



A guide to correct and careful referencing

Correct and clear referencing is essential in order to present research accurately and avoid plagiarism, writes Trish Patton

REFERENCING, ALSO KNOWN AS CITING, is acknowledging the information sources used within your research in order for others to identify and locate the items. There are two parts to referencing: citing within the text, and the reference list.

Why reference?

- **To support your research:** It is important to reference other people's work to demonstrate your level of knowledge in the area and to put your research into context.
- **To acknowledge another's work:** A reference is required for a direct quotation, when paraphrasing or summarising another writer and when using statistics, tables, graphs/diagrams or appendices which do not arise entirely from your own work.¹ A reference list allows other researchers to locate your sources and trace the development of your work.
- **To avoid plagiarism:** The Oxford Dictionary defines plagiarism as the practice of taking someone else's work and ideas and passing them off as one's own. Nowadays there is software available that can detect plagiarism, eg. Turnitin (www.turnitin.com) and many educational institutions and publishers use this software to check articles and research to ensure the work is your own unless otherwise stated.

Referencing styles

Referencing styles provide rules for referencing to ensure standardisation and consistency. The same set of rules should be followed every time you cite a reference. Two of the most well-known are the Harvard and the Vancouver styles. The choice of referencing style depends on what you are using your article for and you should always check if the journal, university or organisation you are writing for have their own rules for referencing and follow these accordingly.

The Vancouver style, known as the numerical one, follows rules established by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.² It is most frequently used in medical sciences and both *Forum* and the *BMJ* require you to use this style. References are listed in numerical order as to when they appear in the body of the text (see the online guide *Citing & Referencing Guide: Vancouver Style*³).

Citing within the text

There are two ways of citing within the text: direct quotation or paraphrasing. Quoting is reproducing the actual wording from the original source. Direct quotations should be indicated by single quotation marks and the page numbers provided. Duplication of charts, diagrams, pictures, etc. should also be treated as direct quotes. Quotations should be used sparingly. Alternatively, you can paraphrase using your own words. A number is assigned to a source in the order in which it is cited in the text. If the source is referred to again, the same number is used. In order to indicate a citation, place the number beside the relevant text in superscript.

Top tips for referencing

- Be specific, be accurate, be consistent!
- Remember the four steps to referencing: record; organise; cite; list⁴


Also see useful tutorial on *Demystifying citing and referencing*, Monash University, 2011:

www.lib.monash.edu.au/tutorials/citing/

Creating the reference list

The reference list is a list of all the sources that have been cited in the body of the text. It appears at the end of your work. The list should appear in numerical order, with each number referring to the one in the body of the text. There are rules for citing specific information formats, eg. books, journal articles, websites, newspapers, reports, theses, audiovisuals, etc. and these must be adhered to.

Managing your references

It is useful at the outset to record the information sources you use with all the descriptive elements, known as the bibliographic details, as this will make the reference list easier to complete and avoid you having to search for information at the end. Nowadays, there are many useful tools available to help you called reference management software. There is subscription-based software where you purchase either a package to download to your PC, eg. EndNote (www.endnote.com), ProCite (www.procite.com) and Reference Manager (www.refman.com), or access to an online version for an annual licence, eg. RefWorks (www.refworks.com). There are also free versions available such as Mendeley (www.mendeley.com) or PubMed (www.pubmed.gov). As with all software, there is a learning curve involved and the information must first be put in. Alternatively, you can keep records in print format in either a notebook or on filing cards, or in electronic format on your computer. This ensures that all the details of your sources are stored in one place. 

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