



The MLMA Masonic Publication Style Guide

A Recommended Format for Masonic Research

The Masonic Library and Museum Association Publication Style Guide establishes conventions for writing, citation, and presentation in Masonic research articles. It ensures consistency, respects the scholarly and symbolic nature of Freemasonry, and aligns with established standards in humanities and historical writing. Authors are encouraged to adhere to these guidelines to maintain clarity, professionalism, and reverence for Masonic tradition.

General Citation Format

Articles should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* (CMOS), 17th edition (or later), using the notes and bibliography system (not the author-date inline style).

The notes style is the standard for humanities and historical writing, fields closely aligned with Masonic research. It allows for detailed commentary and source discussion in footnotes or endnotes, accommodating the layered context often required in Masonic studies—such as historical events, philosophical interpretations, and ritual analysis—without disrupting the narrative flow. A full bibliography at the end provides a comprehensive resource for readers and researchers. Notes can be either presented as footnotes (best for academic works) or endnotes (used for both academic and general non-fiction products).

Application: Generally speaking, use *numbered* footnotes or endnotes for citations and substantive asides. The old style of using ordered symbols (*, †, ‡, §, ¶, #) may be used in a document with six or fewer footnotes. The symbol format is never used for endnotes.

Examples:

Text:

“The . . . Freemason derives his initial knowledge of the history of the Craft from the ritual itself.”¹

Note:

1. John Hamill, *The Craft: A History of English Freemasonry* (London: Aquarian Press, 1986), 15.

Bibliography:

Hamill, John. *The Craft: A History of English Freemasonry*. London: Aquarian Press, 1986.

Abbreviations

Follow CMOS guidelines for abbreviations (e.g., "ed." for editor, "vol." for volume). Exclude contractions in formal prose (use "cannot" instead of "can't") to maintain a scholarly tone.

In footnotes, endnotes, and bibliographies, U.S. states are abbreviated. In CMOS, the traditional format for abbreviating U.S. states, using periods and often more than two letters (e.g., "Calif." for California or "Mass." for Massachusetts), is preferred over the streamlined, two-letter USPS format (e.g., "CA" or "MA") because it preserves clarity, historical charm, and a touch of formality that enhances readability. While the USPS system was designed for postal efficiency in an era of machine sorting, it sacrifices nuance for brevity, often leaving abbreviations cold and cryptic—especially for states like Missouri ("Mo." vs. "MO") or New York ("N.Y." vs. "NY"), where the traditional style avoids ambiguity with words like "No" or "Mo."

Biblical and Classical Texts

Citations of Biblical and Classical texts (e.g., Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Plato, Aristotle) should conform to the *Society of Biblical Literature Handbook of Style* (SBL), 2nd edition.

The SBL style is the authoritative standard for religious and classical studies, offering precise conventions for scriptural and ancient sources common in Masonic scholarship. Its abbreviated citation format (e.g., "Gen. 1:1" for Genesis 1:1) is widely recognized and avoids

cluttering notes with lengthy titles, while its flexibility accommodates Masonic references to apocryphal or esoteric texts.

Application:

Biblical: “Masonic tradition centers Jacob’s Ladder (Gen. 28:18) within the ideal Lodge.”
(Note: “Gen. 28:18 [AV]” if a specific translation is used.)

Classical: “Plato’s concept of the ideal form (Plato, *Rep.* 514a–520a) parallels Masonic allegory.”

Masonic-Specific Conventions

1. Capitalization of Symbols: Capitalize terms when they refer to symbolic or ideal concepts within Freemasonry, but use lowercase for literal or mundane references. This distinguishes the *referential significance* of Masonic symbols from their everyday meanings, reflecting the Craft’s emphasis on allegory and deeper truths.

Examples:

“The lodge next door is friendly.” (the lodge as a physical place)

“The Lodge is a symbol of Solomon’s Temple.” (the lodge as a philosophical concept)

“Square” (symbolic tool) vs. “square” (an actual wooden tool)

“the Letter G” (a key symbol referring to the divine name) vs. “the letter z”
(just a letter in the alphabet).

2. Lodge Designations: Lodges are nearly always identified by a name and number (e.g., “Publicity Lodge No. 1000”). Always include “No.” or “№” before the number.

Rationale: The “No.” or “№” is the traditional and precise convention in Masonic documentation worldwide, avoiding ambiguity. Note that the typewriter-era hash mark symbol (#) is typographically informal and obsolete. Although sometimes used casually by an organization, it is never actually part of the name as chartered, and therefore unsuitable for scholarly work.

Examples:

“Harmony Lodge No. 22 hosted the event.”

“St. John’s Lodge № 1 was founded in 1737.”

3. Titles and Degrees: Use full titles for officers (e.g., “Grand Chaplain Thaddeus Mason Harris”) on first mention, then abbreviate subsequent references (e.g., “Gr. Chap. Harris”) if needed. Degree designations should follow standard Masonic abbreviations: “Entered Apprentice” (E.A.), “Fellow Craft” (F.C.), “Master Mason” (M.M.), etc.

Example:

“Harry S. Truman, a Past Grand Master of Masons in Missouri and 33° Scottish Rite Mason, spoke at the statue’s solemn dedication.”

4. Accurate Naming Conventions. Use the official names of rites and organizations. Academic writing requires accuracy in the identification of the subjects of study. For this reason, researchers should not rename organizations in their accounts. One example is the substitution of the name of the original Grand Lodge of England as the “Grand Lodge of London and Westminster,” despite the organization never operating under that name. It has been acceptable within internal Masonic media to refer to the 1717 Grand Lodge as “the Moderns Grand Lodge” and “the Premier Grand Lodge,” but care should always be taken to ensure that the reader has clarity regarding the actual name of any organization being studied.

Additional Guidelines

1. Tone and Voice: Maintain a formal, objective tone suitable for academic discourse, avoiding authoritative assertions or other claims unless supported by evidence. Active voice is preferred for clarity (e.g., “The Grand Lodge established the regulation” over “The regulation was established by the Grand Lodge”).

2. Quotations: Use block quotes for excerpts exceeding four lines (per CMOS), especially for ritual texts or historical charters. Preserve original spelling, orthography, and punctuation in primary sources, noting “[sic]” for errors only when necessary.

3. Dates: Use the Gregorian calendar (e.g., “April 9, 2025”). For Masonic dating systems (e.g., *Anno Lucis*, A.L.), include a Gregorian equivalent in parentheses: “A.L. 6025 (2025).”

Bibliography

Compile a full bibliography at the work's end, adhering to CMOS notes style. Include all sources cited, from books and articles to lodge records and online materials. For unpublished Masonic documents (e.g., minutes, charters), provide as much detail as possible:

Example:

“Minutes of Publicity Lodge No. 1000, January 15, 2020. Private archives,
New York, N.Y.”

“Royal MS 17 A. I. British Library, London, England.”