LEARNING ABOUT REFERENCING SYSTEMS – a brief introduction

A variety of referencing systems are used in academic writing, for example, the Modern Oxford, the Vancouver, the Harvard, the MLA, and the APA System. At first glance, these systems might appear to be similar, but they are not. Each of them contains a high number of detailed specifications, all of which are important. It is essential that you familiarise yourself with these details. Not only are there differences between the various referencing systems, there are also numerous interpretations of each system. This complicates things. Therefore, it is essential that you:

1) consult your course handbook or a member of staff in order to establish which referencing system your department expects you to use.

2) choose and use one version of a referencing system. Be consistent - otherwise you might lose valuable marks.

The source cited in the examples below is a book. If you want to know how to cite other types of documents (e.g. journal articles or electronic sources), please consult the websites and manuals listed throughout the section.

The Modern Oxford System gives full bibliographic details at the bottom of the page on which a cited work is first mentioned. In other words, it relies on a footnote approach, not on an alphabetical reference list added at the end of the text. However, it does use endnotes (i.e. notes which are added at the end of the text), but these are not listed alphabetically. Instead, both footnotes and endnotes should be numbered consecutively throughout the text. It is recommended that you use superscript to do this.

An example of the Modern Oxford Referencing System

In the text:
Peck and Coyle[1] tackle writing problems from the student's perspective.
or
A common writing problem among students is that they struggle to position and introduce subordinate clauses[1].

At the bottom of the same page:
1 J. Peck & M. Coyle, *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling*, Palgrave, Basingstoke, 1999, p.15.
or
[1] John Peck and Martin Coyle, *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling*, (Basingstoke, 1999), p.15
or
[1] John Peck and Martin Coyle, The Student's Guide to

> Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling,
> (Basingstoke, 1999), p.15
>
> or
>
> 1. Peck, J. & Coyle, M. *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling*. Palgrave, Basingstoke, 1999, p15.

The traditional version of the Oxford Referencing System is characterised by its use of Latin abbreviations (e.g. 'ibid.', 'loc.cit.', and 'op.cit.'). However, most versions of the Modern Oxford System tend not to use them. For more details, please see:
http://www.mic.ul.ie/lsu/footnoting_referencing_system.htm
or
http://ceds.vu.edu.au/studyskills/referenc.htm

The Vancouver System also relies on a numerical approach because references should be numbered consecutively in the order in which they are first mentioned in the text. However, the Arabic numerals should be written within parentheses rather than added as superscript. These numbers should be linked directly to the reference list at the end of the essay, but the numbers at the start of each entry in the reference list should not be put in parentheses. For more details, please visit the following websites: http://www.library.soton.ac.uk/infoskills/vancouver.shtml or http://www.nlm.nih.gov/bsd/uniform_requirements.html

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An example of the Vancouver Referencing System

In the text:
Peck and Coyle (1) tackle writing problems from the student's perspective.
or
A common writing problem among students is that they struggle to position and introduce subordinate clauses (1).

Reference list at the end of the essay:
1. Peck J, Coyle M. The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling. Basingstoke: Palgrave; 1999.

As explained, the Modern Oxford System and the Vancouver System are numerically formatted referencing styles. In other words, they do not list references according to an author's name or the year of publication. In contrast, the Harvard, the MLA and the APA System list their references alphabetically.

It is easy to acknowledge other people's work when you use **the Harvard System** because you simply add the author's surname and the year of publication to your text. This information should be added in brackets and a comma should be inserted between the surname and the year. However, as there are several versions of the Harvard System, it is necessary to point out that some of these find the comma unnecessary. As mentioned earlier, the

most sensible thing to do is to choose and consistently use one version of a referencing system. Furthermore, remember to use the same version when you produce the alphabetical reference list at the end of the assignment; otherwise you might end up making mistakes (i.e. you might lose valuable marks). To find out more about how to use the Harvard System, please consult:
http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/academic_services/documents/Library/Citing_References.pdf

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An example of the Harvard Referencing System

In the text:
Peck and Coyle (1999) tackle writing problems from the student's perspective.
or
Many students experience writing problems (Peck & Coyle, 1999).

In the reference list:
Peck, J. & Coyle, M. (1999) <u>The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling</u>. Basingstoke, Palgrave.
or
Peck, J. & Coyle, M. (1999) **The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling**. Basingstoke, Palgrave.
or
Peck, J. & Coyle, M. (1999) *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling*. Basingstoke, Palgrave.
or
PECK, J. AND COYLE, M., 1999. *The Student's Guide to Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Although there are similarities between the **MLA System** and the Harvard System, there are also differences. For example, both systems require you to cite works in the text according to the surname of the author. The author's name can occur either directly in the text or in brackets. However, there is a difference: when you use the Harvard System you have to include the year of publication, whereas with the MLA System you always refer to the page the information was found on, even when it is not a direct quote. In addition, both systems state that authors' names should be arranged in alphabetical order, but again there is a difference: on a MLA reference list the second and subsequent lines of each entry should be indented. The inclusion of the author's first name constitutes another difference. For further details about the MLA System, please consult the following sources:
http://www.mla.org/style/sources.html
or
http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_mla.html
or
http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/humanities/english.html
or
Joseph Gibaldi's *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (1998)

or
Joseph Gibaldi's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* (2003).

An example of the MLA Referencing System

In the text:
Peck and Coyle tackle writing problems from the student's perspective (vi).
or
If you as a student learn to construct complex sentences, you will be able to tackle any writing task (Peck and Coyle 15).

In the reference list:
Peck, John, and Martin Coyle. <u>The Student's Guide to</u>
  <u>Writing: Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling</u>.
  Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999.

The final referencing style to be described in this booklet is **the APA System**. Like the Harvard System, the APA System also favours an author – date method of citation. Basically, the author's surname and the year of publication should be inserted in brackets at an appropriate point in the text and a comma should be inserted between them. However, if the citing is author-led, only insert the year of publication in brackets. Moreover, remember that if both the author's surname and year of publication occur directly in the textual discussion, you do not need to add any parenthetical information (please see below).

The APA System's reference list is organised alphabetically, just like it is in the Harvard and the MLA System. However, there are many differences between these referencing styles. For example, when using the APA System or the MLA System, the second and subsequent lines of the entries on the reference list need to be indented, whereas that is not the case when using the Harvard System. Furthermore, when using the APA System and the Harvard System, the year of publication can be inserted in brackets after the author's name, whereas when using the MLA System this information is added right at the end of the entry without brackets. There are too many differences to mention here, but it is worth bearing in mind that the three systems do not share the same approach to punctuation. For further details about the APA System, please consult:
http://www.apastyle.org/faqs.html
or
http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc/social_sciences/overview.html
or
Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2001)
or
Mastering APA style: Student's Workbook and Training Guide (2002)

> **An example of the APA Referencing System**
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> In the text:
> Essays continue to play a significant role in academia (Richards, 2003).
> or
> Peck and Coyle (1999) tackle writing problems from the student's perspective.
> or
> In the beginning of 2003, Richards confirmed that essays continue to play a significant role in academia.
>
> In the reference list:
> Peck, J., & Coyle, M. (1999). *The student's guide to writing: Grammar, punctuation and spelling.*
> Basingstoke: Palgrave.

As mentioned earlier, it is easy to get the referencing systems mixed up and make mistakes. Thus, it is important that you choose and use one referencing system. Some academic subjects dictate which referencing system you should use. Hence, it is essential that you consult your course handbook or a member of staff. Each system has its own detailed specifications which you need to follow consistently. It is worth paying attention to your reference list as well as to how you cite references in text. A lack of consistency signals a sloppy approach to your work. Finally, it is worth noting that there is a difference between reference lists and bibliographies. A reference list should contain the works you have cited directly in the text and nothing else, whereas a bibliography can include sources which you have read, but not cited in the text.

CITING REFERENCES IN TEXT

When you use a referencing system, you will be citing references indirectly or directly in text. Here, we will focus on how to cite references according to the Harvard System. If you have chosen to use one of the other systems, please pay attention to all details because their specifications are not the same.

The two most common approaches to indirect referencing are:

1) Author-led citing:

Peck and Coyle (1999) tackle writing problems from the student's perspective.

2) Information-led citing:

A recent research paper concludes that essays continue to play a significant role in academia (Richards, 2003).

However, if you include both the year and the author directly in the text, do not add parenthetical information:

> 3) In 2003, Richards concluded that essays
>   continue to play a significant role in academia.

These three approaches to citing can all be described as indirect. They are indirect because they show: a) that the author has understood what she read, and b) that she has summarised the key point and put it into her own words. Generally, this is the best way to cite references in text because it shows that you have understood what you read and that you are capable of paraphrasing, that is, accurately and succinctly presenting the information you read in writing.

The alternative to indirect referencing is direct referencing. If you take this approach, you include other authors' words directly in your text. In other words, you quote their exact words. For example,

> 4) Peck and Coyle (1999, p.vii) argued that 'basic
>   correctness is vital, but most of us also want to
>   sound intelligent, mature, sophisticated, even
>   witty, when we write'.

> 5) According to Peck and Coyle (1999, p.vii) 'basic
>   correctness is vital, but most of us also want to
>   sound intelligent, mature, sophisticated, even
>   witty, when we write'.

> 6) In recent years, the traditional attitude towards
>   writing has changed because 'basic correctness
>   is vital, but most of us also want to sound
>   intelligent, mature, sophisticated, even witty,
>   when we write' (Peck & Coyle, 1999, p.vii).

If the quotation exceeds a couple of lines (i.e. more than 30 words), forget the quotation marks and indent the whole block of text. For example,

> 7) Many students encounter problems with their
>   writing. A common problem is
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> > …that they fail to see how the basic rules of constructing sentences, if followed with a degree of self-awareness, can enable more intricate ideas to be expressed in a very controlled and confident way. The main thing that is involved here is being aware of the logic of how to position and introduce a subordinate clause. (Peck & Coyle, 1999, p.15)

> 8) Many students encounter problems with their
>   writing. According to Peck and Coyle (1999,
>   p.15), one of the most common problems is

…that they fail to see how the basic rules of constructing sentences, if followed with a degree of self-awareness, can enable more intricate ideas to be expressed in a very controlled and confident way. The main thing that is involved here is being aware of the logic of how to position and introduce a subordinate clause.

9) It can be difficult to find examples of balanced sentences. However, Peck and Coyle (1999, p.132) provide some useful advice:

> The point about balanced sentences is their symmetry and neatness of structure, features which lend an air of something being carefully thought out and weighed. For this reason, balanced sentences are favoured by politicians and speech-writers who want to make an emphatic but reasonable statement. They are, it has to be said, fairly rare in academic work, but you might spot one in your reading.

Direct quotations should be kept to a minimum because, unless you are really good at integrating them in your writing, all they show is that you can copy other authors' work. In other words, they do not automatically illustrate that you have grasped the essence of what you have read. Another problem with including other writers' words in your text is that it breaks up the flow of your personal writing style. In summary, direct quotations have a tendency to lower the quality of your writing. However, if you do need to include direct quotations, select them with care. Try only to choose quotations which enhance essential points in your work. Furthermore, clearly identify the author's surname, the year of publication, and the page on which you found the words. If you fail to do this, you might be accused of plagiarism. Experienced readers of essays can easily spot changes in writing style. Hence, it is worth checking that your references are correct.