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Reference, reference, reference – why do I have to reference everything?

There is one overarching reason why you need to reference: a reference tells your reader where the evidence for what you say has come from (**see also p. 59**).

Readers can then use your reference in different ways. They can:

- 1 go and find the source themselves if they want to
- 2 understand the nature of your source
- 3 form their own view about the use you make of it.

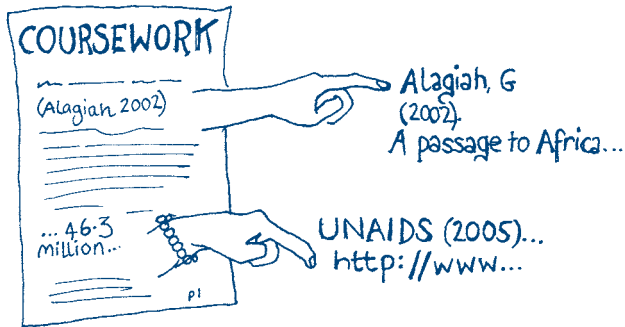
And, of course, if your reader is a tutor, s/he can see what you have read and what sources you have used for your assignment. That helps them to assess the quality of your work and the range of your research.

Help your reader to find your source!

It isn't good enough just to list everything you have read for an assignment at the end of your writing. At best this just tells your reader that you've been busy; at worst it

gives the impression that you've borrowed a list from somewhere else. Plus, you can't expect your reader to wade through 5, 15 or 50 sources to try and find that nugget of information you have used. They will just get annoyed ("where did she get this from?") – and you will be the loser.

The whole purpose of referencing is to make the process of tracking back to previous research as clear as possible. **Point** your reader to where they can find the source or support for particular statements.



Make it easy! A good source can be a goldmine for someone who is interested in your topic. It could lead them to a whole network of sources that in turn could help them in their research.

All referencing systems have two linked elements

In the text you drop in a signal at the point in your writing where you are using a source. This is a 'citation', a link that tells the reader two things: first, that the idea or information comes from elsewhere, and secondly, where to look for more information on that source. The signal is either:

- ▶ a number in numeric systems¹ or [1]; or
- ▶ the author + year (in most author-date systems).

In the 'references' section you list ALL your sources, giving full details of where to find them. The list can be either:

- ▶ in number order according to where you first use that source in your text; or
- ▶ in alphabetical order by the author's last name. Whichever style you use ...

There needs to be 100% correspondence between the sources you

- ▶ use (or 'cite') in your text; and
- ▶ list at the end with full tracking details in your references list.

For the difference between 'References' and a 'Bibliography' [see p. 77](#).



Styles of referencing

There are several main styles of referencing and plenty of local variations. There are differences so tiny that even specialists struggle to spot the difference. Add to this the house styles favoured by individual journal and book publishers and individual tutors' quirks, and there are probably hundreds of different variations in use around the world – all perfectly correct.

Different disciplines tend to have their preferred way of referencing, often with good reason, sometimes by convention. As a newcomer to the subject, clearly you should follow the models. However, even within one subject area – sometimes even in the same department – there can be differences. Individual tutors tend to want students to set out references in the way they themselves do.

All this makes for conflicting advice and confusion for students. What's OK on one module can be marked as wrong on another. The upshot is that referencing has become a real bugbear for many people, and, worse still, students (and tutors!) often fail to distinguish between what is important in referencing and what isn't.

They are all correct!

There are plenty of variations within any referencing style with individual preferences and house styles creating their own. Here is a sample of styles – and they would all be classified as the ‘Harvard’ style.

PARKHURST, J.O. and L. LUSH (2004). The political environment of HIV: lessons from a comparison of Uganda and South Africa. *Social Science and Medicine*. No 59(9), p1913–24.

Parkhurst, J.O. and Lush, L. 2004. The Political Environment of HIV: lessons from a comparison of Uganda and South Africa. Social Science and Medicine. Vol. 59, issue 9, pp. 1913–24.

Parkhurst JO and Lush L (2004). ‘The political environment of HIV: lessons from a comparison of Uganda and South Africa’. *Soc Sci Med*. **59**(9): 1913–24.

They have all been modelled on books and articles published by major publishers and they are all absolutely correct!

So what do you do?

Try a bit of self-preservation! Find out how your reader wants you to reference – and set out your references in the way your reader – tutor or editor – wants them set out.

Your module/course handbook will almost certainly state how they want this done. Keep your handbook handy when you are writing, and follow the models. Exactly.

What matters and what doesn't?

It doesn't matter if you:

- ▶ use or don't use commas, full stops, capitals in titles, underlining/italics. But be consistent because playing too fast and loose with punctuation annoys readers;
- ▶ can't track down some detail, despite your best efforts. It's better to refer to a good source than to leave it out because of a missing detail.

It does matter that you:

- ▶ understand the purpose of referencing
- ▶ place your in-text reference (or 'citation') at the point you use a source
- ▶ give as full a set of details as you can about each source in your reference list
- ▶ develop ways of weaving references into your writing style in your own way
- ▶ give up the idea of 'hanging on' to the words used in your source, even if you feel they say it better than you do
- ▶ pick one style of referencing and stick to it.

It is unrealistic, however, to expect students to be 100% accurate. World-class professors send books and articles to publishers with incomplete references and copy-editors check and correct missing reference details. Tutors will be looking for authenticity – wanting to see what you have really read and thought about this source material.

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