I am going to suggest that you use a citation style characteristic of mathematical writing rather than historical writing. This is also the default citation style if you use \LaTeX, so I will put a copy of the source file on our course website as well. If you use \LaTeX, you will need to process your file twice to get the citations to come out correctly. (If you’re a \LaTeX wizard, modify the style so that the “Bibliography” header doesn’t look so huge.)

It is important to give citations that are precise enough to allow the reader to find the material you are referencing. The first step is to make sure that your bibliography gives good information. In the bibliography below I have cited a journal article [4], an article from a book [3], a book [1], and an online source [5]. Follow these models.

Some styles require a location for a book’s publisher, but I find that less useful for modern books. If you cite a rare book (or, even more so, a manuscript), you should specify the library in which you found it and the shelf number or other identifying information.

For journal articles, it is best to give the volume number and year. Some journals have more information, but number and year usually suffice to pin down the issue you mean; always give page numbers as well.

In case of an online source, it is usually useful to indicate the date when you accessed it, just in case it changes or goes away. If the online source has an author, you should use that person’s name. Some web sites will specify how you should cite them; in that case, do what they ask you to do.

When you want to refer to something specific, add a page number as in [1, p. 23] or give some other sort of specific reference as in [1, Theorem 2.5.1]. The idea is that the reader should be able to find things (in this case, to discover that there is no Theorem 2.5.1 in that book).

Doing things this way means that references can be embedded in the text instead of given in footnotes. Since in most cases I will limit the number of pages you can use, it is helpful to use a compact citation style.

Of course, if you cite exact words from any source, put them in quotation marks and give a precise reference. In general, however, you should avoid doing that unless you are going to argue with the author’s conclusions or their specific way of saying something. It is rarely helpful to use a quotation to make a point for you; instead, make the point yourself. Long quotations can be set out from the text, as in

Every substantial piece of information should be referenced, especially if it is a quotation. This may seem pedantic, but it is the only way to
keep misinformation from creeping in. No one’s memory is completely reliable. [2, p. 146]

Which is good advice, but omits to mention that giving a specific reference also allows your reader to check whether you have interpreted the source correctly. (The chapter from which I took that gives advice on how to write a historical paper, and so is worth reading. You can access it through the library.)

Good luck. Enjoy your reading and writing.

References


