Citing References and Writing Your Bibliography

Academic work of any kind usually makes reference to books, articles and other documents that the author has consulted during writing. Acknowledgement of these sources is commonly known as ‘referencing’ or ‘citing bibliographic references’.

You must cite and make reference to a source you have used if you make a direct quote from the source or have used the writer’s ideas in your own work. It is important to cite bibliographic references for three main reasons:

- to acknowledge the sources, and ideas of others you have used in establishing your own argument.
- to enable those reading your work to identify and trace the sources you have used to formulate your ideas.
- failure to do so in an appropriate way could result in an accusation of plagiarism, which is regarded as a serious offence in academic institutions.

An understanding of how to correctly acknowledge sources you have used in your writing is, therefore, essential.

There are many variations and different systems for citing and referring to sources, and it can become a complex task. You should always, however, use the system your department or course leader has specified and, more importantly, be consistent in the way you apply it. This guide is intended to give guidelines to the most commonly used forms of bibliographic citation within Durham University. A listing of more definitive works on the subject can be found at the end of this guide.

Key terms

Citing: acknowledging a document from which you have obtained information, or drawn ideas, in the main body of your writing.

Reference: a detailed description of a document from which you have obtained information or ideas.

Bibliography: a list of documents and publications you have consulted in producing your work.
Referencing systems

There are two major recognised systems of reference in the University – Author-date (Harvard and American Psychological Association) and Numeric (including Modern Humanities Research Association and OSCOLA). Each system will be dealt with separately in this guide. There are two principal elements in citing bibliographic references:

- The acknowledgement, or citing, of the source within the main body of your text.
- The listing of sources you have used, as a full reference, at the end of your work as a reference list or bibliography.

Author-date referencing systems (Harvard and American Psychological Association)

Citing a source in the text of your document

When citing a source in the body of your text, use surname of the author followed by year. This is because the bibliography or reference list, which you will create at the end of your text, is arranged alphabetically by author followed by date of publication. The method of citing in the body of text is illustrated below:

Research by Goddard and Barrett (2007) found that standards of care vary across the country. This was confirmed by a survey of health professionals, in which 65% were dissatisfied with current arrangements (Professional survey, 2008). Liu et al. (2008) also established that care workers need additional support.

When you cite a source that has two authors, you must always give both authors’ surnames. When the source has more than three authors (or more than six if using APA style) you need only use the first author surname followed by et al. in your text, but give all authors in the bibliography. Specific pages of a source may be referred to by placing the page numbers after the year, e.g. Thompson (1978, pp.114-131). If you need to cite more than one source by the same named author in the same year, simply add a,b,c, etc after the year, e.g. Thompson (1978a) or (Thompson 1978b).

Listing your sources in a reference list

A reference list represents a collection of full references to all sources cited using the Author-date style in the main body of your work. It comes at the end of your work and is ordered alphabetically by author followed by year. A reference list for the sample of text above would look like this:


You should not divide your bibliography into separate sections for different document types. References should contain all of the information required for a reader to find a source. Standards have been set for different document types to ensure that each reference contains the information necessary to aid retrieval of the source. If you need to discover the correct method of giving a full reference for a source in the style that you have been advised to use, you should consult one of the texts in the Further Reading section below.

**Numeric referencing systems (Modern Humanities Research Association and the Oxford University Standard for the Citation of Legal Authorities [OSCOLA])**

In Numeric systems, numerals in the text refer to sources in the order they are first cited. The numerals may be presented in:

- Parentheses, e.g.

  A new design process was first proposed by Thompson (1), but it was not until a full decade later that his proposals were actually put into practice (2).

- Superscript, e.g.

  More recently Carter, Burns and Halliday have modified the process and improved its impact on the management structure.\(^3\)

**Listing your sources in footnotes and bibliographies**

Most Numeric referencing systems require full references to be listed at the end of the text in a bibliography. Some systems, including MHRA and OSCOLA, also expect you to use footnotes or endnotes in each chapter, with a comprehensive bibliography at the end of your work. In longer works, it is appropriate for reference lists to be presented at the end of each chapter. References are in numeric order matching the sequence in the text.


Note that in the footnotes the author’s given name or initials come before their surname, but in bibliographies or reference lists surnames precede given names.

Although the information that should be included in references when using numeric styles is similar to that of the author-date systems, the order and formatting in which the information should appear differs slightly between styles, as can be seen in the examples above. If you need to discover the correct method of giving a full reference for a source in the style that you have been advised to use, you should consult one of the texts in the Further Reading section below.

Further Reading

Durham University Library holds several items which give guidelines for bibliographic referencing.

The comprehensive online resource *Cite them right: the essential referencing guide* is available through the Library catalogue ([http://library.dur.ac.uk/record=b2643050~S1](http://library.dur.ac.uk/record=b2643050~S1))

Other resources:

*MLA handbook for writers of research papers.* (2016) 8th edn. New York: Modern Language Association of America. **Shelfmark:** Ref 808.027 MLA


