

Confusing Library Terms Explained

Whether you're new to library research, or have been doing it for a while, there are many terms that can be confusing to people.

Let's start with three common and related terms: Journal, Issue, and Volume.

Journal: A publication, issued on a regular basis, devoted to disseminating original research and information on current developments in a specific field of study.

Issue: A numbered, single publication put out on a particular date. Journals, magazines, and newspapers all have issue numbers.

Volume: A collection of issues published together during a given period, usually yearly, and numbered.

A journal consists of articles collected in an issue bound together in a volume.

A lot of this terminology is a carryover from the age of print, when individual issues were bound into hard covered volumes, as illustrated previously.

This is important to know as you are finding and interpreting results from our various research databases.

For example, a record for a peer reviewed article in Omni includes information about volume number, issue number, and page numbers.

There are several other related terms that might be confusing:

1. **Periodical:** A periodical is: "An information source published in multiple parts at regular intervals (daily, weekly, monthly, biannually). Journals, magazines, and newspapers are all periodicals."

See "Periodical" in Young, C. (n.d.). Research Guides: Library Terminology: Glossary of Library Terms [Research Guide]. Retrieved November 3, 2021, from <https://libguides.usc.edu/libraryterms/librarytermsglossary>

2. **Citation:** A citation is: A pointer in a text that points the reader to a specific work, listed at the end of a paper in a list of references. In APA format, a citation appears in the following form: (Li, 2020).

See APA Style 6th Edition Blog: References Versus Citations. (n.d.). Retrieved November 3, 2021, from <https://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2017/09/references-versus-citations.html>

3. Reference: A reference is: A bibliographic entry referring to a work cited in a text. References should include more information than a citation does, such as author, date, title, and publisher. References appear at the end of a work, as in a Reference List, or Bibliography.

See APA Style 6th Edition Blog: References Versus Citations. (n.d.). Retrieved November 3, 2021, from <https://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2017/09/references-versus-citations.html>

Citation or Reference?

People tend to use the terms "citation" and "reference" interchangeably, even in scholarly communication.

If you are using APA style to credit your sources, the previous definitions follow the convention that APA uses.

There are still some additional terms you might find confusing.

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