An introduction to referencing

Being able to reference is absolutely essential to practising academic integrity in your assignments. This guide offers a quick introduction and tips to get you started.

APA referencing style

While there are many styles of referencing used at SCU, this resource refers to American Psychology Association (APA) in-text referencing style (6th edition). This information can be transferred, and applied when using other styles of referencing.

This resource draws upon the excellent APA referencing guides generated by the SCU Library. Please refer to these easy-to-use guides if you are using APA 6th edition referencing style. The PDF abridged Quick Guide to APA is located at www.scu.edu.au/library. The online APA style guide is located at libguides.scu.edu.au/apa.

What is referencing?

Referencing is a method used to acknowledge when ideas, information, data, examples, images and words from others’ work are included in academic writing. It is one of the most important ways SCU students practise academic integrity when writing assignments. At SCU referencing styles vary across different disciplines and courses.

Where can I find the referencing style guide I need to follow?

Your teachers will indicate the referencing style you need to follow when writing assignments and a link to your style guide will often be provided on the learning site (Blackboard site).

The Library site also contains copies of referencing style guides used in each School at SCU.

Check with your teacher if you are in doubt about the correct referencing style to use in assignments.

Why is referencing used in academic writing?

There are five main reasons why referencing is used in academic writing.

Referencing is used to:
1. adhere to copyright laws
2. acknowledge the use of other’s work
3. recognise the efforts of those who have already produced work on the topic
4. add credibility to the writing by providing verifiable evidence
5. offer a collegial gesture to the reader (e.g. being generous by sharing resources you have found about the topic).

Why do I need to reference in assignments?

Unless otherwise stated, students are expected to use referencing when writing assignments at university.

Referencing is used in assignments to:

• practise academic integrity by acknowledging when others’ work is used
• clearly show where your work ends and others’ work begins
• avoid plagiarism and possible penalties
• demonstrate your understanding by showing you have read and used existing work on the topic
• make it easier for your marker to follow up evidence used in the assignment
• ensure your work appears well edited and complete.

Writing assignments at university involves blending sources into your writing in very specific ways. Referencing is an important technique used to blend sources into your writing in a way that carefully shows every time you use others’ work.
When do I need to reference?

Unless otherwise stated in assignment details, you need to reference every time you use others’ work in your writing. This means you need to reference every time you use:

- ideas
- information
- data
- examples
- tables and figures
- words
- sounds.

Even unpublished work needs to be referenced. For example, if you use information or words ideas, information, data, examples, images, or sounds from lecture PowerPoint slides, blogs, songs, or an interview transcript, you need to reference.

Often, the sources we read while preparing assignments confirm and clarify our own existing ideas on a topic or issue. Even in these instances it is important to reference. This is because referencing acknowledges your use of sources, and adds credibility to your writing (because credible sources support your stance).

Common knowledge

Common knowledge is something which most people would know, such as key events or dates. You don’t need to reference common knowledge. For example, when writing an assignment about World War II, the event and key dates relating to battles would be considered to be common knowledge.

Figuring out what falls into common knowledge can be tricky. This is because what is ‘common knowledge’ varies depending on the context, and the audience. If you are not sure whether something is common knowledge check with your teachers (e.g. make a post on the Discussion Board). Usually, it is best to reference if in doubt.

Referencing in two places in assignments: APA examples

APA is an in-text referencing style. This means you will reference:

1. in the text of your assignment (in amongst the sentences of paragraphs), and
2. at the end of the assignment.

Limited referencing details are provided in-text (e.g. author surname(s), year of publication, page number(s)). At the end of the assignment complete referencing information for sources is provided in the list of references.

The idea is that the in-text citations provide enough information (author name, year of publication) for the reader to find the source in the reference list (or bibliography) provided at the end of the assignment.

Example

Example: in-text citation

Drake (2011) argues animal rights and economic growth can co-exist if sustainable strategies are employed.

OR

If sustainable strategies are used it is possible for animal rights and economic growth to co-exist (Drake, 2011).

Reference lists

The reference list appears at the end of your assignment. It contains complete referencing details for all the sources actually cited (referenced) in the text of your assignment. Expect to include a reference list for all assignments unless directed otherwise.

APA referencing style uses an author-date system to organise referencing information. If using APA style note reference lists and bibliographies MUST be ordered alphabetically according to the surname of the author. If using a different referencing style check the style guide for rules.

Use a page break to start the reference list on a new page, and provide a centred title ‘References’.

When referencing try to break the process into phases

Ask yourself:

1. **What type of source am I referencing?**
   The style guide will be organised according to the type of source being referenced. This is because different types of sources are referenced differently. Identify the exact type of source you are referencing (a book with one author, a book with two authors, an edited collection, podcast, journal article found on a web site etc.).

2. **Where am I referencing this source? In-text or in the references list?**
   The style guide will be organised according to where sources are referenced (e.g. in the text of your assignment, or in the references list). This is because sources are referenced differently in-text and in the references list.

Finally, it is much easier to complete referencing in two phases. First, write down all of the referencing details in the correct order. Then go back and edit punctuation to make sure you have included brackets, full stops, commas and italics where you need to.

By completing referencing in two phases you can cut down on study stress and ensure your referencing is correct and consistent.