

# I found this great diagram online that sums up exactly what I'm trying to say in my assignment. Is it OK to use this image in my work, or would I be doing something wrong? Help!

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*Visual images are a great research resource, but just like any other resource, if you use them in your work then they must be cited appropriately. Here's how to cite visual images properly—regardless of where you found them.*

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This advice relates primarily to finding and using still images that have been reproduced (whether in printed form, or digitally), but it is also relevant to “original” visual artefacts (such as a painting, a plan, a map, a 3D digital model, or a CAD visualisation). For advice relating to citing moving pictures (film and video), [click here](#).

Visual images, and other visual representations such as diagrams, graphs, and charts, are an important source for your assignments. It's still true that “a picture paints a thousand words”, as the saying goes, and a well-chosen diagram, photograph, chart, or digital reproduction of a visual artefact (like a painting, cartoon, or drawing) can add a very valuable dimension to your assignment work, provided that you cite it appropriately.

However, make no mistake: the images and visual representations you use in your assignment work must be referenced, just like written sources. Here's how to do it.

## How to Cite Visual Images

As a minimum, you should expect to include the following information when citing a visual image or other visual representation:

1. Artist/producer: Who created it?
2. Date: When was it made?
3. Title of work: What is it called?
4. Medium: What type of work is it? How was it made? (E.g. sign, photograph, site plan)
5. Location or publication details: Where is it located? (E.g. publication, museum collection, or URL and date of access.)

Tip! Copying a URL from a Google image search is not a substitute for referencing a work properly! For example, you may have accessed a reproduction of a painting online, but you still need to reference the name and location of the museum or scholarly collection where the work is housed. This includes online digital collections from museums, libraries, or scholarly databases. Always include full details in your citation. However, it is appropriate to cite the URL of a digital work that exists in online form only.

To know how to cite visual images appropriately, it's important to familiarise yourself with the referencing style used in your subject. Is it MLA, Harvard, Vancouver, etc.? Different referencing styles have slightly different conventions for how to order the information in a citation.

Tip! Use the Library's [Re:Cite](#) tool to check guidelines for referencing visual materials using a specific referencing style. Use the [Re:Cite Site Index](#) to go straight to the type of visual item you want to reference.

## Example 1: Referencing a painting in seminar presentation slides and handouts

Imagine you are preparing a seminar presentation, for an Art History subject about the Italian Renaissance (AHIS20011: Renaissance Art in Florence and Venice). You have identified Botticelli's painting *Primavera* as a primary source for your presentation, on the role of the Medici family as patrons of the arts in fifteenth-century Florence. Searching the Library's [list of databases](#) (using the keyword "art"), you identify the [ARTstor](#) database as a good source of art images. Searching for "Botticelli" on ARTstor, you quickly access a digital reproduction of the painting, *Primavera*, which is also known by the English title, *Allegory of Spring*.

Here's how to cite the painting on your presentation slides and in your reference list (which might be presented in the form of a handout), using the Harvard citation style:

Botticelli, S., c.1478, *Primavera* [*Allegory of Spring*], tempera on panel, ARTstor, viewed 8 May 2013, <<http://www.artstor.org>>.

Tip! Some citation styles for paintings require you to cite the name and geographical location of the museum or collection where a physical artwork or object is kept. For example, Botticelli's *Primavera* is located in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy.

## Example 2: Referencing design work by a fellow student in a class exercise

Let's say you are writing a journal entry for the Architecture subject ENVS10003: Constructing Environments. You have taken a photograph of another student's architectural model and wish to include this image in your journal entry as part of a compare and contrast exercise. To properly acknowledge the photograph and the model in the photo, you need to credit the work to the classmate who made it. To do this, include the five pieces of information mentioned above, with respect to the model itself. Follow that up with "photograph by the author" (you!).

## Example 3: Referencing a digitised version of a map in a written assignment

You are researching a written assignment on the origins of epidemiology, for the Public Health subject POPH90016: Epidemiology. You have identified a map created by John Snow in 1855, which was used to determine the source of cholera outbreaks in Victorian London, as a key visual source for your argument. Searching online, you have discovered a scholarly website about John Snow (housed in the Department of Epidemiology at the University of California, Los Angeles), which contains an [interactive version of Snow's map](#) created by Ralph Frerichs.

Here's how to reference the map in your assignment's reference list, using APA 6<sup>th</sup> style:

Frerichs, R. (2001) John Snow's Map 1 (1854). Retrieved from <http://www.ph.ucla.edu/epi/snow.html>

## Using Images Found Online – Is It A Problem?

These days, it's simple to search for relevant images, thanks to the internet. However, the very simplicity and speed with which we can now search for and locate images online means that it can be all too easy to take them for granted: to "borrow" images without proper citation, or to assume that no-one else will recognise them or know where we found them.

The fact that it's easy to discover images online doesn't mean that you can avoid the responsibility of citing them correctly.

It's fine to search for images online, in a government report, in a book, or in the library's [special collections](#); you can use images from any of these sources in your assignment work, provided they are cited appropriately. Remember, a URL alone is not enough!

Naturally, we recommend using reputable, scholarly sources when looking for visual inspiration online: reliable online sources of images for inclusion in university work include university library collections, scholarly databases, and other public or government-funded digital image collections.

Unfortunately, a lot of the information about visual sources that is publicly available online is highly variable in quality (and this is true of the internet as a whole). Online information is often half-correct at best, or is missing crucial bits of information; at worst, it can be completely misleading. To avoid wasting time on random internet searches, [start with academic sources](#), test your information, and trust your judgement. If you find something potentially interesting online but are not sure about its credibility, check the facts using a reputable scholarly source, like a library database.

However, the rise of social media means that crowd-sourced image collections (including photo-sharing sites like the ABC's [Open](#), and IBM's [Many Eyes](#)) can be a valuable information source too, especially when the images they contain are licensed for public use and relate to contemporary subjects.

When evaluating the quality of images that you find online, consider the following broad guidelines for evaluating websites:

1. Relevance: Is the image relevant to your topic?
2. Accuracy: Is it accurate? Is it detailed? Is it a good quality reproduction?
3. Credibility / Authority: Who is the author (or creator), and what are his or her credentials and reputation? Sites with .org or .gov or .edu addresses are generally best to use. If a website does not include details of the individual/institution that created the image or resource, it's probably not worth using.
4. Currency: Is the information current and up to date? (Potentially, this principle is most relevant to charts and graphs)

5. Objectivity: Who is the information aimed at? Is the source of the information scholarly or peer reviewed? Who paid for it?
6. Conditions and agreement of use: some image databases and online galleries require you to include specific information in your citation. Check the website thoroughly to make sure your citation adheres to the terms of use specified by the provider.

Tip! If you can find an image online, the chances are that your classmates, tutor, or lecturer can find it, too. Always provide references for images that you refer to in your work, regardless of whether you actually include a copy of the image, or images, that you discuss. That includes visual images created by academic staff, or by other students (including work created by students in your class, in another class, or in a previous year).

Tip! Don't go straight to Google Image Search. As good as Google is, you'll have a better chance of finding good quality images to use in your work if you search using high-quality research collections to begin with. University digital collections (such as the [University of Melbourne Digital Collections](#) or [Calisphere](#)), museum collections (such as the [National Gallery of Australia](#) and the [Powerhouse Museum](#)), and licensed public image collections (such as the [New York Public Library Digital Collections](#) or [The Commons](#) on Flickr.com) are all good places to start.

## Images and the Ethics of Acknowledgment

Why do you need to cite images? Well, just like academic books or journal articles, visual images represent someone else's work: including the work of artists, designers, architects, scientists, statisticians, and engineers, among many others.

Visual images, including visual representations such as diagrams and charts, have legal rights attached to them; such as intellectual property rights, and copyright. By acknowledging that a visual image is the work of someone else, you are behaving ethically, legally, and according to appropriate academic convention. Remember: always acknowledge the source of your information.

## References / Further Reading

Yale University Visual Image Resources Collection's guide to digital images resources

<http://guides.library.yale.edu/content.php?pid=47735&sid=354520>

"Ask E.T." A forum on effective visual communication and design, moderated by Edward Tufte, one of the world's leading experts on the subject.

<http://www.edwardtufte.com/bboard/>