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Section A.

An introduction to referencing and how to avoid plagiarism

What is referencing?

The ability to present your ideas to other people is a key lifelong skill. It calls for time and practice to gather information, assess its relevance to your task, read and form your opinions and then share your contribution, verbally or in writing, with others. Within the process of researching and presenting your own work is another key skill: how to represent what you have learned from earlier authors.

When writing a piece of work, whether essay, seminar paper, dissertation, project or article, it is essential that detailed and precise information on all sources consulted is included in your text and in the reference list at the end of your work. This allows the reader to locate the information used and to check, if necessary, the evidence on which your discussion or argument is based. **References** should, therefore, enable the user to find the source documents as quickly and easily as possible. You need to identify these documents by citing them in the text of your assignment (called **citations** or **in-text citations**) and referencing them at the end of your assignment (called the **reference list** or **end-text citations**). The reference list only includes sources cited in the text of your assignment as in-text citations. It is not the same thing as a **bibliography**, which uses the same format or reference system as a reference list, but

also includes all material used in the preparation of your work.

Why should I cite and reference sources?

Besides the reasons given above, there are a number of other important reasons why you should cite and reference your sources. In addition to adding weight to your discussion and arguments, references also show that you have read widely on the subject and considered and analysed the writings of others. Appropriately used, references can strengthen your writing and can help you attain a better mark or grade.

They can also:

- Show your tutor/reader what you have read and allow them to appreciate your contribution to the subject
- Establish the credibility and authority of your ideas and arguments
- Demonstrate that you have spent time in locating, reading and analysing material and formed your own views and opinions.

What is plagiarism?

Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating and is generally defined as presenting someone else's work or ideas as your own. These may be in printed or electronic format and, in all cases, giving credit to the original authors by citing and referencing your sources is the only way to use other people's work without plagiarising.

All the following are considered forms of plagiarism:

- Using another person's work or ideas (for example, copying and pasting text or

- images from the **internet**) without crediting (citing) the original source
- Passing off someone else's work as your own
 - Failing to put a **quotation** in quotation marks
 - Quoting, summarising or **paraphrasing** material in your work without citing the original source
 - Changing words or phrases but copying the sentence structure of a source and not crediting the original author
 - Citing sources you did not use.

It is even possible to plagiarise yourself if you paraphrase or copy from work you submitted elsewhere without acknowledging the fact through citation and referencing.

Preparing to reference and how to avoid plagiarism

The fundamental principle is to acknowledge the work of others by providing citations to your references so that the reader can refer to these and other works if they want. It is essential that referencing is done for each source at the time you are using it or making notes, rather than leaving the citing and referencing exercise until all your research has been completed. Besides being good academic practice, this ensures that you do not have the problem of trying to relocate materials you may have used many weeks or months previously. It is also helpful to note the following points:

- Manage your time and plan your work – ensure you have time to prepare, read and write
- Use your own ideas and words

- Use the ideas of others sparingly and only to support or reinforce your own argument
- When using material on the internet, make a note of the source (author, title, **URL** and so on) and the date that you accessed the page
- Use quotation marks when directly stating another person's words and include the source in your list of references (doing none or only one of these is not acceptable)
- Avoid using someone else's work with only minor cosmetic changes, for example using 'strong' for 'robust' or changing a sentence around
- When paraphrasing, use words or a sentence structure different from the original work and acknowledge the source through in-text citation immediately following the paraphrase
- Save all your notes, printouts and so on until you receive your final mark or grade for the assignment
- Remember that your list of references (sources you have cited) at the end of your assignment is not the same as a bibliography, which also includes items (books, articles, web pages and so on) that you used for your research but did not cite directly. Remember, ultimate responsibility for avoiding plagiarism rests with you.

What about common knowledge?

In all academic or professional fields, experts regard some ideas as **common knowledge**. This is generally defined as facts, dates, events and information that are expected to be known by someone studying or working in a particular field. The

facts can be found in numerous places and are likely to be known by many people: for example, that Margaret Thatcher was a British prime minister. Such information does not generally have to be referenced. However, as a student you may only have just started to study a particular subject so the material you are reading may not yet be common knowledge to you. In order to decide if the material you want to use in your assignment constitutes common knowledge, you need to ask yourself the following questions:

- Did I know this information before I started my course?
- Did this information/idea come from my own brain?

If the answer to either or both of the questions is 'no', then the information is not common knowledge to you. In these cases you need to cite and reference your source(s).

What about confidential information?

If you wish to use source material that is confidential (for example, some legal or medical information), you must obtain permission from all those who might be affected by its publication. If material is in the public domain, you are usually free to reference it but, if in any doubt, ask whoever produced or published the information for permission to use it.

Which referencing style should I use?

There are many styles of referencing and this is a cause of understandable confusion for many students and authors who may

be asked to use different styles for different pieces of work. There are two principal methods of referencing:

- Author-date referencing styles (such as Harvard and APA) which emphasise the name of the author and publication year in the text and full bibliographic details in a reference list
- Numeric styles (such as MHRA and OSCOLA) which provide a **superscript number** in the text with full bibliographic details in footnotes and bibliographies.

You will need to check which style is required for your work. In further and higher education your department or faculty may have decided to use a certain style. Others may follow a referencing style agreed by professional authorities, for example the American Psychological Association (known as APA) or the Oxford Standard for Citation of Legal Authorities (known as OSCOLA), which is used by many law departments in the United Kingdom. If you are writing for an academic journal or newspaper, you will need to establish the preferred style of writing and referencing: this information is often given on the publisher's website or will be available from the editor. Once you have established the referencing style required, use it consistently throughout your piece of work.

Despite the many referencing styles used in education and literature, the reasons for referencing your sources and the details that you will need to give your readers remain the same. Your aim will be to give the reader enough information to be able to easily identify the sources you have used.

Index for the Harvard referencing style

NB To avoid confusion when referencing, this index does not list items specific to the alternative referencing styles (Sections E–I)

Index entries are arranged alphabetically letter by letter, with numbers referring to pages

Bold numbers indicate glossary entries

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