



REFERENCING ELECTRONIC DOCUMENTS



1) Which electronic documents can I use?

In principle, the same requirements apply to electronic documents as to classic print publications. For scientific use, therefore, they must be both citable and worthy of citation. An electronic document is **citable** if it has been published, i.e., it is not stored on a single inaccessible computer/memory location but, for example, in a database accessible on the internet (a paywall does not negate citability). An electronic document is **worthy of citation** if it fulfills the usual requirements for a scientific publication. Whether or not a document is worthy of citation may be indicated by the following:

- The server is operated by an official institution (e.g., university, research institute, government institution).
- The author is identified as a scientist.
- The site is clearly aimed at a scientific audience.
- The author cites their sources in a scientifically accepted form/there is an annotation apparatus and a list of works cited.

In addition, depending on the aim of your work, documents or sites that are not actually worth citing can of course also be cited or used. E.g., if it is a study of a subculture active on the internet, then their forum contents can serve as material for the study.

2) How do I reference electronic documents?

Basics

As a rule, the same requirements apply to electronic documents as to print documents. As far as possible, you should therefore provide the same information (author's name, title, date of publication). Regardless the specific format of the information, the citation style, it is essential that the **information is understandable and consistent**. The work must therefore be clearly identifiable and findable.

Specifics

You must also add the **address** (usually the URL) through which the document can be found, as well as the **time of your last access** (at least the current date, sometimes also the time). If a document is no longer available at the address given, specifying the date makes it possible to at least check whether it was available there at an earlier time.





„Location“

While classic print publications can usually be found in a large number of copies in very different locations (e.g., in libraries), citable electronic documents can be found ‘somewhere’ on the web. Your reference must therefore always contain a traceable address. Since the common URL only refers to the site at which a document was uploaded, but this site may later disappear or no longer contain the document, special identification keys have been developed for electronic documents, the so-called **persistent identifiers** (also permalink).

Persistent identifiers are unique and unchanging and refer directly to the electronic document regardless of where it is uploaded. They consist of character combinations and, depending on the system, can contain letters, numbers, and other characters. Common systems are:

- DOI (Digital Object Identifier),
- URN (Uniform Resource Name),
- PURL (Persistent URL)
- Handle-System.

If such an identifier is available for a document, you should always list it in your reference and favor it over the URL. To be able to access the documents, the persistent identifier must be resolved via resolving services (e.g. <https://doi.org> , <https://hdl.handle.net> , <http://nbn-resolving.de> , <http://purl.oclc.org>).

EXAMPLE

East J. (2016) Educational Responses to Academic Integrity. In: Bretag T. (Hrsg.). Handbook of Academic Integrity. Singapore: Springer.
Available online: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-098-8_33.

Page numbers

There is some uncertainty in dealing with electronic documents, especially when there are **no page numbers** in the document – be it an **e-book** that can only be read with special devices or display software (e.g., in epub format), or texts that are **only available in HTML format directly on a website**. Some e-book formats also show you different page numbers depending on the display device, as the text adapts to the size of the respective device.

If you want to refer to a direct formulation or an idea in such a text (for a quotation, a paraphrase, or a citation), you must therefore choose a different method to indicate the corresponding passage in a comprehensible way. We recommend using section or chapter headings or numbers that are stable in terms of their text position (paragraph numbers, chapter numbers). When in doubt, you may also use your own numbering of the paragraphs to orient yourself within the text – as long as it is easy to identify.



Further information on the topic

can be found, for example, at the information portal: **LOTSE** (Library Online Tour & Self-Paced Education) of University and State Library of Münster, available online at: <https://www.ulb.uni-muenster.de/lotse/> [last access 19.02.2020], especially the information on „Zitieren elektronischer Quellen [Citing Electronic Sources]“ [https://www.ulb.uni-muenster.de/lotse/arbeiten_schreiben/zitieren/Zitieren_eQuellen.html] (last access 19.02.2020)] as well as on „Evaluierung von Websites [Website Evaluation]“ [<https://www.ulb.uni-muenster.de/lotse/literatursuche/evaluierung/webseiten.html>] (last access 19.02.2020)].

