

# NotebookLM Citation Formatting Options

*Gemini 3 query: summarize options for formatting references in NotebookLM*

NotebookLM does not currently have a built-in settings menu to toggle between citation styles (like APA, MLA, or Chicago) for its automatic interface.

Instead, it uses a two-part system: **native interactive citations** (which are fixed) and **generated text citations** (which are flexible via prompting).

Here is a summary of your options for formatting references:

## 1. Default Behavior (Native "Source Grounding")

By default, NotebookLM appends **interactive citation chips** (e.g., [1], [2]) to its responses.

- **Format:** Numeric badges.
- **Function:** Clicking a chip opens the source viewer on the left and highlights the exact passage in the original document.
- **Customization:** You **cannot** change the look or behavior of these chips (e.g., you cannot make the clickable chip look like "(Smith, 2023)").

## 2. Custom Styles via Prompting (The Workaround)

While you cannot change the clickable chips, you can instruct NotebookLM to include text-based citations in your preferred format *alongside* or *instead of* the default text.

- **How to do it:** Add specific instructions to your prompt or the "Customize" configuration.
- **Examples:**
  - "Summarize this document and include in-line citations in APA format."
  - "Create a bibliography for the sources used in this answer using Chicago Manual of Style."
  - "When quoting, please add the author's name and page number in parentheses."
- **Result:** The AI will type out (Doe, 2024, p. 12) in the text.
  - *Note:* These typed citations will **not** be clickable links to the source viewer; they are just text.

## 3. Source Preparation (Best Practice)

NotebookLM is "grounded" in the documents you upload. The quality of your citations depends on how your sources are formatted *before* you upload them.

- **For PDFs/Docs:** Ensure the document clearly states the title, author, and date at the top.
- **For "Quote Files":** If you are pasting loose text into a Google Doc to use as a source, manually add a citation line to each paragraph (e.g., [Source: "Book Title", Chapter 4]). This helps NotebookLM identify where the text came from when it generates a citation.

## Summary of Workflow

If you need a specific citation format for a paper:

1. **Drafting:** Allow NotebookLM to use its default [1] numbers so you can easily verify facts while you work.
2. **Finalizing:** Ask NotebookLM to *"Generate a Reference List for the previous response in APA style"* at the end of your session, or copy the text and use a dedicated citation tool (like Zotero) to finalize the formatting.

*Gemini 3 query: I'd like to see an example of a custom citation prompt*

Here is an example of how to structure a prompt to force NotebookLM into a specific citation style.

Since you were just asking about **Green's functions** in QFT, I will use that as the context for the example.

## The Scenario

You have uploaded three PDFs about Quantum Field Theory and you want a summary that looks like a standard academic paper using **APA Style**.

## The Prompt to Use

Copy and paste this into the chat box:

**"Draft a detailed summary of the key differences between Green's functions in classical electromagnetism versus QFT based on these sources.**

**Please follow these formatting rules:**

- **Use APA style in-text citations:** When you state a fact, place the author and year in parentheses immediately following the sentence, e.g., *(Smith, 2023)*.
- **Retain the native citations:** Keep the small numeric footmarks (like [1]) so I can click them to verify the source.
- **Bibliography:** At the very end, generate a Reference List of the sources used, formatted in APA style."

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## What the Output Will Look Like

Here is a simulation of how NotebookLM would respond to that prompt:

In classical electromagnetism, the Green's function is primarily used as an impulse response to solve inhomogeneous differential equations subject to boundary conditions **(Jackson, 1999)** [1]. However, in Quantum Field Theory, the concept expands significantly. The "Green function" (often referred to as the propagator) encodes the probability amplitude for a particle to travel between two points in spacetime **(Peskin & Schroeder, 1995)** [2].

While classical functions are determined strictly by boundary values, QFT Green functions must also satisfy causality conditions, such as the Feynman propagator which accounts for time-ordering **(Weinberg, 2005)** [3].

### Reference List

- Jackson, J. D. (1999). *Classical Electrodynamics*. Wiley.
- Peskin, M. E., & Schroeder, D. V. (1995). *An Introduction to Quantum Field Theory*. Addison-Wesley.
- Weinberg, S. (2005). *The Quantum Theory of Fields*. Cambridge University Press.

### Critical Constraints

To make this work effectively, you must keep two things in mind:

- **Metadata Visibility:** NotebookLM generally does not "know" the publication year or author unless that information is **written inside the text** of the document you uploaded.
  - *Tip:* If your PDF is a scan or lacks a clear title page, NotebookLM might hallucinate the date or say "(Author, n.d.)".
- **The Double Citation:** Notice in the example above that you get **(Jackson, 1999)** and **[1]**. The text citation (Jackson) is for your reading/copy-pasting utility; the number [1] is the only part that is interactive and links to the source.