Referencing

What is referencing, and why is it important?

Academic writing is about debate. Whatever the subject or topic, if you are writing an essay or a longer piece of work such as a project, you need to read round the subject to research other people's ideas, and, if you use these ideas, give credit to the author. Referencing, also called citation, is about stating the source of your ideas, facts and opinions.

Failure to credit sources is at best sloppy, at worst plagiarism. You can read more about this in the article about the topic; suffice it to say that it is strongly disapproved of in academic circles and can cause you to be heavily penalized.

The other reason for providing references is that you give an "audit trail" for your work: your readers have somewhere to go if they want more information, and you yourself can refer back to your sources. Consistently compiled references will also give your work a greater authority and credibility.

There are various styles of referencing (see styles of referencing below), but the general rule is either:

- An in-text reference close to the source, providing author, date and possibly page, with a list of fuller references at the end of the work
- Footnotes or end notes with a bracketed or superscripted number in the text and the reference at the bottom of the page or end of the work.

Your university will probably have its own preferred convention and you should check with them. In this article we can provide only general guidelines.

A list of references is different from a bibliography

References are the full citations of works you have referred to in the body of your work. A bibliography is a full list of all the works which have contributed to your understanding of the topic, whether or not you have actually referred to them.

You should check with your tutor whether you are expected to provide both, or just one. The conventions for setting out a bibliography are the same as for a list of references.

When should you reference?

Certain information can be regarded as in the common domain, and will not need referencing. You should, however, give a reference in the following circumstances:

- when you are using someone else's ideas
- when you are referring to a piece of research, a theory, argument, model etc.
- when you quote specific information which someone else has researched or written up such as statistics, case studies etc.
- when you quote from a particular author, whether you use their words directly or whether you paraphrase them.

If you were writing about the demographics of London, you would not need to reference the fact that its population is 7.5 million; you would however if you were referring to more in depth studies, say, of
population density, movement, ethnicity etc. You would also need to reference theories as to how the population might change or grow in the future.

**How to lay out citations**

There are various ways in which you can draw in other people's work, which we explore below. The most important general rule is that you should not quote them in isolation, but within the context of your own ideas, so the quote needs to make both logical and grammatical sense. Take the following extract from an Emerald article, where the author quotes several sources both directly and indirectly, but in the context of showing the development of empirical ideas in accounting:

**Empirical research in accounting**

There would be few today that would dispute that empirical research in accounting is of central importance. Yet it is interesting to note that, as Mattessich (1980) points out, this centrality is of recent origin. It is only in the 1970s that this shift in accounting research gained centre stage. Prior to this time “normative” thinking and theorizing was paramount.

The reason for this shift in the 1970s is clearly complex yet it is not unconnected with, first, the disillusionment with normative thinking and second, with the interest in the shift to more descriptive studies from multiple branches of the research community. On the first point what became clear in the 1970s was that the normative ideas which had been generated over previous decades did not appear to be readily taken up and used in practice. It was as though a “tissue rejection” problem was occurring—the suggested design for accounting systems seemed to have an irrelevance to current practices. This led to calls for a greater descriptive understanding of the functioning of current accounting practices in the hope that such an appreciation would lead to the design of more meaningful and appropriate normative systems. Cooper (1981, p. 198) makes this plain when he suggests that “…only through a well-grounded understanding of how systems operate can we prescribe how accounting systems should be changed”.

– From "Empirical research in accounting: alternative approaches and a case for ‘middle-range’ thinking" by Richard Laughlin, Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, vol. 8 no. 1

**Direct quotes**

This is when you use the words of the author without changing them, perhaps because the author uses a particularly vivid turn of phrase.

*Listening is often more tiring than talking and it demands intellectual effort. In the future, "the successful leader will have not the loudest voice, but the readiest ear"* (Bennis, 1993).

– From "Listening practices and performance in service organizations", William J. Glynn et al., International Journal of Service Industry Management, vol. 14 no. 3

Use these sparingly, especially the longer ones, and ensure that they are relevant, fit into your existing grammar and sentence structure, and do not cause a break in the sense of your argument. You should also always give a precise page reference.

- Longer quotes should be on a separate line from the main text and indented left and right. No need for quotation marks. Don't include more than you need; just sufficient to make your point.
- Shorter quotes should come between quotation marks and should be quoted accurately. Should you wish to make minor changes (inserting your own words, omitting part of the quote etc.), you can do so using the following conventions:
  - Ellipsis – … to indicate words left out of a passage
  - Square brackets to indicate where you have used your own words, as in the following example:

The latter, defined by Laurillard (1993, p.131) as embodying “some model of an aspect of the world, [allowing] the user to make inputs to the model, [running] the model, and [displaying] the results” are believed to be valuable in that they provide a model of the world with which the student can interact.
• Emphasis – you might want to underline something or put it in bold to indicate its importance, in which case you need to put (emphasis mine)
• [sic] – indicates that there is an error in the original, e.g. a misspelling.

Indirect quotes and paraphrases

You could cite someone and make only minor changes to the original: this is called an indirect quote and does not need quotation marks. Paraphrasing giving the gist of what the author is saying, but in your own words, as in the following example:

Mayer and Sims (1994) claim that when information is presented in a double source, the process of encoding of information is enhanced in the memory by the two different representations that the double encoding gives rise to.

Summary

This is where you summarize the main points of an author's work, as in the following example:

When starting to disentangle and structure the various facets of consumer disadvantage, a useful starting point is provided by Bromley and Thomas's (1993) study of disadvantaged consumers in Swansea. These authors consider consumer disadvantage to emerge from two interrelated dimensions; social disadvantage and poor personal mobility. Taking their ideas a step further, the phenomenon can be viewed as consisting of potential causes and manifestations. Potential causes of consumer disadvantage are linked to membership of social disadvantage groups, and help to identify who is likely to be disadvantaged as a consumer. Manifestations are concerned with the forms that disadvantage may take in a retail context, for example paying higher prices, lack of variety and selection and poorer quality (Market Behaviour Ltd, 1983).
– From "Rethinking consumer disadvantage: the importance of qualitative research" by Lucy Woodliffe, International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management, vol. 32 no. 11

Quoting one author who quotes another

If a book or article quotes another author, you should always try and track down the original source, or at least give credit to both authors – (Brown 2000, cited in Smith 2005). Note that only Smith should appear in your long list of references.

Using reporting verbs and phrases

A good way of showing your "independence of mind" with respect to your cited material is by distancing yourself slightly with a reporting verb or phrase. There are a number of standard ones you can choose, for example:

"As X has noted/demonstrated"; "Defined by X" – suggests agreement

"According to X"; "X states that" – neutrality – acknowledging that is what the author thinks

“X alleges/claims” – distancing yourself or possibly disagreeing

Styles of referencing

There are various formats for references (see Referencing systems), although generally speaking you should provide the following information (right-hand column indicates other related conventions):
Referencing systems

There are a number of different referencing systems but the most common are:

- The author-date system, also known as the Harvard system, which is commonly used in the social sciences.
- The numerical system, also known as the Vancouver system, which is commonly used in the humanities.

The author-date system

The essence of this system is a brief in-text reference to the author, date, and sometimes page (in the case of a very particular reference), with a fuller reference at the end of the work.

More details of this system can be found in the following:

- How to use the Harvard reference system (elsewhere on this site)
- A references and citations tutorial from Leeds University Library – References and citations explained, see section on Harvard style bibliographies and references.

The numerical system

Here each reference has a bracketed or superscripted number which refers to a footnote (bottom of page) or endnote (end of section/chapter/work) with the full reference. If the reference recurs, you do not need to repeat the details but can use:

- Ibid if the reference is the same as the previous one
- Op. cit. if the reference is not the same as the previous one but details have already been given earlier in the document.

Compiling references and using bibliographic software
Compiling your list of references will be much easier if you maintain records as you do your research, noting the essential bibliographic information. You could use a system of index cards for each reference, or you could create a system on your computer, with space for the relevant data.

There are software packages which can help you with your bibliographic data, which work through databases which record the information on a range of different types of material and can lay it out in the required format. It's also possible to add brief notes, carry out a search, and download records from online databases. There are a number of these systems on the market:

Endnote – http://www.endnote.com/
Procite – http://www.procite.com/

...are two established ones. (You can read more about Endnote on How to use the Harvard reference system – Bibliographic software.)

Check with your institution as to whether they already have some bibliographic software on their network, or whether arrangements exist for discounts to research students. Your library may also provide some training.

Some useful resources

Start by checking the guidelines that your university or department provides. Most books on study skills will cover referencing.

Referencing is also covered in the following excellent websites:

- University of London Research Library Services: Library research skills tutorial
- Leeds University Library online tutorials

http://www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/learning/study_skills/skills/referencing.htm