citation practices, and what they might be overlooking.

For methodological details, see "The Gender Balance Assessment Tool" by Jane Sumner (Sumner 2018).

Future Outlook

How many citations (to women) is enough?

It is relatively easy to monitor how many students and staff identify as women. It is much more challenging to define a sufficient percentage of citations to women. Any targets will very likely differ between fields, as they would need to also reflect the diversity of the field, now and in the past. If you are unsure about the diversity in your research field, professional organizations often publish descriptive data on their membership which enables the definition of a baseline (see for example Dion, Sumner, and Mitchell 2018; Political Science Now 2019, 4 June; International Studies Association 2022), although we acknowledge that more studies are necessary to define proper baselines for all fields.

However, it is never enough until some of the imbalances get righted. We hope that this citation guide will help all of us to **start citing more mindfully and fairly.** We look forward to a future in which this question no longer needs to be asked. In the meantime, we need to remember that choosing whom to cite remains a choice, and it is **a choice that has consequences for the careers of women** and other groups historically excluded from the formal production of knowledge. Citations can be suggestions for thinking, writing, and living differently (McKittrick 2021, 24).

Author Information

In this citation guide, we (the authors) come from different academic backgrounds, and thus have our own authorship norms and practices. Considering that everyone has made their own valuable contribution, we decided to put the names in alphabetical order (based on the first name).

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The **Female Empowerment Maastricht University** network – otherwise known as FEM – is a network of academic and administrative staff representing every discipline and faculty of Maastricht University. Since 2018, FEM has become a key part of UM's Diversity and Inclusivity Office, contributing to the overall efforts of the University to eliminate gender disparities and create a diverse, fair, and equitable work environment for all.

Any questions, comments or suggestions on the citation guide should be directed to fem@maastrichtuniversity.nl.

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