How To Use SBL STYLE

While working on your research projects you will seek out sources of information. When discussing the data from the sources you consulted, you have to document them in your paper. According to the Society of Biblical Literature style format, you may use either notes or a bibliography. Based on Chicago/Turabian Style, it uses specific abbreviations and conventions particularly related to biblical studies. The following guidelines and examples are taken from The SBL Handbook of Style, 2nd ed.

Overview

From the Student Supplement to the SBL Handbook:
“Citing works properly is an important component of writing a term paper. Become familiar with the styles for notes and bibliographies illustrated in the second edition of The SBL Handbook of Style (SBLHS). These general (SBLHS 6.2–3) and special (6.3) examples have been chosen with care to cover the broadest array of resources. SBLHS provides sample entries for the initial citation of a work in a footnote, subsequent citations of the same work, and the entry for the bibliography at the end of the paper. When conducting research, check the title page of a source and carefully record all pertinent bibliographic information. Frustrations arise when students are preparing manuscripts and realize that they are missing key pieces of information. In addition to the author and title of the work, students should record the editor, translator, number of volumes, edition, series, city, publisher, and date.”

This Guide is meant to supplement the main SBL Handbook and also the Student Supplement. Please consult the main Handbook if you do not see information that is helpful to you.

Sample Notes

Basic Format – Book with one author

1. AuthorFirstName LastName, Book Title (City of Publication: Publisher, Date), page numbers.
2. AuthorLastName, Book Title, page numbers.

2. Talbert, Reading John, 22.

Book with two or three authors


Book with more than four authors


Book with an editor or translator


Book with NO author (i.e. a dictionary or encyclopedia)

If the author or editor is unknown, the note or bibliography entry should normally begin with the title. Well-known reference books, such as major dictionaries and encyclopedias, are normally cited in notes rather than in bibliographies. The facts of publication are often omitted, but the edition must be specified. References to an alphabetically arranged work cite the item (not the volume or page number) preceded by *s.v.* (*sub verbo*, “under the word”; pl. *s.vv.*


Chapter in an edited book


   Attridge, “Jewish Historiography” (Kraft and Nickelsburg), 314-17.

Journal article


Periodicals with no volume numbers


Bible

Note: only use footnotes to cite Biblical passages when you are citing a large number of references. In general, cite passages using in-text parenthetical reference. See pg 7 and following below. It is necessary to cite introductions or commentary from a study Bible. See pg 8 below for more information.


8. II Cor. 3:1-10 (NRSV).

Thesis or Dissertation


CITATIONS OF ELECTRONIC SOURCES

As internet-based publications play a growing role in scholarly discourse, students must familiarize themselves with citation guidelines for electronic sources. Students should consult the detailed instructions for documenting CD-ROM and Internet resources in SBLHS 7.3.12–14. List electronic sources by the author’s name, and enclose the title of the webpage in quotation marks, as you would a journal article. Since pagination will change from printer to printer, do not cite page numbers for online resources. Many websites change their content frequently, try to include the date the resource was published on the website as well as the date the student last accessed the page. In angle brackets, provide the most detailed stable URL available.


Electronic Book

When citing an online version of a book, include the DOI. In the absence of a DOI, include the URL or other permalink in the citation.


Online Book – that is also in print (kindle, pdf, or nook, etc)


Online Article or website


Electronic journal article (ejournal)

Include a DOI (Digital Object Identifier) if the journal lists one. A DOI is a permanent ID that, when appended to http://dx.doi.org/ in the address bar of an Internet browser, will lead to the source. If no DOI is available, list a URL. Include an access date only if one is required by your publisher or discipline.


Government publication

Full text in a compiled subscription database (i.e. EbscoHost, Proquest, etc)

Give whatever identifying information is available in the database listing: a DOI for the article; the name of the database and the number assigned by the database; or a “stable” or “persistent” URL for the article.


Sample Entries for the Bibliography

Basic Format

AuthorLastName, FirstName. Book Title, Place of Pub: Publisher, Date.

Book with one author


Book with two or three authors


Book with more than four authors


Book with an editor or translator


Chapter in an edited book


Journal article

Bible

You do not need to include the Bible in your bibliography.

Periodicals with no volume numbers


Government publication


Full text in a compiled subscription database (i.e. EbscoHost, Proquest, etc)

Give whatever identifying information is available in the database listing: a DOI for the article; the name of the database and the number assigned by the database; or a “stable” or “persistent” URL for the article.


Thesis or Dissertation


BIBLICAL CITATIONS (SBLHS 8.2)

Citations of modern Bible versions do not require publisher’s information in either footnotes or bibliography; instead, use standard abbreviations for the Bible version (e.g., NRSV, RSV, NIV, NASB; see SBLHS 8.2). If citing scripture from a single version, include the abbreviation of the version following the chapter and verse on the first scripture reference only. When citing more than one version in a paper, include the version after each citation.

“Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria” (2 Kgs 10:1 NRSV).

When citing specific chapters and verses, use the standard abbreviated titles of biblical books provided in SBLHS 8.3.1–3. If a biblical book is the first word of the sentence, do not abbreviate the title. Also, when referring to the book as a whole or a person with the same name as a biblical book, do not abbreviate.

Right: Revelation 3 begins with the letter to the church in Sardis. We know little about the historical Habakkuk.


Wrong: Rev 3 begins with the letter to the church in Sardis. We know little about the historical Hab.

Cite Bible verses with chapter and verse(s) using Arabic numerals separated by a colon. Do not write out the numbers. When referencing consecutive verses, separate the first and last verse numbers with an en dash. Do not use a hyphen (see SBLHS 3.1.1.5).

Right: John 5:8–9

Wrong: John chapter five verses eight and nine. John 5:8-9

When citing multiple passages, list the abbreviated title of each new biblical book followed by the chapter number and colon, with all verses in that chapter separated by a comma and space. A semicolon should separate references to subsequent chapters or books. Do not include the conjunction “and” or an ampersand before the last citation. List passages in canonical and numerical order.

Right: Matt 2:3; 3:4–6; 4:3, 7; Luke 3:6, 8; 12:2, 5; Acts 15:1–5; Rom 1:8–12


Further examples of correct and incorrect citations are listed in SBLHS 8.2.

In study Bibles such as The HarperCollins Study Bible or The New Oxford Annotated Bible, special articles and the notes (usually at the bottom of the page) are not part of the biblical text. Study notes are written by authors or editors whose names are included in the front matter of the study Bible. If these notes are cited, all the relevant information from the specific study Bible should be included.


WORKING WITH BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

SERIES TITLE AND VOLUME TITLE

Most biblical commentaries appear as part of a commentary series, the purpose of which is to comment upon the biblical text using the same general format. When working with a single volume in a commentary series, follow the citation guidelines for “A Work in a Series” (*SBLHS* 7.2.22). Most commentary series are listed in the abbreviations found in *SBLHS* 8.4.1–2.

When collecting bibliographic information, distinguish carefully between the volume title and the series title. Whether abbreviated or written in full, volume titles are italicized, but series titles are not.


ANCIENT CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON SCRIPTURE

How to cite church fathers from the series, if citing one of the church fathers quoted in the ACCS:


If citing introduction or comments by the editor him/herself:


NUMBERED SERIES OR NONNUMBERED SERIES

The publishers of some biblical commentaries number each volume in the series, while others do not. If the series uses numbers (e.g., Anchor Bible and Word Biblical Commentary), the number goes immediately after the name of the series but does not include the word “volume” or its abbreviations.

Right: Word Biblical Commentary 12

WBC 12


WBC, vol. 12.
**Multivolume Commentaries**

Multivolume Commentaries on a Single Biblical Book by One Author

Usually, each volume has a separate title for the books and chapters treated in a given volume: for example, Wenham’s two-volume commentary on Genesis in the Word Biblical Commentary. The title of one volume is *Genesis 1–15* and the other is *Genesis 16–50*. In other cases, each volume uses the same title and is distinguished only by volume number, using either roman or Arabic numerals. The following example of Dahood’s three-volume Psalms commentary is taken from *SBLHS* 7.3.10.

If the paper references all three volumes, cite the entire multivolume work.


If the paper uses only one or two of the three volumes, cite each volume individually.


**Multivolume Commentaries for the Entire Bible by Multiple Authors**

To save space, multivolume commentaries often combine treatments of multiple biblical books in a single volume. A different author usually writes the commentary on each biblical book. In this case, treat each author’s commentary like a chapter in a book written by several authors (*SBLHS* 7.2.21).

Multivolume commentaries cited in a footnote should use the abbreviated title listed in *SBLHS* 8.4.1–2. The author of the section should still be cited.


**SINGLE-VOLUME COMMENTARIES ON THE ENTIRE BIBLE**

Check the resource carefully. Some single-volume commentaries are written by a single person and are thus cited like any other monograph. Others are edited volumes where more than one person has written the commentary on individual books. In these cases, cite the author of that section of the commentary as you would the chapter in a book with an editor (*SBLHS* 7.2.12).


**SERIES WITH NEW NUMBERS**

Occasionally a publisher will restart the numbering of a journal or a series for a variety of reasons. When this happens, include the number of the new series, separated from the volume number by a forward slash as illustrated in *SBLHS* 7.2.22.

**BIBLE DICTIONARIES AND ENCYCLOPEDIAS**

Cite the author of the article, not the editor of the work as a whole (*SBLHS* 7.2.28). Most Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias put the author’s name at the end of the article that he or she wrote. If multiple articles from the same source are used, cite the author and article individually in the footnotes.


When multiple articles from the same dictionary or encyclopedia have been used, list the work as a whole under the editor in the bibliography, but cite the individual authors and articles in the footnote as above.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviate titles of standard works in footnotes, but cite the complete titles in the bibliography. *The SBL Handbook of Style* offers two extensive lists of abbreviations for journals, series, and other standard reference works. The first abbreviation list is alphabetized by the source (*SBLHS 8.4.1*) and the second by the abbreviation (*SBLHS 8.4.2*). If the work you are citing is in these lists, use the standard abbreviation listed. Note that both lists italicize abbreviations of journal titles (e.g., *JBL*) but do not italicize the abbreviations of series (e.g., JSOTSup) or names (e.g., BAGD).

Footnotes:  
*JBL*  
JSOTSup  
BAGD

Bibliography: *Journal of Biblical Literature*  

If a work is not included in *SBLHS* abbreviation lists, use complete titles throughout or include a list of additional abbreviations on a separate page at the beginning of the paper (after the title page and before the main text).

TRANSLITERATING GREEK AND HEBREW WORDS

- If the student has training in biblical languages, it is preferable to use a Greek or Hebrew font when discussing particular words. When citing Hebrew, use only the consonantal text unless the vowel pointing is necessary for the argument.
- *The SBL Handbook of Style* provides two different transliteration options for Hebrew: the “academic style” (*SBLHS 5.1.1*), which makes extensive use of diacritical markings to distinguish subtle differences in sounds, and the “general-purpose style” (*SBLHS 5.1.2*).
- Unless stated otherwise, the general-purpose style (*SBLHS 5.1.2*) is usually adequate for term papers. For transliteration in theses and dissertations, consult specific departmental guidelines. Only one transliteration system is provided for Greek (*SBLHS 5.3*).
- Students should be careful to use the same transliteration style for all words cited, especially when these words have been found in secondary literature from different publishers. Transliteration styles vary widely among publishers.
- Word-processing software such as Microsoft Word and WordPerfect can insert most diacritical characters. To add diacritical characters in Word, for example, select the “Insert” menu, then click on “Symbol” and choose the appropriate character from the list.
- Fonts for working with Greek and Hebrew are available for download from the SBL website (http://www.sbl-site.org). Available fonts include those with Hebrew and Greek characters and fonts with all the transliteration symbols. To improve font stability and
ensure cross-platform performance, the SBL Font Foundation is developing a new group of Unicode fonts. See: https://www.sbl-site.org/educational/biblicalfonts.aspx

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Referring to individual verses using parenthetical references:

Wrong: (vs. 3).
Wrong: (vss. 5-6).
Wrong: (verse 3).
Wrong: (verses 5-6).
Right: (v. 3).
Right: (vv. 5-6).

Verse reference at the beginning of a sentence:

Wrong: V. 5 gives…
Right: Verse 5 gives…

At the beginning of a sentence, always spell out names of biblical books that begin with a number:

Wrong: 1 John 1:5—2:2 in only made up of eight verses.
Right: First John 1:5—2:2 in only made up of eight verses.

Ellipsis Points

There should be a space before and after each dot in a set of ellipsis points. When a complete sentence is followed by ellipsis points, it should be immediately followed by the proper punctuation (whether a period, question mark, or exclamation point) with no intervening space. That punctuation mark will be followed by three—and only three—ellipsis points, as in the second and third examples below:

Wrong: John...knew who they were.
   John ... knew who they were.
Right: John . . . knew who they were.
   John knew them. . . . He had seen them before.
   John, the youngest, . . . left home.

Ellipsis points are used where material has been omitted in the course of a quotation; they are generally not necessary before or after a quoted bit of text. It is acceptable to omit introductory words such as “And” and “For” from a quotation without using ellipsis points. Copy editors and proofreaders should consult CMS 10.39, 48–63 for directions about the proper use of ellipsis points.
Placement of footnote number

The superscripted footnote number should always be the very last character(s) in a sentence:

Wrong: incorrect footnote reference”^2.
Wrong: incorrect footnote reference^2.
Right: correct footnote reference,”^2
Right: correct footnote reference.^2

Dictionary Article with Author Abbreviations

When citing Bible dictionaries/encyclopedias that have articles with authors listed only by abbreviation you must look at the table of author abbreviations in the book to find the correct author of the entry you are citing. Always cite the author’s full name.

The examples in this STUDY GUIDE are based on the *The SBL Handbook of Style, 2nd ed.* and the *Student Supplement Rev 2015*. This style format is only one of many formats available to writers. If you need another format or writers’ manual, please consult with a Reference Librarian if you require additional assistance.

Go to: [http://asbury.libguides.com/style-guides](http://asbury.libguides.com/style-guides) for more citation formats.