



Faculty of Engineering
and Applied Science

CITING PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS IN TECHNICAL REPORTS

Any information included in a technical report that is not common knowledge or your own ideas needs an in-text citation. If that information is obtained by word of mouth, it is known as "personal communication." This document explains how to cite this type of information.

Providing in-text citations for information obtained from personal communication is important for two main reasons:

1. By citing, you are giving credit to the original "knower" or "provider" of the information.
2. You are also providing support for information obtained by word of mouth that might otherwise be construed as your own ideas. This is especially important if it is later discovered that the information was incorrect or incomplete. By adding the citation, you are recording who provided the information and when it was obtained.

Here are two typical use cases of personal communication in technical reports and examples of how to cite:

1. You are including summarized information derived from a conversation or interview. Often, these communications have taken place with a colleague or supervisor.

To cite, you could:

- Introduce the information using the person's name, title and the date the conversation took place, similar to this: An interview with site manager John Smith on August 22/18 revealed that operator error was the most plausible reason for the accident.

OR

- Add the citation at the end of the summarized information, like this: The most plausible reason for the accident was operator error (personal communication, John Smith, August 22/18).

2. You are reporting on a practice or procedure that has not been formally documented for you to access and reference (either in print or online). That is, there is no internal company record anywhere that you can cite. This information may be considered accepted/general knowledge amongst employees but you learned of the information by word of mouth.

To cite and report this type of information, you could:

- Describe, within the paragraph text, the “background” behind the knowledge (the what, who, and when) as a means of citing the source. For example: During the construction phase of project X, concrete finishing procedures were established according to directions from shop supervisor, Jane Doe (May 1, 2018). Then you can go on to describe the practice/procedure, whatever... and you do not need to provide further citations because you have explained, upfront, where the information came from.
- When reporting a list of instructions, provide a “disclaimer” statement prior to adding the content. For example, if you are reporting on a set of unpublished instructions used to perform a task, you might introduce the content similar to this: The concrete finishing procedures used by company X, described below, were executed according to directions obtained by shop supervisor Jane Doe (May 1, 2018).

You will need to change the sample wording to suit your report’s context but the main point is that you are providing the reader of your report information about the source of any unpublished procedures or practices.