

A Brief Guide to Plagiarism & Referencing¹

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the act of taking someone else's work or idea and passing it off as your own. This does not mean that you have to actually claim the work or idea is your own to commit plagiarism. If you include someone else's work or ideas in your own work without making it clear that it belongs to them, then you risk committing plagiarism, even if you have done so unintentionally.

Universities take plagiarism very seriously. It is regarded as a form of cheating and so it's very important that you make sure you understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Many cases of plagiarism by first year students occur due to confusion about what constitutes plagiarism rather than any deliberate attempt to deceive. However, irrespective of whether or not their act of plagiarism is deliberate, a student is likely to face disciplinary action such as an official warning or a mark penalty on the work concerned, or, in the most serious cases, expulsion from university. All universities now use plagiarism detection software to check students' work for potential plagiarism.

Avoiding Plagiarism

There is no need to be overly anxious about plagiarism. As long as you make sure you know when to include references and take care over anything you include in your work, you should avoid any problems. A basic rule is that **if you are handing in work which includes quotations, theories, ideas, data or any other materials which are the work of another person, you should ensure that you take steps to acknowledge the source, i.e. where it came from.**

This includes any:

- Factual information – e.g. statistics, facts, tables, diagrams. Citing the source will let the reader know where to go if they want to find out more.
- Quotes – Quoting even a single word means you should use quotation marks and cite your source.
- Summaries of theories or ideas – Even if you have put an idea into your own words, it's still someone else's idea, so you will still need to cite the source(s).

It is better to be safe than sorry and so if you are in doubt include a reference. Your lecturer will soon let you know if it isn't required.

Note-taking

Organised note-taking is a good way to help avoid plagiarism. You could try the following:

- Each time you begin reading a new text, use a blank piece of paper (or word doc) for notes and write down the details of the text at the top (see referencing section for the details you will need). This way you will not forget later where you found the information.
- Every time you make a note write the page number down beside it.
- Try to avoid copying text directly and instead write notes in your own words. This will make it easier to understand later on and will mean you won't be tempted to just copy wording.
- If you do copy a piece of text directly then write QUOTE or something similar in big letters beside it. This way you will not mistake it later as your own notes/words.

Getting Help

Most universities have study skills advisors who can help you get to grips with plagiarism and referencing. Student support services, either at the university or the students' association will be able to point you in the right direction – have a look on the university website for contact details. Most importantly, don't be afraid to ask for help if you are unsure about any of the above.

¹ With thanks to Tracey Kerr at the University of Stirling, Academic Services at the University of Edinburgh, and Angela Ruskin University Library.

Referencing

Referencing is the system by which authors acknowledge any sources of information (in any form) they have used in a piece of work. This allows the reader to identify the original source of the information and to locate further information should they wish to.

Referencing Styles

There is no one system of referencing and different subject areas are likely to have different preferred methods. It is a good idea therefore to **check with your lecturer or tutor at the start of the course about the referencing system in use**. You should also refer to course handbooks and / or the departmental website.

Referencing will involve using some or all of the following:

Citation - this is a short reference contained within the body of the text. It is usually fairly basic but is enough for a reader to locate the relevant text listed in your reference list or bibliography. It normally includes the author, the year of publication and the relevant page number (if appropriate). This information is noted in brackets after the relevant text, e.g. (Smith, 2005, p123). If the author is referred to in the main body of the text, the citation should include just the year and page number; e.g. "As Smith (2005, p123) states ...".

Reference List – this is a detailed listing of **ALL** of sources cited in the work. References are usually listed at the end of the piece of work or sometimes, for longer texts, at the end of each section or chapter. Each reference should include the following information: *name of author, title of the article/book/website etc., year of publication, where it was published, and name of publisher*. This information can normally be found in the first few pages of a book, on a webpage itself or at the start or end of an article. An example of a standard reference for a book might be:

<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Year Published</i>	<i>Where Published</i>	<i>Publisher</i>
Smith, Jane	A Book of Citations	2005	Edinburgh	SWAP-East Press Ltd

The order in which individual references are listed depends on the referencing system in use. In most commonly used systems references are listed either alphabetically by author surname or by citation order listing (i.e. references are listed in the order they appear within the text). The system you use will depend on the requirements of your subject area.

Bibliography - This is a list of all relevant items that you have used to help you prepare for the assignment but which are **not necessarily cited** in your text e.g. background reading to familiarise yourself with the topic. A bibliography is located at the very end of the document.

NOTE: The terms reference list and bibliography are sometimes used interchangeably. Make sure that you know what is required from you before you start!

Points to Note:

- If there are two or three authors list each one, e.g. (Jones and Smith, 2005) or (Jones, Smith and Murphy, 2005).
- If there are more than three authors use 'et al' (means 'and others'), e.g. (Smith et al, 2005).
- A citation for a website does not require a page number. If there is no obvious author on the webpage you could use the name of the website. Always include the website address (URL).
- Include the date you visited a website in your reference as information on websites can change rapidly: e.g. – Smith, Jane; *How to use citations*; viewed November 2009 on www.swap-east.co.uk/citations
- When referencing an article from a journal remember to include the relevant page numbers and the volume number and/or issue number of the journal: e.g. "How to reference" in Smith, Ann; *Journal of Citations* Volume 5 issue 3; 2005; Edinburgh; SWAP Press Ltd, pp 2-7.