

The Number System: In-Text Citation

This system goes by other names including “Vancouver” and “citation-sequence system.” Like other citation systems, it has advantages and disadvantages.

Although the number system is commonly used in technical fields (e.g., physics, engineering, and chemistry), you may be required or given the choice to use it in your courses at KUMC.

This system employs numbers to refer to texts/sources listed in the reference list. The sequence in which the sources appear in your paper determines the sequence in the reference list. Numbers can be superscript (as in traditional footnotes) or enclosed by either parentheses or brackets.

The number can appear virtually anywhere in a sentence: the beginning, middle, or end. It depends on how the source is incorporated in the sentence. Usually, the punctuation comes *after* the parentheses or brackets:

Warfarin has been the mainstay effective treatment for stroke prevention; however, it is only used in 50% of patients who qualify and only 50-60% of these subjects maintain INR in the therapeutic range (2-4).

But sometimes the punctuation *precedes* the numeric citation:

Homonuclear metal cluster complexes have been extensively studied, with the chemistry of the trisium clusters and organic substrates being the most well-established.^{1,3,6}

Notice how in the first example the numbers are in continuous sequence, with the hyphen connecting “2” and “4.” If you cite sources that are not in sequence, as in the second example, use a comma to separate the numbers.

As you can see, there is variability in this system. However, all authorities agree that the first source you cite should be number 1. The second source number 2, and so on. If you repeat a reference to a source later in your paper, it retains its original number.

No matter what citation system you employ (e.g., AMA or CSE), the strategies of good writing always apply. For example, it may be strategic to identify the source in a signal phrase: Gould et al. (5) found a clear relation between . . .

There are other aspects to this citation system. Contact us for more information.
