

## **Guidelines to Citing Personal Experience and Interviews in Research**

*(Updated May 2023)*

**Purpose:** *The purpose of this document is to provide students with guidelines on how to cite personal and family experiences in their academic research to allow for the inclusion of more diverse forms of knowledge production.*

*Scholars are able to include data from participant-observation and ethnographic research methodologies in peer-reviewed publications. The credentials and academic training of the scholar is often what gives this personal, lived experience academic weight and authority. However, what if you don't have multiple degrees or even a university education? What if you have not been formally trained on research methodologies? Do your personal, lived experiences still have value in academic research?*

*These guidelines are proposed in an effort to move toward decolonizing the classroom in a practical way by making space for diverse forms of knowledge production by people who have lived experiences in the contexts we study, but also to make space for the forms of knowledge production that students--along with their communities and families--create as valuable parts of their research. Whether or not we have direct experience in a context we study, we all approach our research and study from a specific position or viewpoint. No matter what it is, it's important to consider who we are and be thoughtful about what lenses we bring with us.*

*These guidelines explain and provide examples of how to cite personal experience, and the proper structure of the citation, adapted from Chicago, APA, and MLA citation formats. This guide also provides information about how to cite personal interviews/conversations, including the importance of obtaining consent from the person you are interviewing.*

**Acknowledgements:** *These guidelines are inspired by Native scholars, and scholars of feminist, critical race, and post-colonial theory...all who in their own way argue for acknowledgement and inclusion of diverse forms of knowledge production, working to dismantle current power structures regarding who gets to produce knowledge and claim it as valuable or not. [See "Additional Reading Suggestions" section for more information.] These guidelines were originally developed for University of Washington LSJ 491 course and have been edited according to feedback from students who utilized them and is a part of an ongoing project with students to further develop these guidelines. Feedback welcome. Contact: Emily Willard, [eawillard@gmail.com](mailto:eawillard@gmail.com)*

## **How to Cite Personal Experience**

In order to provide a space for more diverse forms of knowledge production, you are able to use your own personal experience as evidence for this assignment, as long as it is properly cited (see format below) and follows certain guidelines. The idea is that information you get from personal interviews, or what you know from personal experience is valid and can be used as evidence to support your argument. Using citations for personal experience and interviews should be a piece of the wider puzzle constituting your argument.

**Guidelines:** The personal experience you cite should serve as evidence to support your argument or provide background information that adds substance to your paper and is a unique perspective that would not be easily found through other sources. In other words, it is not ok to use personal experience as a “shortcut” to avoid doing research or citing other sources. It is important to avoid sweeping generalizations, and students should only use the citation to speak to the specific experiences. The main idea is that you need to explain your relationship to the information you are using in your paper. You need to explain to your reader how you know what you know.

### **Examples of not acceptable uses of citing personal experience:**

#### **Example 1:**

“Poverty is a human rights issue in Latin America.” (Personal Experience mission trip to Dominican Republic, June 2018)

#### **Example 2:**

“Transitional justice efforts in Cambodia have been unsuccessful in addressing human rights violations during the genocide.” (Personal experience of visits to Killing Fields Museum in Phnom Penh, and Angkor Wat Temple, Cambodia, June 2018).

#### **Example 3:**

“Drug violence is a severe, ongoing problem in Mexico, and is amplified by police corruption and lack of rule of law.” (Personal experience of visit to Cancun, Mexico and reading local Mexican newspapers, March 2018).

These are not acceptable uses of personal experience because:

- 1) They are overly generalized statements about complex issues, and the student provides no evidence of extensive conversations with people who are directly affected by these issues (for example personal interviews), a deep engagement with the issues at hand, or a close personal relationship to the issues discussed.
- 2) Their own viewpoints, as they are written, seem to come from disengaged, outside observer, and the way they describe their experience seems to come from a place of relative lack of

understanding or knowledge of potentially complex issues. The student does not seem to consider their own viewpoint or position relative to what they are observing.

3) The information cited is widely available in other sources that can better illuminate complexities and details in each context.

### **Example of proper citation of personal experience:**

#### **Example 1:**

“Even though many academics and practitioners argue that Guatemala is “post-conflict,” communities continue to suffer from on-going violence and unresolved conflict. Some civil society members argue that the violence is worse now than during the conflict because the perpetrator is not as clearly defined as a result of increasing influence of clandestine, organized criminal groups, and a lack of rule of law.” (Personal Experience human rights monitoring delegation with the Guatemala Human Rights Commission-USA, including meetings with civil society members, government officials, and informal interviews and conversations with people in Guatemala, in June 2018.)

#### **Example 2:**

“The emotional and psychological effects of forced disappearance contribute to intergenerational trauma in which generations of family members struggle with the lack of closure and lack of information about what happened to loved ones. When information is released, it can have a profound impact on healing this intergenerational trauma.” (Personal experience as family member of the disappeared in Paraguay, 1980s to present).

#### **Example 3:**

“Even 20 years after the end of the dictatorship and the inquiry by the truth and reconciliation commission, Chile remains divided politically between those who supported Pinochet, and those who don’t. For example, some families continue to support Pinochet’s dictatorship, arguing that the human rights violations were worth committing to save the country from economic ruin. Other people continue to mourn the loss of their friends and family, calling for more trials to hold perpetrators accountable for the human rights violations committed by the Pinochet regime.” (Personal Experience, study abroad living with a pro-Pinochet family, and conversations with friends who had family members disappeared, Santiago, Chile, August-December 2017.)

#### **Example 4:**

“In the 1960s-70s in the United States, women often had difficulties opening bank accounts, leading to increased vulnerability in domestic violence situations. This was the case because banks required a man, usually either a husband or father, to cosign a bank account in order for women to open one. This challenge was exacerbated for women of color and women who had recently immigrated due to racial discrimination. In some cases, this led to women’s inability to

leave abusive relationships and support themselves and their children independently.” (Personal experience of family history in Charleston, South Carolina, USA, 1960s-1970s.)

### **Example 5:**

“During the current political unrest in Nicaragua, people are suffering from a lack of access to food, medicine, and clean water due to roadblocks placed by dissident groups, and also by government rationing.” (Personal experience of visit to Nicaragua in June 2018 and conversations with family and friends in Managua, Nicaragua January – August 2018). [You could also supplement this with quotations from an interview with a specific family member or friend and cite it as a personal interview.]

These are acceptable uses of the citation guidelines because:

- 1) They are about specific experiences, anecdotes, or pieces of evidence to support an argument, not sweeping generalizations;
- 2) The specific information shared in the citation is not necessarily easily accessible in other sources;
- 3) In the cases where the student is a participant/observer, they explain the information presented is based on series of conversations with people directly affected and show their own understanding of some of the complexities of the situation, and their relationship to the information/topic.

### **Citation format (can be used of Chicago, APA, and MLA)**

Use the following structure as footnotes or in-text citation. This should also appear as an entry in your bibliography. You may also be asked to include an annotation to the bibliography entry, explaining in more detail your relationship to the information you cite.

**Structure:** Personal Experience, [explain briefly what the experience was, how you gained the knowledge]. [Location], [if applicable, date/time-period].

**Example:** Personal Experience. Study abroad in the Netherlands attended meetings with civil society members and ICC officials, observed ICTY tribunal. The Hague, Netherlands, June-July 2018.

**Example:** Personal Experience. Growing up with parents who were undocumented immigrants from Somalia. Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1990s-present day.

### **How to Cite Personal Interviews**

You can use the information gained through personal conversations or informal/formal interviews with friends, family, neighbors, etc. However, similar to citing personal experience,

the information you choose to use should provide a unique perspective that would not be easily found through other sources and should not be used as a “short cut” to avoid doing other research. If you have a conversation at the dinner table with a family member/family member, cite it as an unpublished interview, using the structures below. If you recall stories over time from multiple family members, or a sort of family history, you may cite that as personal experience of conversations you had with family members over a period of time (see example 4 of how to cite personal experience).

When doing interviews with people who have experienced trauma, ensure that you let them lead the conversation regarding their experiences of trauma, and be sure to use active listening skills and respect their boundaries around what they feel comfortable talking about.

**A note about consent:** As with all research, it is important to get consent from the people that you interview in order to protect personal privacy, confidentiality, and identity as needed/requested. You should be clear with your interviewee about how you will use the interview material, and if you have permission to use their name. Always remember that the person you are interviewing can change their mind during the interview, and ultimately you need to honor their requests about what you do with their personal information. Use [this consent form](#), and turn a copy of it in with your paper - if appropriate. This may be too formal and legalistic in many cultures or communities, so use your best judgement and whatever is appropriate culturally in the community for obtaining free and informed consent.

If the person is no longer living and you would like to include the information, consider whether or not it would be appropriate to keep their identity confidential. If you are planning to do an interview, please speak to the class instructor first to get more detailed guidance about consent.

### **How to Cite an Unpublished Interview in Chicago/Turabian**

Unpublished interviews are normally only cited in text or in notes, but if you include it an unpublished interview in a bibliography, the citation should include the name of the interviewee, the interviewer, some identifying information if necessary or appropriate, the place and date of the interview, and where a transcript or recording is available if it is.

#### **Structure:**

First name Last name of interviewee (identifying information), interviewed by First name Last name of interviewer at Location, Date.

**Example:** Prudence Bushnell (Former ambassador to Guatemala and Kenya), interviewed by Allison Henderson, New York, NY, July 2014.

#### **Example:**

Samprity and Arnab Pal (my great aunt and great uncle who lived in India during the partition and resettlement period of the late 1940s to early 1950s), interviewed by Allison Pal, New York, NY, July 2014.

## How to Cite an Interview in APA

APA reference lists only include works that can be found by the reader. As a personal interview is not published or “findable,” it should not be included in an APA reference list. Instead, a personal interview should be referenced as a parenthetical citation. For example: (J. Smith, personal communication, May 17, 2008). If you would like to include a personal interview as part of your APA reference list, then include the interviewee, the date of the interview, and the type of interview. In your bibliography, you would need to include an approximately 75 to 100-word annotation explaining how this person knows the information they shared with you.

### Structure:

Interviewee Last name, FI., interviewed by FI. Last name of interviewer(Year, Month date).  
Interview type [email communication, phone, personal interview].

### Example:

López, A. interviewed by E. Willard(2014, July 29). Personal interview

**Annotation:** Aníbal López is my neighbor who moved to the United States from El Salvador during the 1980s in order to flee from violence during the Civil War. He was a union organizer and involved in public education campaigns in his hometown. Due to the violence against leftist organizers at the time, he feared for his life and the life of his family, so they fled El Salvador and have lived in the U.S. without documentation since that time. Aníbal is a leader in local immigrant rights groups, and owns his own business in Hyattsville, Maryland.

## Citing a personal interview in MLA

Personal interviews refer to those interviews that you conduct yourself. List the interview by the name of the interviewee. Include the descriptor Personal interview and the date of the interview. In your bibliography, you would need to include an approximately 75 to 100-word annotation explaining how this person knows the information they shared with you.

### Structure:

Last Name of Interviewee, First Name M., interviewed by FI. Last name of interviewer. Type of Interview [Personal Interview, Phone Interview, Skype Interview, etc.]. Date.

### Example:

Henderson, Allison interviewed by E. Willard. Personal interview. 24 July 2014.

**Annotation:** Allison Henderson is an attorney who has worked as a federal public defender for the past 20 years, mainly representing children. She has represented several children who face immigration criminal charges, and frequently visits children being held in detention. Most of the clients she represents are located in the Pacific Northwest, and she has taken detailed notes about her observations of conditions inside the prison. She has worked with local and national human rights organizations to document human rights violations she has observed.

## **How to Incorporate into Your Paper**

For the most part integrating self-conducted interviews should look the same as other pieces of evidence.

Avoid using “I statements” or breaking from the voice of the paper to insert interview information. Instead, draw out specific information from interviews that is relevant to the paper topic and argument you are making. This might also depend on the style of your writing - the main point is to keep it consistent throughout your paper

Avoid over-generalizing the experience of your interviewee or representing their experience as the norm unless you have established that this is true through the support of other sources. Additionally, stay as true as possible to the actual words and intent of interview responses. If you are unsure, it is always better to follow up with your interviewee than to make your own interpretations. Providing a small introduction to your interviewee before discussing the information they imparted can help more seamlessly integrate their contributions.

### **Example:**

“Whenever the perpetrator of mass atrocity is the state, the integrity of that nation’s justice system is compromised, and trials can be used as a tool for perpetrating further injustice instead of alleviating it. This is the case in Turkey, as all trials regarding the conflict have been prosecuting Kurds for breaking extreme nationalism laws. Adar recalls a local bus driver in his hometown being sent to jail for simply playing a Kurdish song (Adar). However, there are more prominent cases of this, perhaps the most famous being Leyla Zana, the first Kurdish woman to be elected to Turkey’s parliament. During her oath to parliament in 1991, she said the required parts in Turkish and then added a....”

### **Additional Reading Suggestions**

- Kishimoto, Kyoko. “Anti-Racist Pedagogy: From Faculty’s Self-Reflection to Organizing within and beyond the Classroom.” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 21, no. 4 (2018): 540–54.
- Million, Dian. “Felt Theory.” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 2008): 267–72.
- Mott, Carrie, and Daniel Cockayne. “Citation Matters: Mobilizing the Politics of Citation toward a Practice of ‘Conscientious Engagement.’” *Gender, Place & Culture* 24, no. 7 (2017): 954–73.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. 2nd ed. London and Dunedin, N.Z.: Zed Books and University of Otago Press, 2012.
- Thomas, Robina Anne. “Honoring the Oral Traditions of the Ta’t Mustimuxw (Ancestors) through Storytelling.” In *Research as Resistance: Revisiting Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*, 177–98. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2015.
- Tuck, Eve. “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities.” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 409–428.

- Vizenor, Gerald. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.