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Citing Electronic Information in History Papers

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Introduction:

New information media always present challenges to bibliographers, who must either adapt existing forms of documentation or devise new ones to maintain bibliographic control. Until recently the style guides that historians commonly use have not risen well to the challenge of electronic information — information that has migrated to computer files. All the early guides failed to provide adequate means of citing it, giving sketchy treatment and few useful examples. These included Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 5th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), in §§ 9.121-122, 11.56-57, and 12.20; *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), in §§ 15.421-424 and 16.207-209; and Sue A. Dodd, of the Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina, in an online paper in 1990 entitled *Bibliographic References for Computer Files in the Social Sciences: A Discussion Paper* (available online; see the **bibliography** of this paper).

The 6th edition of the Turabian manual (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), in §§ 8.139-141, 11.57, 12.1, and 12.20, added disappointingly few basic examples, so I began advocating the styles advocated in this paper, seeking to make forms borrowed from various sources compatible with Turabian's traditional styles for history. (In early versions of this paper, I advocated only the use of a reference list, on the assumption that if historians are sufficiently up-to-date to use electronic sources of information they are also sufficiently up-to-date to use newer forms of citation. Clearly, however, there still is a demand or preference on the part of many historians for the older forms of bibliography and footnotes or endnotes, so I included them, too, in later versions.)

In 2003 the University of Chicago in the 15th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* finally gave quite full

treatment of citations of electronic information (§§ 16.18, 16.40, 17.4-15, 17.142-147, 17.180-181, 17.187, 17.198, 17.208, 17.211, 17.234-237, 17.239, 17.270-271, 17.273, 17.356, and 17.357-359). I was distressed, however, to find that some of its recommendations were at odds with what I have advocated since 1995, and the 7th edition of Turabian in 2007 followed its lead and made essentially the same recommendations. The 16th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* (published in 2010) has moderated some of the recommendations that disturbed me, but not a great deal. Left with a choice of abandoning my recommendations and going with *The Chicago Manual of Style* or continuing to advocate them, after lengthy pondering of the situation I decided to continue advocating them because I still think they have merit. (Of course, if you are submitting a manuscript to the University of Chicago Press, you should certainly follow its style, not mine.)

My disagreements with *The Chicago Manual of Style* center on two main points: the punctuation of URLs and the use of dates of access.

The 15th edition of the *Manual* says that angle brackets, "which have specific meaning within some markup languages, including html, should never be used to enclose a URL" (§ 17.10). Colons, semicolons, commas, hyphens, and quotation marks also have such meaning, and by the same reasoning they should be prohibited but they are allowed. I think angle brackets serve the useful function of isolating the URL in much the same way as parentheses isolate the publishing data in footnotes. In the same section the *Manual* says that punctuation marks other than the trailing slash in URLs "will readily be perceived as belonging to the surrounding text." (The 16th edition, § 14.12, uses identical language.) Perhaps so, perhaps not. Angle brackets permit the use of punctuation without any possibility of ambiguity.

I wrote the preceding paragraph, except for the parenthetical reference to the 16th edition, in September 2003. I was pleased to find later that the MLA in a document entitled "Why does the MLA recommend putting angle brackets around URLs in the works-cited list?" argued my point in terms that were even stronger and clearer than the ones I had used. I wish I had written the following two paragraphs, quoted from the MLA document:

> When special symbols are placed before and after a URL (Internet address), readers are always certain about where it begins and ends. A URL without such markers could be misread, for several reasons. URLs may contain letters, numbers, and other marks used in documentation, including periods. A long URL may have to be divided at the end of the line in your text and continued on a new line, but no hyphen or other mark of division should be inserted at the break. Finally, in a works-cited list a URL is usually directly followed by the entry's final period, which is not part of the URL.
>
> Angle brackets have been widely used to surround URLs and are recognized for this purpose by the Internet Engineering Task Force, a standards body for the Web. (See appendix E in this organization's ***Uniform Resource Identifiers (URI): Generic Syntax***.

(Unfortunately this MLA document seems to have vanished from the Web. Check the **entry for it in the bibliography** for a citation as to the latest date of access.)

I was further pleased to find that the 16th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* retreated somewhat from the stand that angle brackets should "never" be used, saying (§ 6.102), "Although angle brackets are sometimes used to set off URLs and e-mail addresses (e.g., in message headers in e-mail applications), Chicago discourages this practice for regular prose."

I am not clear why *The Chicago Manual of Style* thinks that using angle brackets will cause a problem. Perhaps the thinking is that if they are used incorrectly in an HTML document, the enclosed text will simply drop out of the displayed document and not be seen at all. That is correct, in fact. But anyone who knows HTML knows not to use literal angle brackets that way. (To display the left angle bracket as literal text, one uses the "HTML entity" **<** and to display the right angle bracket as literal text one uses **>** — the brackets aren't "really" there to cause any problem. Similar entities are required to display literal quotation marks — and even literal ampersands.) On the printed page, the literal angle brackets will not be a problem either, because they are not in an HTML document.

As to access dates, *The Chicago Manual of Style* (16th ed., § 14.7) says that they are "of limited value" because

"previous versions will often be unavailable to readers; authors typically consult a source any number of times over the course of days or months; . . ." As will be seen later in this paper in **"Implications for Methodology,"** that is precisely why I think that access dates — far from being dispensable — are essential. I was pleased to find that the 7th edition of Turabian (§ 15.4.1., 17.1.7, and 19.5.9) recommended that access dates be given for all electronic citations. The latest *Chicago Manual of Style* (16th ed., § 14.7) does allow for the use of an access date when "no date of publication or revision can be determined from the source" and it also notes, "Students are typically required to include access dates for citations of online sources in their papers."

The beginning point of my recommendations was Xia Li and Nancy B. Crane, *Electronic Style: A Guide to Citing Electronic Information* (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1993). Li and Crane, who were reference librarians at the Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont-Burlington, advocated a style based on the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 3d ed. (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1983). In turn, in its 4th edition (published 1994) the APA's manual (§ 3, Appendix 3-A, I. Electronic Media, examples 72-7) incorporated their style as its standard for citing electronic information. (The 5th edition, published in 2001, simplified the style somewhat — see § 4.16, I: Electronic Media, 71-95.) Li and Crane had some influence on Joseph Gibaldi, in §§ 4.8.1-6, 4.9.1-3, 4.10.7, B.1.7-8, and B.1.9.g of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 4th ed. (New York: Modern Languages Association of America, 1995), §§ 4.9.1-9 of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 5th ed. (New York: Modern Languages Association of America, 1999), §§ 5.9.1-9 of *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers,* 6th ed. (New York: Modern Languages Association of America, 2003), and § 6.9 of *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing*, 2d ed. (New York: Modern Languages Association of America, 1998).

Because no early published style guide other than Li and Crane's dealt extensively with electronic information, many scholars wrote papers which summarized Li and Crane's recommendations and adapted or extended them for a particular academic discipline, or advocated a substantially different approach, such as an extended MLA style of citation. Janice Walker, Department of English, South Florida University, is the central figure among advocates of the MLA style. The Alliance for Computers and Writing endorsed the recommendations in her paper, *MLA-Style Citations of Electronic Sources*. However, in their paper, *Beyond the MLA Handbook: Documenting Electronic Sources on the Internet* (available online; see the **bibliography** of this paper), Andrew Harnack and Eugene Kleppinger, Eastern Kentucky University, argued that these recommendations needed amending to avoid ambiguity. The outcome is a very much improved citation system in Janice R. Walker and Todd Taylor, *The Columbia Guide to Online Styles* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998; 2nd ed., 2006). The guide contains forms for both "humanistic styles" and "scientific styles."

In 1996, Li and Crane published a revised edition of their book, which reflected the influence of many of the papers mentioned above or listed in the **bibliography** of this paper. *Electronic Styles: A Handbook for Citing Electronic Information* (Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc., 1996) includes revised forms for both "APA embellished style" and "MLA embellished style" citations, and a few examples of footnotes and endnotes — but no "Turabian embellished style." In my view, their new forms are much better than the old ones. The forms in the 1993 edition were fairly consistent for all types of media, but they broke up Internet Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) into unnatural "chunks" of information. The new forms are fairly consistent, too, and allow perfectly natural citations of URLs at the small cost of making citations of CD-ROMs and dial-up information service databases in the APA style look like URLs.

Some historians might find Li and Crane's MLA style acceptable, because it is not remarkably different from Turabian's bibliographic style. Fewer, perhaps, might find their APA style congenial, although it resembles Turabian's reference-list style. Most historians have been trained in Turabian's styles, have used them all their academic lives, and would prefer to keep as much of them as possible. The only person before me, to my knowledge, who has tried specifically to adapt Turabian's styles to electronic information in a fairly comprehensive way is Melvin Page, Department of History, East Tennessee State University, *A Brief Citation Guide for Internet Sources in History and the Humanities* (available online; see the **bibliography** of this paper), prepared in 1996. Harnack and Kleppinger think that his recommendations need amending, too, to avoid ambiguity. I agree that there are shortcomings. Furthermore, in common with most writers on citing electronic information, Page deals only with sources from the Internet and omits forms of citations for CD-ROMs and dial-up information services. He advocates the use of a bibliography and notes and does not have any forms for a

reference list.

Early in 1997 Harnack and Kleppinger published *Online! A Reference Guide to Using Internet Sources* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997; rev. 2000, 2001, 2003), in which a chapter entitled "Using Chicago Style to Cite and Document Sources" incorporates their improvements on Page's models. Like Page, however, they deal only with Internet sources, and their models are still not quite what I think Turabian style should be. (In addition to Chicago style, they also have a chapter on MLA style, and they have two sets of models for reference lists, one based on APA style and the other on Council of Biology Editors style.)

Although Li and Crane did not attempt to create a "Turabian embellished style," I believe that their forms can be adapted to Turabian. At first glance, admittedly, these forms look very unfamiliar to persons schooled in the Turabian tradition. Li and Crane add labels such as "Online" or "CD-ROM" which they call "Type of medium" statements. In a striking departure from traditional methods of citation, they substitute for the usual information on place and publisher of printed works an "Available" statement giving the electronic medium where the information can be found. They include two dates for electronic information: the date of the last revision of the work, if it is known, and, at the end of the citation, the date on which the computer search was made (the "Access date"). Besides this, history students will probably consider the spelling, spacing, punctuation, and capitalization of URLs very odd indeed, quite unlike anything to which they have been accustomed. But Turabian documentation has always changed as the nature of information itself has changed, and now, to enable the adequate citing of radically different kinds of information, it needs to change its forms of citation radically, too.

As I remarked **earlier**, the 7th edition of Turabian generally followed the recommendations of the 15th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*. (The 8th edition will probably follow the recommendations of the 16th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.) Although in most respects I agree with their recommendations about printed sources, I will continue to advocate a style for electronic citations which I believe to be fully in the spirit of the Turabian tradition and somewhat better than what the *Manual* recommends. Please hear me out.

The Basis of My Recommendations:

While I begin with Li and Crane's recommendations as the foundation for my own, I depart from them on both major and minor points.

A major departure is that until October 2002, following Li and Crane's model, I recommended using a statement about availability that contained the word "Available" and an indication of the type of medium involved. For example:

> **Crouse, Maurice. 27 December 2012. *Citing electronic information in history papers*. Available [Online]: <http://cassian.memphis.edu/history/mcrouse/elcite.html> [27 December 2012].**

In the interest of simplicity, the word "Available" has now been dropped as superfluous, and it is not necessary to indicate the type of medium if it is obvious, as it usually is with sources from the Internet. The citation given above now becomes:

> **Crouse, Maurice. 27 December 2012. *Citing electronic information in history papers*. <http://cassian.memphis.edu/history/mcrouse/elcite.html> [27 December 2012].**

Another departure is that I have simplified the forms of citations. Li and Crane provide separate forms of citations for each of the various protocols used on the Internet for transferring electronic information, such as FTP, Gopher, HTTP, and several others. For two reasons, I prefer to cast all Internet citations into forms that use URLs, the "lingua franca" of the World Wide Web:

- Many of the forms that Li and Crane supply are very much alike, differing from each other in only a few details. The use of URLs very substantially reduces the number of distinct forms required.
- A World Wide Web browser is a "Swiss Army knife" for the Internet — it can access almost any information,

using almost any protocol. I think we may assume that researchers on the Internet these days will be using Web browsers for nearly all their work.

URLs do not solve all problems, however; they can complicate as well as simplify. For example, searches for information on the Internet sometimes activate Common Gateway Interface (CGI) scripts or lead to search engines. These often require the researcher to choose from menu items or to enter search terms which will result in information being returned. In theory, once the information has been retrieved it can always be represented by a URL, but the resulting URL may be absurdly long and intricate. For example, a report from the U.S. General Accounting Office could be represented in reference-list form by:

U.S. General Accounting Office. 1995. *U.S. Vietnam relations: Issues and implications*. <http://bubba.ucc.okstate.edu/cgi-bin/GPOretrieve?target=wais.access.gpo.gov:210&base=gao&type=TEXT&size=62546&docid=3=0%20-62546%20/diskb/wais/data/gao/ns95042.txt;7=%00;&images=0> [25 October 1996].

This citation, although correct and useable, is unacceptably complicated. There are two ways to improve it. One is to enclose the basic address within angle brackets, a common convention on the Internet (the brackets are not part of the address; they are delimiters to show where the address begins and ends). The other is to return partially to Li and Crane's earlier (1993) system of documentation and use elements labeled "Select," "Search," "Message," "Subject," or other descriptive terms, to identify keystrokes that must be entered once the address has been reached. The previous citation could become:

U.S. General Accounting Office. 1995. *U.S. Vietnam relations: Issues and implications*. <http://bubba.ucc.okstate.edu/wais/GPOAccess> Select: General Accounting Office Reports, 10/94- Search: "vietnam relations" [25 October 1996].

This citation has several advantages over the original:

- It is simpler and easier to understand.
- It reflects more accurately how the original researcher actually found the document.
- It makes URLs easier to distinguish from other kinds of information about access.

Harnack and Kleppinger make the important point that there can be many equivalents of the same electronic address. This principle is obvious in the example above. Persons who prefer to make citations that reflect the "step by step" access that is natural to Gopher may use it for that purpose (if indeed any Gopher sites still exist). My preference is for a form which, if used with a World Wide Web browser, leads directly to the information:

***About The University of Memphis*. 6 June 1995. <gopher://gopher.memphis.edu/00/.campus-info/data._/about-um.txt> [15 November 1996].**

But there is no inherent reason for rejecting a "hybrid" form which, although it looks very different, leads to the same information:

***About The University of Memphis*. 6 June 1995. <gopher://gopher.memphis.edu> Path: Campus Information/About The University of Memphis [15 November 1996].**

The same "hybrid" form can relieve an especially troublesome problem in documenting electronic information — the need at times to distinguish between the electronic address and the content of a document or the sequence of commands, path names, or keystrokes necessary to retrieve it from that address. Li and Crane's recommendations are not helpful with this problem. In very early versions of this paper, following Li and Crane's model, I recommended the following citation form:

***H-Net jobs guide* [Online]. 26 January 1996. Available e-mail: mailto:listserv@h-net.msu.edu/get h-net jobguide [30 January 1996].**

The problem is that what appears to be a Path name or a File name is actually the body of the message that is to be sent. It perhaps is not obvious that there are two very different kinds of information in the "Available" statement. The citation could more accurately become:

> ***H-Net jobs guide*. 26 January 1996. <mailto:listserv@h-net.msu.edu>**
> **Message: get h-net jobguide [30 January 1996].**

This "hybrid" form is not elegant. But it is less misleading than Li and Crane's forms and, at the moment, it is the best way I can think of to represent the required information without confusion.

URLs are not only cumbersome at times, but they also are notorious for changing over a period of time, rendering them useless for anyone who tries to retrieve information with an out-of-date URL.

One way around the problem is a stable URL or persistent URL, one which does not change. This system is in fairly wide use (JSTOR is an excellent example within the field of history), and if you can find such a URL for the information you are using, cite the information with that URL

Perhaps even better would be the use of Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs), which are already extensively used in the sciences but, unfortunately, hardly at all in the humanities. A DOI is a string of characters (numerical, alphabetical, or a mixture) that uniquely identify a resource, which can be almost anything from a whole series of books to a single table or illustration within one book or article. A work may have its own DOI and any number of its constituent parts may have separate DOIs. The resource referenced by a DOI is not necessarily digital in format, therefore, although it usually is.

A DOI somewhat resembles the ISBN used with books (in fact, an ISBN may be part of the DOI). It always starts with "10" with the next numbers representing the publisher and then any unique string of characters that the publisher wishes to assign to the item. Some are as simple as 10.1000/186, while others are as complicated as 10.1103/PhysRevLett.64.1196 and can be more complicated than that. While URLs are free of cost, DOIs have to be registered with a central organization that charges for the work it does. This central organization is International DOI Foundation, Inc. In addition to maintaining the database for publishers it provides a free service by which a DOI can be "translated" into a Web link that leads to the item. The publisher of the item may create the necessary link by attaching the DOI to the Web address of the organization. For example, the DOI mentioned above could become the link <**http://dx.doi.org/10.1000/186**> (it will go to the *DOI Handbook*, which is a full introduction to the topic of DOIs). If the publisher does not supply the link, you can create it yourself. Or, if you choose, you can go to <**http://dx.doi.org/**> and enter the DOI into a form that will then go to the item. (To avoid typing errors, you probably should copy the DOI and paste it into the form.)

This appears to be a very good way to cite electronic information. As early as the 15th edition, the *Chicago Manual of Style* called the system "promising" (§ 17.14) and furnished one example (§ 17.181). Now, seven years later, the 16th edition gives a few more examples, but DOIs haven't caught on with most humanists.

Although more stable than ordinary or stable URLs, DOIs are not necessarily eternal. If the publisher of a work changes it in any way, including the place where it is stored on a host computer, the publisher is expected to update the new information with doi.org — in theory, the publisher will always do so, but practice conceivably could vary.

If you see a DOI attached to the item you are using, by all means use it in your citation. Keep your eye out for more DOIs in the future. Within a few years they may be as common as URLs are today. I certainly hope so. I use DOIs in examples of Individual Works below, to get readers accustomed to the idea of using them.

Li and Crane (p. 100) recommend citing both printed and electronic sources. The 6th edition of the *MLA Handbook* agrees, recommending (§ 5.9.1) that if the electronic work has a printed counterpart, the information for the printed source should precede the information for the electronic source. (The 7th edition, § 5.6.2.c, backs off a bit, leaving the question of whether to include the printed source to the discretion of the person doing the citing.) I do not follow this reasoning. You won't be violating any laws if you do give citations for both printed

and electronic versions of the same information, but I don't see any compelling reason to do so. My thinking is that if a printed source is conveniently available, you should use it alone and cite it in preference to the electronic source; if you use an electronic source, you should cite it alone (see the section of this paper entitled "**Implications for Methodology**"). If you want to give both citations, however, do what the *MLA Handbook* recommends — list the printed source first.

My other departures from Li and Crane's forms are less substantial. I think that Li and Crane's forms for citing postings in lists, Usenet newsgroups, and e-mail need some changes. There are also in other forms a few small adaptations in citing volume, issue, and page numbers; in dates; and in the order of the names of multiple authors, mostly to bring them in line with Turabian.

On the matter of access information, I have no quarrel with Li and Crane. I agree entirely with them. I found it startling that the 4th edition of the *MLA Handbook* (§§ 4.9.3a-b) contained the suggestion that access information about an online document is optional or merely supplementary. The 5th edition (§§ 4.9.3a-b) and the 6th edition (§ 5.9.1) abandoned that suggestion, recognizing as do most recent guides (the 15th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* being the prominent exception) that Li and Crane are correct in insisting (pp. 97, 103) that access information is essential in the citation of electronic information found online.

Models and Examples:

Below are the most common forms, inspired by Li and Crane but adapted to Turabian, with both general models and specific examples. My aim is to retain, as much as possible, the familiar appearance of the forms recommended by Turabian (critics will possibly judge that I have been able to salvage very little indeed), while giving access information that is complete, consistent, and without ambiguity. I do not discuss here such matters as the arrangement of the entries within the reference list or bibliography, the use of parenthetical references in the text or notes, or the placement of footnotes or endnotes, because Turabian fully explains them.

The models are as general as possible. Usually, if the model calls for an item that is missing from the information you are citing, you may simply pass over it to the next item. The only exceptions are with dates, as indicated **below**, where you must make the notation "No date" if the date is missing from any kind of entry, and you must be careful to make the date the second element in a reference list entry.

You may occasionally have to consult the Turabian manual for guidance on citations that are more complicated than the general ones given here. But such complications as books in a named series with a series editor, or multi-volume works with separate volume titles, seldom occur with electronic information.

These forms assume an author or editor for each entry. If there is neither, the title becomes the first item, as some of the examples show. (Remember, however, that in a reference list, the date of publication is always the second element in the citation.)

Documents that stand alone, such as entire databases, computer sites, online papers, and e-mail messages, are treated as books. Conferences, interest groups, Usenet newsgroups, and lists are treated as periodicals, and the postings that appear in them are treated as articles. A "message" may, therefore, be an individual work in one setting and an article in another, and a single-page online paper will have a citation form that is indistinguishable from that of a thousand-page book that appears online. Long-time users of Turabian documentation will doubtless find these conventions strange. Li and Crane nowhere explain fully the philosophy behind these conventions but hint (pp. 4, 80-82, 99, and 182-184) that they rest upon a distinction between that information which is serial and that which is nonserial in nature. (Li and Crane consider some databases to be serial, others nonserial; I find this distinction more troublesome than useful and do not observe it.)

Observe that in citing electronic information there is no such category as unpublished material. Everything that is available online is published in some sense.

Nearly all of the examples given below have known dates of publication. If an entry lacks this information, put

"No date" at the proper place; do not leave this item blank.

The type of medium may be omitted if it is obvious, as it usually is with URLs. The examples show "Dial-up database," "DVD-ROM," and "CD-ROM" as common types of media. Other possibilities, not actually given in the examples, include "Diskette" and "Magnetic tape." Li and Crane remark that users of a local area network may not be able to identify the ultimate type of the medium; they suggest (pp. 5-6, 103) the generic designator "Electronic" for those cases. You should use the best descriptive term available.

Because of physical limitations on line length, URLs in their printed form may appear divided on more than one line. Ideally, the line division should come after one of the / characters, but, if necessary, it may come after any of the punctuation characters such as . (period) or - (hyphen) that are actually part of the URL. A hyphen is always taken to be part of the URL; never use a hyphen to indicate continuation of the URL. Be aware that on computer systems you must enter everything within the angle brackets as one continuous string of characters from start to finish. (You of course do not enter the angle brackets themselves, only the string of characters between the opening and closing brackets.) Moreover, you must observe meticulously the spelling, spacing, capitalization, and punctuation, or the attempt to access the information will fail.

Omit the item "Additional" if the URL is sufficient to retrieve the information. If you use it, label it "Select," "Search," "Message," "Subject," or whatever descriptive term is needed. As in the **General Accounting Office example** above, repeat the item as many times as necessary to assure completeness.

The examples sometimes show, in square brackets, optional supplementary information about the nature of the document being cited. You should furnish such information when it will be helpful to the reader. For example, you might improve citations of newspapers by such notations as "News item," "Editorial," "Personal column," or "Editorial cartoon."

The models and examples for notes do not show note numbers, because their placement and style may vary. Turabian (§ 16.3.4) says to place the numbers for both footnotes and endnotes on the line (not superscript), followed by a period. (Superscript numbers are permitted but not encouraged: "Begin each note with its reference number, preferably printed not as a superscript but as regular text.") In the body of the paper, however, superscript numbers are still recommended (§ 16.3.2).

Some of the sections show only one model because the information usually occurs in only one electronic medium (for example, e-mail).

Incidentally, don't regard the examples as current information. While they were perfectly valid when they were originally written, their main purpose was to give concrete illustrations of the rather abstract models, not to provide a list of usable links (you should use Google for that). Because many of them date back to the early days of this paper, the URLs are hopelessly out of date by now. I could have updated the examples every time I put out a new version of this paper, but I decided to keep the old ones for two reasons. Because of the constant changes in Web sites and documents, "updated" information doesn't stay updated long. Updating would be a frustrating, time-consuming, and never-ending task. And I wanted to illustrate my point that **access dates are essential in citing electronic information**. As of the given date of access, that was the way the information appeared, although it may have changed a thousand times or disappeared altogether since then. (I do update the **bibliography** every time I revise this paper. There, a reader is interested primarily in content, not form, so the content needs constant updating.)

Individual Works:

Reference List:

Author or Editor. Date. *Title of work*. Edition. [Type of medium]:
<Protocol/Site/Path/File> Additional: retrieval information
[Access date].
or
Author or Editor. Date. *Title of work*. Edition. [Type of medium]:

Supplier/Database identifier or number/Item name or number
[Access date].

Kehoe, Brian P. 1992. *Zen and the art of the Internet*. 2d ed.
<ftp://quake.think.com/pub/etext/1992/zen10.txt> [25 March 1995].

Dissertation abstracts ondisc [Bibliographic database]. 1861- [Years of coverage]. [CD-ROM]: UMI/Dissertation Abstracts Ondisc [11 November 1996].

H-Net jobs guide. 26 January 1996. <mailto:listserv@h-net.msu.edu>
Message: get h-net jobguide [30 January 1996].

Crouse, Maurice. 27 December 2012. *Citing electronic information in history papers*. <http://cassian.memphis.edu/history/mcrouse/elcite.html> [27 December 2012].

International DOI Foundation, Inc. *The DOI Handbook*. 5 October 2006.
<doi:10.1000/186> [30 September 2010].

The University of Memphis Anonymous FTP Archive. 25 August 1998 [Last update]. <ftp://ftp.memphis.edu/> [9 October 1998].

Palmer, Pamela. 24 February 1998. *Academic Writers' Net Source* [Helps for writers]. <http://www.people.memphis.edu/~prpalmer> [8 October 1998].

Government Publications [WWW home page of Government Publications Department, Regional Depository Library, The University of Memphis]. No date. <http://www.memphis.edu/govpub/citweb.php> [8 November 2011].

Online Book Initiative [Public-domain electronic texts]. No date.
<gopher://ftp.std.com/11/obi> [3 December 1996].

Bibliography:

Author or Editor. *Title of Work*. Edition. Date. [Type of medium]:
<Protocol/Site/Path/File> Additional: retrieval information
[Access date].
or
Author or Editor. *Title of Work*. Edition. Date. [Type of medium]:
Supplier/Database identifier or number/Item name or number
[Access date].

Kehoe, Brian. *Zen and the Art of the Internet*. 2d ed. 1992.
<ftp://quake.think.com/pub/etext/1992/zen10.txt> [25 March 1995].

Dissertation Abstracts Ondisc [Bibliographic database]. 1861- [Years of coverage]. [CD-ROM]: UMI/Dissertation Abstracts Ondisc [11 November 1996].

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Turabian (§§ 17.4, 19.4) gives somewhat contradictory advice about citing newspapers, saying that you need not place separate news items from newspapers in a bibliography but only in notes, while saying that you should include them in reference lists. You will have to decide for yourself what to do. Perhaps you can use the following forms:

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(Results of Subject search on term "icons" in online catalog of Burrow Library at Rhodes College. <telnet://libcat@rhodes.edu> [30 September 1996])

(Results of search on term "su(history, united states) and sc((memphis state university) or (university of memphis)) and ad(crawford, charles w)" in Dissertation Abstracts Ondisc database. [CD-ROM]: UMI/Dissertation Abstracts Ondisc/Jan. 1980-Dec. 1992 [11 November 1996])

(Results of Author Name search on term "hurley jack" in UnCover database. <http://www.ingenta.com/> Select: search options Select: uncover plus [18 October 2002])

(Results of Expert Keyword search on term "au onasch and ti icons" in online catalog of McWherter Library at The University of Memphis. <telnet://library@library.memphis.edu> [30 January 1996])

(Results of Title search on term "debow's review" in Tennessee Union List of Serials database. [CD-ROM]: Auto-Graphics, Inc./ Tennessee State Library CD-ROM Catalog/Serials [11 November 1996])

(Results of Author search on term "hawes joseph" in WorldCat database. <http://bibliotech.memphis.edu/search~S4/y?w> Select: WorldCat Classic [8 November 2011])

Note:

Results of Type search on term "search term" in Source. [Type of medium]: <Protocol/Site/Path/File> Additional: retrieval information [Access date].

or

Results of Type search on term "search term" in Source. [Type of medium]: Supplier/Database identifier or number/Item name or number [Access date].

Results of Subject search on term "icons" in online catalog of Burrow Library at Rhodes College. <telnet://libcat@rhodes.edu> [30 September 1996].

Results of search on term "su(history, united states) and sc((memphis state university) or (university of memphis)) and ad(crawford, charles w)" in Dissertation Abstracts Ondisc database. [CD-ROM]: UMI/Dissertation Abstracts Ondisc/Jan. 1980-Dec. 1992 [11 November 1996].

Results of Author Name search on term "hurley jack" in UnCover database. <http://www.ingenta.com/> Select: search options Select: uncover plus [18 October 2002].

Results of Expert Keyword search on term "au onasch and ti icons" in online catalog of McWherter Library at The University of Memphis. <telnet://library@library.memphis.edu> [30 January 1996].

Results of Title search on term "debow's review" in Tennessee Union List of Serials database. [CD-ROM]: Auto-Graphics, Inc./ Tennessee State Library CD-ROM Catalog/Serials [11 November 1996].

Results of Author search on term "hawes joseph" in WorldCat database. <http://bibliotech.memphis.edu/search~S4/y?w> Select: WorldCat Classic [16 October 2002].

Government Publications and Legal Documents:

The models and examples above should be enough to get you through most of the citations you will need, unless you work with government publications and legal documents. For these difficult materials, I have neither space nor expertise to give comprehensive models and forms.

Li and Crane's book (chapters 5, 12) remains the only comprehensive guide for citing electronic versions of both government publications and legal documents.

Diane L. Garner and Diane H. Smith, *The Complete Guide to Citing Government Documents: A Manual for Writers & Librarians* (Bethesda, MD: Congressional Information Service, 1993) barely recognizes the existence of electronic versions. The Government Publications Department, McWherter Library, The University of Memphis, has prepared a *Brief Guide to Citing Government Publications*, which deals partly with electronic sources (available online; see the **bibliography** of this paper). Peter W. Martin's *Introduction to Basic Legal Citation* has a brief discussion on citing electronic sources (available online; see the **bibliography** of this paper). Candace Elliott

Person has a few examples for citing legal materials in *Citation of Legal and Non-legal Electronic Database Information* (available online; see the **bibliography** of this paper). Turabian (§§ 17.9.7, 19.9.7) has little to say about legal citations, but *The Chicago Manual of Style* (15th ed., §§ 17.275-289; 16th ed., §§ 281-315) has some useful models which could be adapted. *The Bluebook: A Uniform System of Citation*, 18th ed. (Cambridge: Harvard Law Review Association, 2005) in its Rule 18, Electronic Media and Other Nonprint Resources is fairly comprehensive on legal documents. It allows the citing of an electronic source only if a printed source is not available, or if the electronic source will "substantially improve access to the relevant information" and is "identical to the printed version."

I recommend that you study all these guides and choose a set of recommendations to your liking for the descriptive part of the citation. Then use one of the following models for the access information, depending on whether access was through the World Wide Web or otherwise:

```
[Type of medium]: <Protocol/Site/Path/File>
Additional: retrieval information [Access date].
      or
[Type of medium]: Supplier/Database identifier or number/
Item name or number [Access date].
```

Finding and Using the Information for Citations:

The author's name is usually at the head of the electronic document. If not, you should look for it at the end of the document, or near links labeled "Send comments to," "Mail to," "Return to," "Maintained by," or something similar. Usenet postings or e-mail messages may have only an e-mail address as author. Some messages may have a nickname or "handle" as author. If you fail to find any indication of the author's name, you may sometimes substitute the publisher's name if it is known, or you may omit the information entirely and begin the entry with the title.

Most electronic documents have titles at their head, just like printed documents. If you use a browser to access the document, there will probably also be a title which appears at the top of the browser window. If the two titles differ, you should choose the title that more accurately describes the document. If no meaningful title appears anywhere, you may supply a descriptive title of your own in square brackets.

The date of the document usually appears either at the head or at the end of the document. It may be labeled "Last revised," "Last modified," or something similar. In my experience, it is not uncommon for authors to forget to change this information when they make changes in the document. I have seen documents in which two or more conflicting dates appear. If you cannot find any date for the document, put "No date" in the citation. Remember that the date of the document is usually not the date on which you accessed the document — do not confuse the two dates. You should always give the access date (except for e-mail, where the access date is not required in the citation model) for reasons that are explained in the section "**Implications for Methodology**."

How do you get the DOI or URL for an online document that you access? If you were able to access the document using a given DOI or URL, presumably others can do so as well — use it in your access statement.

If the document has a DOI, it should be explicitly identified as such somewhere in the document. Until DOIs become more common, most of your citations will be to URLs. If you use a browser to jump from one hypertext link to another, the browser usually displays the current URL. If not, there is usually a menu choice or keystroke that will display it — consult the browser's documentation or online help file. With virtually all modern browsers, the URL of the current document appears in a small window near the top of the screen, and the URL of any link on which the mouse cursor is resting appears at the bottom of the screen. (Remember that, as explained **earlier**, if you end up with an impossibly long and complex URL, under certain conditions you might be able to use what I called a "hybrid" form of citation.)

There is a problem in finding URLs with Web sites that use frames. The browser will usually display the URL for

the "parent" frame, no matter what document is displayed in another frame. The "old" Web site of the Department of History at The University of Memphis, for example, used frames for its pages, and the browser would show <http://cassian.memphis.edu/history/> as the URL for every one of its dozens of documents. This made it appear that the same URL could be used for numerous "child" frames. This is impossible — each document must have a unique URL. If you encounter this problem, in order to determine the unique URL you must open the "child" frame in a new window or new tab, the procedure for which may vary from one browser to another. It is not always visually obvious that a Web site is using frames, because the borders between the frames may not be visible. Frames are not much used these days, and in time they may disappear completely from the Web, but until that time, be on guard for the tell-tale sign of frames — the same URL appearing for every document on a particular site.

You may occasionally have the problem that in verifying your URLs before you publish your paper (which you should always do), you get the dreaded message "Error 404: File not found on this server." The URL worked at one point while you were writing the paper, but now it doesn't. (This should not happen with DOIs or stable URLs, and you should use them whenever possible.) You won't necessarily have to delete the reference. Never assume that electronic information which was "here yesterday" but "gone today" has vanished forever. In many cases, what might be thought to be ephemeral, such as a posting sent to a discussion group (the list H-Teach, for example), can be located later in computer archives or logbooks (see the examples, above, of **Bob Wheeler's posting** and **J. D. Beatty's posting**). You may use Internet search engines, including Google Groups, to search these archives. A search engine can often turn up the new URL for a document that has disappeared from its old site since you last saw it. (Over the years that this document has been in existence, I have often had to do this with the items in the **bibliography**.) Try searching on the author's name and significant words in the document title or on a distinctive phrase in the text of the document. (The *Internet Resources* page of my personal Web site provides **links to many search engines** and SearchEngineWatch has an **extensive annotated list of search engines**.) If you simply cannot find a current URL for some information that you need to retain in your paper, you may use the latest access information that was valid and add an explanatory note that the document has since disappeared from the Internet.

How much access information should you provide? You must include enough to identify the source clearly and without ambiguity. I agree completely with the statement of the 6th edition (2010) of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (§ 6.31): " . . .include the same elements, in the same order, as you would for a reference to a fixed-media source and add as much electronic retrieval information as needed for others to locate the sources you cited." Otherwise, you might as well say, "It's out there somewhere; I found it; you probably can, too." But, on the other hand, don't burden your reader with completely unnecessary information. As in the story about Goldilocks, you need to provide "not too much" and "not too little" but "just enough."

It appears to me that the 7th edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* in § 5.6.1 comes very close to saying, "It's out there somewhere; I found it; you probably can, too." What it actually says is:

> In the past, this handbook recommended including URLs of Web sources in works-cited-list entries. Inclusion of URLs has proved to have limited value, however, for they often change, can be specific to a subscriber or a session of use, and can be so long and complex that typing them into a browser is cumbersome and prone to transcription errors. Readers are now more likely to find resources on the Web by searching for titles and authors' names than by typing URLs. You should include a URL as supplementary information only when the reader probably cannot locate the source without it or when your instructor requires it.

Many of these points are well taken. But I would urge that you always give the URLs that you used to reach the cited material. Why not give your reader all the help you can? Why make him or her do a search for a source for every item in your paper? If the URL fails, then he or she can always resort to the searching that MLA recommends.

Students sometimes assume, erroneously, that they must account for each and every link they have used in finding information. Suppose that you first used the *Harvard Guide to American History* to locate a bibliography on the colonial period of American history and then used that bibliography to identify Charles Sydnor's *Gentlemen*

Freeholders as a good source of information on your topic. The only book you would need to cite is *Gentlemen Freeholders*, because that citation is sufficient to lead readers to the exact material you used in your report. Similarly, suppose that you used a Web browser to access the home page of The University of Memphis, then selected in turn the links for "Academics," "College of Arts and Sciences," "About the College," "History," "Links of Interest," "History and history-related," "Recommendations by Maurice Crouse," and finally the link for the electronic equivalent of this paper, <http://cassian.memphis.edu/history/mcrouse/elcite.html>. The last URL is all you would need to cite. Don't force your reader to go through unnecessary steps to get to the information.

Don't err in the other direction, though, by including too little information. You should not include extraneous information, but you must include enough to allow your source to be verified. If you are citing this paper, you should not (as some of my students in the past have done) cite merely Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer (they're not even URLs) or the home page of The University of Memphis, because that information would not be sufficient to lead to this paper. The URL <http://cassian.memphis.edu/history/mcrouse/elcite.html> is sufficient, because it fully identifies the necessary protocol, computer site, path, and file.

Implications for Methodology:

There is a serious problem in citing electronic information that seems inescapable, a problem that Harnack and Kleppinger aptly call "invisible revisability." A citation gives the content and the location of the information at the time of access. Unlike most printed information, electronic information may have been silently modified, moved, or deleted by the time a reader tries to verify the citation. What might be assumed to be the same document as earlier, because it was accessed using the same URL, could be slightly or markedly different. For example, if you had sent e-mail in July 1996 to <listserv@h-net.msu.edu> with the message "get h-net jobguide" a position cited on 30 January 1996 would not have been listed, because H-Net constantly updated the guide with more recent listings, usually weekly. (The job guide is no longer distributed by e-mail. If you send such a message today you will get a reply saying the file does not exist.)

Citations might, therefore, on occasion appear to be incorrect through no fault of the researcher. A reader might be hard pressed to distinguish between these innocent cases and cases in which the researcher is careless or even fraudulent in citing. For this reason, you should always give preference in citing to a printed version of the information, because its text is rather fixed and more durable over a period of time. Cite electronic information only when a printed version does not exist or you cannot locate it or use it conveniently. As I urged earlier in this document, use a stable URL or a Digital Object Identifier if one is available, in preference to an ordinary URL. (Some style guides recommend or urge that if information exists in both printed and electronic form, you cite both. If you want to do it as a favor to your readers, do so — but I don't see any necessity for it.)

As noted earlier, if you use electronic information, you should always give the date on which you accessed it. This alerts those who access it later to the possibility that the information might not be current when they see it, although it was current at the time you saw it. Giving the date on which you accessed electronic information is a "first line of defense" against charges of careless or fraudulent citations. Ultimately, of course, the only certain way to defend against such charges is to find a dated archival copy of the source you used.

The **citation of the WorldCat database**, which is part of the OCLC FirstSearch databases, illustrates a special problem with citing information found in electronic sources: some citations may be difficult or impossible for others to verify. At The University of Memphis, access to OCLC FirstSearch databases (and many other databases as well) is through the **Databases A-Z page** of The University of Memphis Libraries, whose contracts with OCLC and the other suppliers grant only restricted use of their materials. Persons who access these databases from computers on the campus network are presumed to be bona fide members of the University community. They can, therefore, readily reach FirstSearch or the other restricted databases. But all persons (including bona fide members of the University community) who reach the databases from "outside" Internet Service Providers (such as AOL) will be denied access unless they have individual passwords. If they do not have access by some other means to the databases (perhaps they are members of another organization which has a contract with the

suppliers), they will be unable to verify the citation. (If you are a member of the University community and wish to access these databases from outside the campus network, you do not need an individual password — see the Libraries' page on **Off-Campus Access to Library Resources**.)

As another example, only paying subscribers to the Thomson Reuters information services may use DIALOG. Again, lack of access to a database results in the inability to verify a citation made to it.

This is not to say that you must refrain altogether from citing electronic sources that might be difficult for others to verify. You would not hesitate to cite a rare book that was unique or could be found in few other libraries if it alone contained the information you needed. Similarly, with electronic information, you should cite what you actually use. It is simply a fact of academic life that some libraries have better holdings or better access to information than others. Still, if you can find the same information in an electronic source that is freely available to the public, you should cite that source instead of the "rare" one.

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This document is subject to constant revision. You may find the current version on the World Wide Web at <http://umdrive.memphis.edu/mcrouse/www/elcite.html>

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