Higher Education Development Centre
Student Learning Development
Whaowhia Te Kete Mātauraka

UNIVERSITY
of
OTAGO
Te Whare Wānanga o Otāgo
NEW ZEALAND
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What is Referencing and why is it important?

A Guide to Referencing

**Student Learning Development
University of Otago**

This booklet is an introduction to some of the skills and strategies that will help you successfully complete your studies at Otago.

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To help show academic understanding and rigor you need to place your work within a framework or context that is relevant to the topic you are discussing. This context might, for example, include reference to data (e.g., the latest employment data from Statistics New Zealand), or an exact quote, or a summary of what other people have had to say about the topic. There are many possible resources that you may refer to depending on your area of study.

As you develop your own ideas and arguments and use others' work to support or contrast your views it is really important that you identify clearly which ideas are yours and which ideas or work belong to another person or source. You should always acknowledge any ideas and work that were not originally your own by providing a reference to the source of that information. Doing so is essential to avoid *plagiarism*.

In academic work, referencing is the appropriate acknowledgement of:

Ideas and work that originate from another person

Information that you have included in your work that comes from some other source (which is not common knowledge or widely accepted).

The terms *cite* and *refer* (or *citation* and *reference*) are often used to mean the same thing since to cite a piece of work is to provide a reference to its source.

Referencing is important because it:
- Helps show that you have been thorough and careful (or rigorous) in your academic work
- Indicates what material is the work of another person or is from another source
- Indicates what material is your original work since you have provided a citation for work that is not your own
- Allows the reader to refer back to any external material (i.e., not your own) that you have stated or discussed
- Provides the reader with an indication of the quality and authority of the material you are referencing (e.g., published article in a respected journal, unpublished opinion piece on a popular online website) Of course the relevance and importance of material is dependent on your topic
- Lets the reader see if you have included up-to-date work, seminal (early and influential) work, and material central to your research topic

What do I need to reference?

You should always provide a reference to all material that you:
- Quote
- Paraphrase
- Summarise

You should also provide a reference to any:
- Ideas you are using in your work that originate with someone else
- Data or other information that is not common knowledge, is controversial, or is specialised knowledge (e.g., you don't need to provide a reference to the fact that the kiwi is the national bird of New Zealand, but if you were to state that the kiwi population is declining at a rate of 4-5% per year, then a reference is required)

Note that where the source of your information came from (e.g., social media, TED talk, newspaper, journal, government report) does not determine whether or not you need to provide a reference. Nor does it matter whether the source of your information has been officially published (although this may have an impact on the credibility and authority of the material).

Referencing/Citation styles

There are a great many different styles and you should follow the referencing style required for your particular assignment, or as set out by your lecturer or department, and confirm this for each assignment. How you format your reference depends upon the reference or citation style you use e.g., Vancouver (a numbered system), APA (an author-date system), Chicago (a notes-bibliography system).

In all referencing systems a short reference, called the *in-text citation*, is appropriately placed within the body of the text to provide a key to the full bibliographic details that will follow later in your work in the *footnotes, endnotes, reference list* or *bibliography*. (The format and terms used depend on the citation style.)

The terms *reference list* and *bibliography* are sometimes used to mean the same thing, that is, the complete list of references or bibliographic details for the sources you have cited. However, *bibliography* can be used more broadly to describe a list of relevant, influential, and related

sources, which may also include work that you did not directly cite.

Vancouver example (journal article, one author):

<u>In-text citation</u>

McLean states that it is probable that the chicken came before the egg [1].

<u>References</u>

1 McLean, B. The chicken came before the egg. Journal of Tall Tales 2025:16: 66-68. doi: 00:1122334455

APA example (journal article, one author):

<u>In-text citation option 1.</u>

A recent study by McLean (2025) discussed the issue of which came first, the chicken or the egg.

<u>In-text citation option 2.</u>

A recent study discussed the issue of which came first, the chicken or the egg (McLean, 2025).

<u>References</u>

McLean, B. (2025). The chicken came before the egg. *Journal of Tall Tales, 16*(4), 66-68. doi: 00:1122334455

Chicago example (journal article, one author):

<u>In-text citation</u>

McLean states that it is probable that the chicken came before the egg.[1]

<u>Footnotes</u>

[1] McLean, B. "The chicken came before the egg." *Journal of Tall Tales* 16, no. 4 (2025): 66.

Bibliography

McLean, B. "The chicken came before the egg." *Journal of Tall Tales* 16, no. 4 (2025): 66-68. doi: 00:1122334455

Citation Software

If you are going to write reports and assignments that will require a number of references then it can be a good idea to use citation software to help you manage those references. There are a number of different citation programs; some are free and others cost money to use.

- There are a variety of reference management software tools available. Use the University of Otago Library's Managing references guide to find out which will suit you best http://otago.libguides.com/managingreferences
- EndNote is a widely used program and is supported by the Library and ITS. It is available for Mac and Windows platforms. EndNote is available free to all students via the Student desktop www.otago.ac.nz/studentdesktop. It is also possible to purchase Endnote for your own computer through ITS for a small fee (see: http://www.otago.ac.nz/its/services/software/index.html). ITS training run courses using EndNote (see: http://www.otago.ac.nz/its/services/training/otago030141.html). Your Subject Librarian can also help you with Endnote.
- Zotero is free to use (https://www.zotero.org
- Mendeley is free to use (https://www.mendeley.com)
- If you are using LaTex for your documents then you will have BibTex as your citation management software. You may find http://www.bibsonomy.org/ useful for recording and sharing references

Related Resources

SLD booklet Quoting, paraphrasing & summarising (or how to avoid plagiarising) available online at:

http://www.otago.ac.nz/hedc/students/digital