Introduction to referencing

1. Introduction

When you produce an academic assignment or a piece of work, you are likely to refer to sources of information that you have used to inform your studies or research. These might be teaching materials, books, ejournals or websites, to name a few. You will be expected to include references to these sources to provide evidence for your arguments.

This activity forms part of a series on referencing.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this activity you should know:
- what referencing is, and why it's important
- more about the sources that need referencing

2. What is referencing?

Referencing is a way of acknowledging the sources you have used, or referred to, in your work by:
- providing information on other people's ideas, theories or works
- paraphrasing or quoting their work

By acknowledging your sources, you are providing clear information to allow your readers to follow up on what you have used. Referencing is a strict requirement for academic work. Additionally, the referencing skills you learn can also be very beneficial in a work environment.

Referencing styles

In order to enable others to locate these sources, and to acknowledge the original authors, you will be required to provide reference details using a specific referencing style.

Referencing styles are guides designed to help you to cite and reference correctly. They offer standard formats to ensure that you include all the information your readers will need to find the work you are referring to.

If you are studying, your module or course will most likely provide you with guidance on which referencing style to use. Quite often libraries will also provide advice on referencing and may offer additional online tutorials to help you.

3. Referring to others in your work

Referencing the work of other people involves two distinct elements:
- an in-text citation
- a reference list

In-text citations

In-text citations are inserted in the body of your text and indicate that you are talking about, referring to or paraphrasing someone else's work. They are also required when you directly quote another person's original words.

An in-text citation will include minimal details; usually the name of the author(s) and date the work was published.

This is usually referred to as the author-date method, however there are some numeric referencing styles which use footnotes.

In-text citations provide enough information for your readers to find the full reference in your reference list.

Reference list

A reference list is a complete list of references related to the sources you have used in your work. For every in-text citation you have included within your work, there should be a detailed reference in your reference list.

Each reference within the list provides full details of the source, written in the format required for the referencing style you are using.

A reference list would typically be included at the end of your work.

4. Why is referencing important?

The benefits of referencing are not restricted to one person.

Although clear referencing will help you, as the author, it will also benefit your readers, and the original authors of works you are referring to.

Below you will read about the advantages for each person.

Original authors

The authors who have written the material you have mentioned will also want to be acknowledged. Imagine if someone used something you had written in their assignment. You would want them to acknowledge that the work was done by you, and not pass it off as their own work.

You

The references you include in your work show that you have researched your subject area, and help to provide evidence that can strengthen the arguments you make.

Passing someone else's work off as your own is referred to as 'plagiarism'. If you acknowledge your sources correctly, you will avoid this.

Your readers

Two key reasons for referencing are:
- to acknowledge the work of others
- to enable your readers to find the material you have mentioned in your work.

Your readers may want to follow up some of the research you have mentioned. Your references could help them to improve their own understanding of the subject.

5. What sources do I need to reference?

If you refer to or quote any work created by another person, you will need to provide a citation within your text and include the full details in a reference list.

Some of the most common sources that you may come across, which would require a reference are listed below:
- ejournals
- books
- forum posts
- tutorials
- module materials
- video and audio
- images and photos

- blogs
- websites.

Essentially, anything you refer to which is someone else's ideas or work, will require a reference.

6. What details should I include in a reference?

Earlier in this activity, we mentioned that there are standard formats for including the full details of the sources you have mentioned in your work. Depending on your source, and referencing style, you may need to include a selection of the following details:

- Author
- Year of publication
- Title of article or chapter
- Title of the publication
- Issue and volume numbers
- Place of publication
- Publisher
- Edition
- Page numbers
- URL
- Date you accessed the material

You may find it useful to download the checklist from the links below. This document provides a reminder of which details you will need to include in a full reference, for a selection of sources.

[Referencing checklist (Word)](#)
[Referencing checklist (PDF)](#)

7. Summary

Summary

This activity has introduced you to some of the elements of referencing. There are many different referencing styles. To find the style you should be using, check your module's study or assessment guide. You may also wish to explore what referencing guidance is offered by your library. If you are publishing your research, publishers usually produce their own guidelines for referencing.

If you have any concerns about referencing, please do ask for help.

Next Steps

To find out more about the basics of referencing different sources, you may wish to work through the following Being digital activities:

[Referencing books](#)
[Referencing ejournals](#)
[Referencing websites](#)