

GUIDELINES & Examples

U.S. RECORDS

(Basic Issues)

11.1 Citing Federal Records (U.S.)

The archival materials held by the U.S. National Archives and its branches within the National Archives and Records Administration (both commonly known as NARA) are divided into *record groups*. Each of those record groups represent an agency, a bureau, a commission, a department, etc. Their contents are traditionally cited by the formal structure discussed at 3.1, although NARA uses some special terms for its record levels. Citations to material at the National Archives are lengthy. Once you have cited a record in full, your subsequent citations to that record can be shortened somewhat. However, in the first reference to a record, you should include all the elements needed to relocate the record. Typically, these elements (with the corresponding punctuation that would be used in a Reference Note citation) are as follows:

- *Item of interest*, with relevant names, item description, dates, page numbers;
- *File Unit Name*, date (or inclusive dates);
- *Series Name*, inclusive dates;
- *Subgroup Name*, inclusive dates;
- *Record Group Name*, inclusive dates, record group number; and
- *Archive*, location.

PUNCTUATION

To ensure clarity within long archival citations, semicolons are used to divide the major elements, as demonstrated above. Commas are then used between semicolons, as needed. When you quote a document title exactly, you should use quotation marks around the words you are quoting. When an item lacks a title and you create a generic description, you do not use quotation marks around your own words.

Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace

SEQUENCE OF THE ELEMENTS

SOURCE LIST ENTRIES ... The first element you cite in your Source List Entry will usually be the series (or subseries) name, rather than the individual document or file. From that point, you proceed in smallest-to-largest sequence, citing the subgroup, the record group name and number, then the archive and its location.

Attempting to list materials in the Source List by the individual document or file unit will radically bloat your Source List. At the other extreme, citing only the record group in the Source List would provide too little identification.

REFERENCE NOTES The first element you cite in your Reference Note will be the specific item of interest. You will then proceed in smallest-to-largest order, following the sequence of the items bulleted on the prior page.

CITING ARCHIVE BOX NUMBERS

NARA requests that you not use box numbers in citing its materials. Those change as documents are reprocessed for better preservation or service. For a notable exception, see 11.44, Congressional Records.

CITING "ENTRY" OR "SECTION" NUMBERS FROM NARA FINDING AIDS

NARA provides many finding aids, from guides to the archives at large to inventories and preliminary inventories that catalog individual record groups. In its major guides, NARA typically uses *chapter* and *section* numbers to organize discussions (e.g., 11.1.3). Within inventories, it typically subdivides the catalog descriptions into numbered *entries*. When you cite from those publications, it is appropriate to cite their section or entry number. However, those numbers relate *only* to the finding aid in which you find them. They are not meant to be part of a manuscript citation, because the manuscripts are organized differently. NARA's recommended style for manuscripts does not include entry and section numbers from the finding aids.

Even so, the entry numbers used within the inventories are important to the retrieval process. When you conduct research personally at NARA and seek records for which an inventory or preliminary inventory (PI) exists, the request forms you fill out will ask for the specific entry number within the inventory. For this reason, experienced NARA researchers routinely record the entry number *in their working notes*, in a fashion similar to this: