

Introduction to Referencing

This document is a general introduction to referencing, intended for anyone new to (or returning to) tertiary study. It includes a discussion of the 'why' and 'how' of citing authors in an academic context.

Why reference?

There are many reasons to reference sources correctly in assignments.

1. To distinguish your ideas

When you hand in an assignment, it is assumed that all facts, theories, and ideas are your own unless they are attributed to an outside source.

If you do not attribute outside sources by referencing them, there is no way to distinguish your ideas from those of the sources. You are effectively presenting someone else's work as your own.

When marking an assignment, your lecturer or tutor needs to know which parts are original thought and which parts are derived from research. Both research and original thought are important skills, but if you do not reference correctly the marker cannot separate them in your assignment or mark them accordingly.

2. To reinforce your argument

Most assignments have an argument of some kind.

Sometimes you will read up on a topic first, and use those readings to develop your argument. Sometimes you will begin with an argument, and then research to find support for that argument.

In either case, referencing the readings gives your argument evidence, credibility, and authority. References tell the reader that your argument is not just a matter of personal opinion: it is backed up by experts in the field.

3. To show different perspectives

Many assignments expect you to show how several different sources think about one topic: what are the points of agreement, what are the conflicts, what are the unanswered questions?

Referencing shows that you have considered the big picture by understanding and using a range of sources. It emphasises the scope and extent of your research.

4. To allow fact-checking

A reference is a signpost that tells the reader the source of facts, opinions, and theories. If the reader wants to check the original source, a reference helps them to find it.

The reader may want to make sure that your information is up-to-date, and that you have correctly understood the source. The reader may want to read more on a topic.

Without the reference, there is no ‘paper trail’ for them to follow. The reader cannot judge the reliability of your assignment.

5. To ensure the moral rights of the author

Most copyright laws talk about the moral rights of the author. Moral rights include the right of attribution: the right for the author to be identified when their work is used somewhere else. It is also a matter of courtesy to properly acknowledge an author's hard work.

Wallace, Schirato, and Bright (1999) describe students as “apprentice academics,” and an assignment as “a simulation of a ‘real world’ article published by an academic researcher or a report published by some organisation” (p. 170).

Because the academic culture is based on the free exchange of ideas, it is essential to show how those ideas fit together. Referencing is the standard way to show these connections.

6. To avoid plagiarism

Plagiarism is the intentional or unintentional presentation of another's work as your own. There are a range of academic penalties for plagiarising in your assignments.

References and further reading

Kennedy, M. L., & Smith, H. M. (2001). *Reading and writing in the academic community* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Summers, J., & Smith, B. (2002). *Communication skills handbook: How to succeed in written and oral communication* (Rev. ed.). Milton, Australia: John Wiley & Sons.

Wallace, A., Schirato, T., & Bright, P. (1999). *Beginning university: Thinking, researching and writing for success*. St Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin.