

CHAPTER 12

POINTS OF REFERENCE

What do citation styles have to do with stylishness? Everything. How we cite influences how we write, from the minutiae of bibliographic forms to the big picture of how we respond to and acknowledge other people's work. Academic authors do no favors to themselves or their readers if they neglect to give credit where credit is due. At the same time, however, a book or article weighed down by awkwardly placed parenthetical citations and ponderous footnotes will probably be less readable, less engaging, and ultimately less persuasive than a piece of writing that wears its scholarly apparatus lightly.

Many commentators have noted the powerful role of citation styles in reinforcing disciplinary epistemologies. All kinds of methodological prejudices lurk just below the surface of any academic text; when we disrupt normative elements such as citation styles, we send those unspoken assumptions scurrying out into the light. Frances Kelly, a literary scholar turned educational researcher, recalls the challenges she faced when she first had to write a paper using APA style (sanctioned by the American Psychological Association) rather than MLA style (sanctioned by the Modern Language Association):

The first real difficulty arose when I attempted to discuss an article produced by a team of researchers working in collaboration. . . .