

CITATIONS: ANCIENT SOURCES

With an ancient primary source, you cite author, work, book, and section in the footnote. The specific book or web transcription you used still goes in the bibliography as usual.

Why is it different?

The thing about ancient sources is, there are lots and lots of different versions, editions, and translations for each work. Think about *The Iliad* by Homer. There are hundreds of different versions, printings, and translations in English alone, not to mention every other language and printing that exists. Everyone has their own copy, and it could be any version of the original text. Referring to a page number in the edition you happen to have in front of you is of limited usefulness.

To get around this problem, scholars long ago divided each ancient work into books, chapters, and sections (for prose works) or books and line numbers (for poetry and plays). The other copies of *The Iliad* out there won't have the page numbering you have—but they will be divided the same way.

You may already be familiar with this idea from a particular kind of ancient primary source—scripture. The Bible, Qur'an, Torah, and other scriptures are divided this way (e.g., John 3:16; Quran 2:185).

Examples

Here's how it works in practice.

Only one work survives

“Every political system has a source of corruption growing within it, from which it is inseparable. For kingship it is tyranny, for aristocracy it is oligarchy, and for democracy it is government by brute force” (Polybius 6.10.3).

Polybius only survives via his greatest work, *The Histories*. Thus, no need to specify the work, just book, chapter, and section number.

Multiple works survive

“The busts of twenty most illustrious families were borne in the procession, with the names of Manlius, Quinctius, and others of equal rank. But Cassius and Brutus outshone them all, from the very fact that their likenesses were not to be seen” (Tacitus *Annals* 3.76).

Several works survive from the Roman historian Tacitus. For such writers, specify work, chapter, and section.

Poetry and plays

“No man or woman born, coward or brave, can shun his destiny” (Homer *Iliad* 6.623).

Homer's works, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, are epic poetry. They're divided into books, then the lines are numbered within each book.

For ancient plays (not divided into acts as modern plays are), you give line numbers: e.g., Aristophanes *Clouds* 625-629.

¹⁰ ¹ At present I will give a brief account of the legislation of Lycurgus, a matter not alien to my present purpose. ² Lycurgus had perfectly well understood that all the above changes take place necessarily and naturally, and had taken into consideration that every variety of constitution which is simple and formed on principle is precarious, as it is soon perverted into the corrupt form which is proper to it and naturally follows on it. ³ For just as rust in the case of iron and wood-worms and ship-worms in the case of timber are inbred pests, and these substances, even though they escape all external injury, fall a prey to the evils engendered in them, so each constitution has a vice engendered in it and inseparable from it. In kingship it is despotism, in aristocracy oligarchy, ⁵ and in democracy the savage rule of violence; and it is impossible, as I said above, that each of these should not in course of time change into this vicious form. ⁶ Lycurgus, then, foreseeing this, did

Note: Print editions and better online transcriptions give chapters and sections. Use the Ancient Texts page on my website to find online sources.