Mechanics of citing sources:

Documentation, Citation, or Style
“Style” in this usage refers to all conventions of writing such as

- Document format (page layout, title page, etc.)
- Organization (sometimes)
- as well as citations
What style should you use?

Consider the comments posted to an online discussion of freshman English courses, signed “Freaky Science”:

In the sciences I have NEVER seen the MLA method used yet that is the citation format presented in every composition course I know of. Quite frankly, it irks me when I have to stand in front of a class and teach them a skill they should have gotten in their comp. courses. The result is always the same, 60% of the students will still turn in papers using the MLA citation format. When I correct them I get the typical response that was how their English teacher taught them to write a research paper. Never mind that English teacher probably never published a research paper in the sciences. Still, we get the same crap being taught every semester.
• Look at the list on pages 263-65 of *Research and Documentation in an Electronic Age*.

• **Moral:**
  – There are too many styles to learn in one course.
  
  – *No style is the “right” one.*
What we will do:

• Learn MLA now; use it for most assignments

• Later, introduce other styles (APA, Chicago, CSE); use your choice for the last assignment.

• Most importantly, learn to use a style guide and pay attention in other courses! (On the job, in the world.) When in Rome . . .
Secrets to Using a Style Guide

1. Notice how (where, format) the style gives basic information about a source.

2. Notice how the style indicates when a source is used, which one, and where in the source specific material is found.

3. Find the appropriate model for each source you have, and follow it slavishly (order, punctuation, capitalization, everything). Combine more than one model if necessary.
The Secret to Finding the Right Model

• Notice the distinctions that are made among different categories of sources and figure out how to identify what you have.
• See the “Directory” on pages 54-56.
• Especially important examples:
• Magazine, newspaper, or journal?
  – Best bet: use information in Ulrich’s (available through library)
  – Frequency of publication:
    • newspapers: daily or weekly (issue will have a specific date)
    • magazines: weekly, 2x month, monthly, 2 months, 3 months (issue may have a specific date, a month, or a season)
    • journals: monthly, 2 - 6 x per year (issue may have a month or season)
  – Length of article:
    • longer, more likely to be journal
  – Presence of citations, bibliography usually = journal
  – Technical terms usually = journal
• For editorials, reviews, and letters, that information is included in some styles (including MLA)

• Periodical found in a full-text database through the library vs. plain web search – both are included in the section on articles.
Books

• Is it a collection or not?
  • Look at the table of contents.