

APA Reference Form for Electronic Sources

Writing research papers is a valuable skill to take to your professional life. With that in mind, it is useful to think of the audience for your papers as the whole clinical research community rather than simply those involved in the CRA program.

Referencing electronic sources can cause headaches. The References chapter in APA's *Publication Manual* is so long and involved that it can intimidate new converts to its citation system. Summon your courage and consult it anyway. If you're using an older version of the manual (a bad idea), note that instructions were updated for the 5th edition.

Even today's rules will soon be outdated. APA's Web site points out that a great many articles retrieved from electronic sources are "exact duplicates of those in their print versions and are unlikely to have additional analyses and data attached. *This is likely to change in the future* [emphasis added]."

When citing references found on the Internet keep in mind this advice from APA's *Publication Manual* (2001, p. 269):

The variety of material available on the Web, and the variety of ways in which it is structured and presented, can present challenges for creating usable and useful references. Regardless of format, however, authors using and citing Internet sources should observe the following two guidelines:

1. Direct readers as closely as possible to the information being cited—whenever possible, reference specific documents rather than home or menu pages.
2. Provide addresses that work.

Citing Proquest (or any restricted database) is a disservice to readers. A reader who is not affiliated with a Proquest database subscriber will be unable to access the article that way. When you sign onto ALADIN, you use your university or library identification; so do faculty members and your fellow students. It is unlikely, however, that all your medical and corporate colleagues have access to the same database.

References for Articles Retrieved Online

APA offers two ways to reference an article retrieved online that also appears in printed form. Read at least paragraph 71, under Periodicals, which begins on page 271 (5th edition).

Because things change so fast, your friendly neighborhood writing coach offers additional recommendations for articles that appear online before they appear in a print publication. That follows the APA guidance for exact duplicates of printed articles and for articles that may differ from the printed version. Guidance for citing retrieval information (section 4.15) begins on page 231 (5th edition).

Exact Duplicate of Printed Article

APA specifies, "**If you have viewed the article only in its electronic form**, you should add in brackets after the article title [Electronic version]." When a downloaded file looks just like a page in the journal, complete with page numbers, you need not include a cumbersome retrieval URL. The article you read as an exact copy of the journal pages need only be referenced the way that you would the print version—almost:

Emanuel, E.J., Currie, X.E., & Herman, A. (2005, July 23). Undue inducement in clinical research in developing countries: Is it a worry? [Electronic version]. *Lancet*, 366, 336–340.

Similarly, when you download a PDF version that is a copy of the pages printed in a journal you need no retrieval information.

Maillet, J.O., Potter, R.L., Heller, L. (2002, May). Position of the American Dietetic Association: Ethical and legal issues in nutrition, hydration, and feeding [Electronic version]. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 102(5), 716-726.

When you must break a URL onto more than one line, be sure to break at a punctuation mark (period, slash). Most people are now familiar enough with the Internet to know that there can be no spaces in a URL.

Article That Differs from the Printed Version

APA specifies, “**If you are referencing an article that you have reason to believe has been changed**” (for example, an article from a print journal that you read online in HTML form), then APA style requires that you “add the date you retrieved the document and the URL.” Because I read this article in HTML form, I must cite the magazine’s URL.

Getz, K.A. (2005, December). A Swift Predominance of Ex-U.S. Sites. *Applied Clinical Trials*, 14(12). Retrieved January 26, 2004, from <http://www.actmagazine.com/appliedclinicaltrials/article/articleDetail.jsp?id=261633>

Article That Appears Online before Print Publication

Back in the “old days,” it took several months for journals to publish articles, and it wasn’t unusual to cite articles as “in press.” Those were articles that had been accepted for publication but had yet to be published. Now, some articles “in press” appear on the Internet before they appear in print.

To publish, in addition to its widely understood meaning of *to prepare and issue printed material*, **is also defined as to bring to public attention, to announce**. For that reason, neither reference example above quite fits articles that are published before they are printed. PubMed (National Library of Medicine) published the example below. The electronic abstract of the article, which provides access to the full text in PDF, is headed by this information:

Published ahead of print on January 24, 2005
Am. J. Respir. Cell Mol. Biol. 2005, doi:10.1165/rcmb.2004-0309OC
Submitted on September 29, 2004
Revised on January 21, 2005

A CRA student needed a way to reference a pre-print publication. So, I dreamed up a hybrid reference form following the general reference rules for an electronic source (and, of course, had it blessed by a good number of faculty members).

Minor variations allow for the fact that Web publication precedes the print version—a concession to the ever-changing world of publishing.

Lappalainen, U., Whitsett, J., Wert S., Tichelaar J., Bry K. (2005). IL-1(beta) causes pulmonary inflammation, emphysema, and airway remodeling in the adult murine lung. *American Journal of Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology*, in press. Epub ahead of print retrieved February 1, 2005, from <http://ajrcmb.atsjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/2004-0309OCv1>

Although abbreviated on the PubMed site, the student was required to spell out the title of the journal. **No abbreviated journal titles appear in APA references.**