



CSU Learning Skills: *your link to success*

Quick Guide: Academic writing

Why referencing is important

Citation is the practice of systematically indicating the origins of thoughts, ideas, knowledge, or words that one uses to author a report, essay, article, speech, book Web site, or other work. Walker & Taylor, 2006, p. 29

Why reference?

Many students express how they feel frustrated and constrained in their writing efforts because of the need to include references within their academic paper. A big picture consideration of how the academic world ‘works’ is helpful here, for this world is all about knowledge building. The primary reason for citation, therefore, is that it encourages and supports the collective construction of academic knowledge (Walker & Taylor, 2006, pp. 29-30).

Neville (2007) provides nine important reasons why authors need to follow academic writing conventions by including referencing:

To trace the origin of ideas

Academic study involves not just presenting and describing ideas, but also being aware of where they came from, who developed them, why and when. Referencing helps your reader to feel confident in your writing by having a means to identify and locate original documents you have referred to. p. 8

To build your own web of ideas

As you build your argument in an assignment, it is rather like a spider building its web. You build carefully engineered connections between ideas. You advance an argument in one section, but then counter it with another threaded and connected group of ideas, each supported by its own referenced evidence. But you have at the centre, your own position, your own place in the scheme of things; your point of view. p.9

To help you find your own voice

*You may have to write in a way that is not ‘you’, in terms of [academic] writing style. However, the perspective you take, the idea you present and the conclusion you reach can all be your choice; referencing helps this process. The **selection** of evidence to support your own perspective is subjective – and is an important way for you to find your own credible voice in higher education. p. 10*

To validate an argument

To be taken seriously, you need to make a transparent presentation of valid evidence in an assignments. *Reliable evidence is in the form of facts, definitions, statistics and other data that has an appeal to the intelligence of the reader. p. 10*

To spread knowledge	<i>You have probably discovered already how useful lists of references at the end of journal articles can be in identifying other related sources for your own research. Once you start to follow up sources in reference lists, it can open up a fascinating trail of knowledge. p. 10</i>
To indicate appreciation	<i>Referencing is also about showing courtesy and respect, about honouring the hard work of writers and researchers by acknowledging their contributions. p. 10</i>
To show influences	<i>Lecturers are interested in your references to identify which authors or sources have been influential in moulding or shaping your ideas and research. p. 12</i>
To conform to marking criteria	<i>Accurate referencing is a tangible demonstration to your lecturer of your research, intellectual integrity and the care you have taken in writing your assignment. p. 12</i>
To avoid plagiarism	<i>Accurate referencing will help you to avoid being accused of plagiarism – the deliberate presentation of someone else’s words, phrases or ideas as your own. p. 12</i>

When to reference?

A good measure of confusion – and therefore frustration – experienced by students with referencing is knowing just *when* to include a citation. Unfortunately, there can be a range of responses from lecturers which can often add to student confusion. Neville (2007) provides a helpful guide of when you ought to provide references in an assignment:

1. When using tables, statistics, diagrams, photographs and other illustrations you need to indicate the source of this information.
2. When describing or discussing a theory, model or practice associated with a particular author or source.
3. When using a source to give weight or credibility to an argument presented by you in the assignment.
4. When giving emphasis to a particular theory, model or practice that has found a certain measure of agreement and support within the discipline.
5. When there is need to inform your reader of direct quotations or definitions in your assignment.
6. When paraphrasing another author’s work, or summarising a prevailing idea.

As we draft an academic paper, we can use a source basically in three ways, and indicate this by reproducing the appropriate APA pattern afterwards:

As a “direct quote” (Authorlastname, year, p. x). (Note the use of double quote marks for APA Style).

As a **paraphrase** (Authorlastname, year).

A paraphrase is where we put an idea from a text into our own words. Usually we do not need to include a page number, although some lecturers prefer that you do; so you need to ask about this one from lecturers themselves.

As a **summary** (Authorlastname, year).

A summary is a succinct and clear explanation of an author’s perspective, idea, theory or research. An effective summary will include all the main points made by the author, and the point of view being expressed. A summary will not introduce any new ideas or any personal views that you, as the summariser,

may have. The summary will leave out examples and details but will, most importantly, be written in your own words, not those of the original writer. No page number required when you summarise.

The following paragraph is an example of a carefully constructed paragraph using supporting sources. This paragraph is addressing that aspect of an assignment question, where it says:

Discuss the reasons why a deep level approach is more likely to result in effective learning.

The primary aim of time spent in study is to generate meaningful learning. Therefore the whole approach to study must be to maximise learning. It has been noted that adult learners come into university with a variety of understandings about what learning really is (Entwistle, 1991). For some students, the focus of their study is to commit to memory as much as they can within their designated study period. For other students, though, they aim at seeking out and *understanding* the meaning of what is being learned. This latter attitude towards study is a characteristic of what's been termed the deep approach to study (Entwistle, 1998; Entwistle, 1991; Ramsden, 1988). Meaningful learning for students who adopt a deep approach is to develop their own understanding rather than simply memorise, and reproduce in some way later on, what has been set down for them to be learned (Entwistle, 1991). It has been noted that for students who seek personal understanding and application of the topic they are studying do so because of internal motivating factors (Bradford, n.d.).

(Note that there are *no* direct quotes in this paragraph).

References

- Neville, C. (2007). *The complete guide to referencing and avoiding plagiarism*. New York: Open University Press.
- Walker, J. R., & Taylor, T. (2006). *The Columbia guide to online style* (2nd ed.). Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press.