

Properly Citing Sources in a Speech

By: Phillip E. Wagner

Well-developed presentations provide external support for the ideas delivered by the speaker to enhance the credibility of the speech. It is essential that when you use outside research that you include an oral reference to the work being referenced. Unlike written work, oral citations do not have a specific format that you must follow. However, some basic rules do apply. You should provide the listening audience with enough information that they could easily access the resource you are referencing. This means that you have to decide which information is most important for each different oral citation. You may include: author, date, title of work, publication, web source, editor, and/or the credentials of the author. You would NOT include all of this information; rather you should choose the necessary information.

As the paragraph above notes, well-developed presentations provide external support for the ideas that you present in your speech. The problem? The entire paragraph is actually a word-for-word copy of a paragraph found online (University of Southern Mississippi, 2012). As you can see, it is incredibly easy to plagiarize the works of others, whether intentionally (as in the paragraph above) or unintentionally (perhaps through simple omissions or sloppy citations). Intentional or not, failure to cite sources thoroughly is still considered plagiarism.

One of the easiest ways to lose credibility in a speech is failing to give credit where credit is due. As you prepare a speech, it is important to know that *nobody* expects you to do all of the work. Not only is it perfectly acceptable to “borrow” the words and ideas of others—it is encouraged! When you ground your argument in a collection of other empirically verified or socially applicable arguments, you provide context, proof, and ultimately give credibility to your speech. But when you use the ideas of others, you must give them credit. Just as you provide a citation in a written document, so you must provide an oral citation for each quote, paraphrase, and idea that you use to support your argument.

There are a variety of sources that you might use for a speech. Some of the most common resources are typically books, academic journals, newspapers, public press articles, policy documents, and Internet documents. While there are many other formats that you could cite as a source, these are some of the most frequently used in student speeches and papers and are some of the most commonly accepted types of credible sources. Regardless of which source you use, you should immediately gather all the relevant citation information for that source. This information includes:

Authorship. When you select sources to incorporate in your speech, you should already have a good idea about the history of the topic. This involves identifying the major people, propositions, and perspectives related to the topic. Once you have this information, you should seek out primary works written by individuals who are closely related to your topic. They, along with their major critics, are a good first resource. Then, secondary perspectives on the issue are a good next step. Regardless, think critically about how the role of the author of the source you use.

Citing relevant material from recognized and reputable authors is an excellent way to give your speech credibility.

Date. Some speeches involve time-specific topics. For instance, if you were giving an informative speech on Women’s Suffrage, you could cite a variety of resources that span decades. However, if you were giving an informative speech on the recent Affordable Care Act, you would likely cite more recent publications (although you certainly could cite older sources on healthcare, policy, or otherwise). Regardless of your sources, know that date matters. You should select sources that have historical relevancy or are currently applicable to the topic. Dates also influence the credibility of your speech because they show the audience that you understand both the history and current affairs of your topic.

Title. Nearly every resource has a specific title. When you pick up a book, the title is obvious. For articles found in scholarly or popular press journals, you might be a little more confused about what the title actually is. In journals, anthologies, or collections, there will be a *primary* title and a *supporting* title. A primary title is the specific title of the article or chapter you are using while a supporting title is the title of the collection where the article or chapter appears—the name of the book or the journal. For instance, if you were citing this chapter, the primary title would be the title of this chapter and the secondary title would be the title of the workbook. While there is no consistent method for identifying the title of an Internet source, they can usually be found near the top of the webpage before the page’s content.

Location. The place you gather your information is closely related to that information’s credibility. While physical location is easy to identify for books (through publication information) it is less easy to identify for other written materials and Internet sources. Providing the title of a journal along with an article you cite from that journal situates your article in a metaphorical “place,” much the same way providing the publication company’s information for a book situates and validates its scholarly contribution. For online resources, this is not quite as easy. You need to think critically about the quality of information you find as not all websites are verified for accuracy. In general, .gov, .org, and .edu webpages are safe places to gather information. Websites ending in .com or other extensions may also hold highly relevant information, but you need to identify, analyze, and ultimately justify the validity of your sources.

While there is certainly a greater range of citation information available than the four concepts outlined above, these four are the most crucial elements of a high quality verbal citation. So does that mean that you must provide all of this information when you use a source in a speech? You will be relieved to find that the answer is *no*. In most situations, it is not appropriate to simply rehash all of the citation information aloud. Many students wonder what information is necessary in an oral citation—and for good reason. Unlike written communications, where there are a variety of accepted citation formats, there is no formally accepted citation style for oral communication.

In general, you should provide an oral citation that shows you are accountable for the source’s information and quality. The general rule of thumb in providing a minimally acceptable oral citation is to give the audience enough information about the source that they are able to find that source with minimal difficulty. Again, there is no formal standard, but high quality oral citations

typically involve listing the author, the date, and title of the source. For online sources, you should also note that the source was online, but do not need to list out the entire website address or URL.

In addition to also ensuring all appropriate source information is orally cited, you must also be sure to present the oral citation in a way that flows with the direction and feel of the speech. Students often fall into the trap of temporarily “pausing” the flow of their speech to insert citation information. This is a distraction and also negatively influences the credibility of your speech as it causes the audience to question how well the source supports your ideas and how well researched you are on the topic. It is crucial to practice delivering your speech from start to finish many times—including source citations. You want them to feel as if they naturally support the points that you are trying to make in your speech, and not like you are forcefully shoving in citation information to meet the minimum requirements.

Many people choose to paraphrase information, which involves translating the direct words into more accessible language for your speech. It involves summarizing or generalizing the content in a way that applies to your speech. Others choose direct quotes, which involve actually lifting the exact language out of the content and stating it word-for-word in a speech. Both of these methods are perfectly acceptable, but you must still provide a citation for each. When you use direct quotes, be sure to indicate that you are quoting directly.

Below are some suggestions for how to orally cite source materials. Again, there is no one accepted method for oral citations. Your instructor may prefer a different format, but these are general principles for successful oral citations.

Books

Book citations should, at minimum, include the author(s) and the title of the book.

Written Citation: Hogan, J. M., Andrews, P. H., Andrews, J. R., & Williams, G. (2013). *Public speaking and civic engagement* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Correct Oral Citations: “According to Hogan, Andrews, Andrews, and Williams, in their textbook, *Public speaking and civic engagement*...” **or** “In the textbook, *Public speaking and civic engagement*, Hogan, Andrews, Andrews, and Williams state...” **or** “In Hogan, Andrews, Andrews, and Williams’ textbook, *Public speaking and civic engagement*, they note that...”

Incorrect Oral Citations: “Our textbook says...” **or** “Hogan, Andrews, Andrews, and Williams state...” **or** “The book, *Public speaking and civic engagement* shows...”

Journal Articles

Journal articles should include the primary title and/or secondary title, author, and date. Ensure that you are not confusing the primary (article) title with the secondary (journal) title.

Written Citation: Dennis, M. R., Kunkel, A. D., & Keyton, J. (2008). Problematic integration theory, appraisal theory, and the Bosom Buddies breast cancer support group. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 36, 415-436.

Correct Oral Citations: “According to a 2008 article by Dennis, Kunkel, and Keyton in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*...” **or** “In a 2008 article titled, ‘Problematic Integration Theory, Appraisal Theory, and the Bosom Buddies Breast Cancer Support Group,’ Dennis, Kunkel, and Keyton note...”

Incorrect Oral Citations: “According to the journal, ‘Problematic Integration Theory, Appraisal Theory, and the Bosom Buddies Breast Cancer Support Group’...” **or** “Dennis, Kunkel, and Keyton state...” **or** “In a 2008 article, Dennis, Kunkel, and Keyton stated...” **or** “In a 2008 article in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*...”

Periodicals/Magazines/Popular Press

Periodical citations should include the primary and/or secondary title and date. If the author information is readily available and applicable, you can cite it as well.

Written Citation: von Drehle, D. (2014, January 27). Can anyone stop Hillary? *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/933/can-anyone-stop-hillary/>

Correct Oral Citations: “According to the January 27, 2014 issue of *Time*...” **or** “David von Drehle notes in the January 27, 2014 issue of *Time*...” **or** “According to a January 27, 2014 article titled, ‘Can anyone stop Hillary?’ in *Time Magazine*...”

Incorrect Oral Citations: “According to *Time*...” **or** “In an article by David von Drehle...” **or** “David von Drehle’s article in *Time* magazine...”

Websites

Not all websites display the same source information. You should include the title of the website or its guiding organization and the heading at the top of the page or the date. If none of these are possible, you should at least provide the guiding organization’s information and summarize the information from the webpage. You should not list the URL or web address.

Written Citation: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). April is sexual assault awareness month. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/SexualViolence/>

Correct Oral Citations: “According to the CDC’s online website in 2014...” **or** “On their website, the CDC lists behaviors that are often associated with sexual violence...” **or** “This month, the CDC highlighted April as sexual assault awareness month on their webpage...”

Incorrect Oral Citations: “I found a list of behaviors associated with sexual violence online...” **or** “The CDC says sexual violence is a growing problem...” **or** “According to www.cdc.gov/Features/SexualViolence/ ...” **or** “According to the CDC on www.cdc.gov...”

Interviews

If you use interview data as a source, you must provide the name of the interviewee as well as provide context by highlighting their title and relationships to your topic.

Written Citation: P. Wagner, personal communication, April 1, 2014.

Correct Oral Citation: “Phillip Wagner, Assistant Basic Course Director in the Department of Communication at the University of Kansas...” **or** “The Department of Communication’s Assistant Basic Course Director, Phillip Wagner, says that accidental plagiarism in student speeches is a growing problem.”

Incorrect Oral Citation: “Phillip Wagner says...” **or** “Phillip Wagner said...”

It is crucial to note that the above examples are merely suggestions for some of the ways that you can more properly cite sources aloud in your speech. As with any speech situation, the context always determines what is most appropriate..

Remember, accidental plagiarism is still plagiarism. Failure to cite sources in a speech severely hurts your credibility and will ultimately hurt your grade. There is no need to overcompensate and include all citation information for all sources in your speech. Instead, find a balance. Practice your speech from start to finish several times, including oral citations. Make sure your sources are high quality sources and that they are directly related to your speech. Identify all source information available for your sources, and begin formulating ideas about how you can include oral citations in your speech in a way that is smooth and strategic. Ultimately, you will show your audience that you have mastered the research process and can successfully integrate the ideas of others into your speech in a way that validates your claims and further justifies your position.

Skills Exercise

Now it is your turn. Using some of the tips suggested above, develop high quality oral citations from the written citations below.

Book: Katz, J. (2006). *The macho paradox: Why some men hurt women and how all men can help*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks.

Journal Article: Engstrom, C. L. (2012). “Yes...but I was drunk”: Alcohol references and the (re)production of masculinity on a college campus. *Communication Quarterly*, 60, 403-423.

Magazine: Romano, A. (2010, September 20). Why we need to reimagine masculinity. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <http://www.newsweek.com/why-we-need-reimagine-masculinity-71993>.

Website: National Organization for Men against Sexism (2012). The importance of using accountable language. Retrieved from <http://site.nomas.org/the-importance-of-using-accountable-language/>.

Interview: P. Wagner, personal communication, April 1, 2014.

References

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). April is sexual assault awareness month. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/SexualViolence/>
- Dennis, M. R., Kunkel, A. D., & Keyton, J. (2008). Problematic integration theory, appraisal theory, and the Bosom Buddies breast cancer support group. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 36, 415-436.
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- University of Southern Mississippi (2012). *Citing sources in oral presentations* [PDF document]. Retrieved from: http://www.usm.edu/gulfcoast/sites/usm.edu.gulfcoast/files/groups/speaking-and-writing-center/pdf/citing_sources_in_speeches_web.pdf
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