What is referencing and when should I reference?

Good referencing is an essential part of academic scholarship. Mastering it is important for the development of your academic training and research skills. Referencing has four functions:

1. To let the reader/marker know where you got your information from
2. To acknowledge that a fact or idea is not your own and has been taken from someone else’s work
3. To indicate to your course tutor which sources you have been reading on the course
4. To support specific facts or claims which you make in your text.

It follows that when writing an essay, you need to provide a reference when:

I. You use someone else’s idea
II. You report specific factual information (e.g. statistics)
III. You quote a source.

Bad referencing is often indicative of poor writing. It may also lead to accusations of plagiarism (see below).

How do I reference using the Harvard system?

Students should follow the same Harvard system of referencing that is required by the journal Political Studies. If you adhere closely to the following guidelines, you cannot go wrong. If you are unsure about how to reference, look at a recent article in Political Studies and/or ask your tutor.

The first component of the system is that the author’s or authors’ last name(s) and date of publication are given at the reference point in the main text, enclosed in brackets and separated by a comma:

(Halperin and Heath, 2012)

If an author has more than one cited publication for this year, add a, b, c, etc. to the date.

Denote pages by p. (singular) and pp. (plural):

(Chadwick, 2011a, pp. 3-4)
Where two or more works are referenced at the same time they are enclosed within the same brackets and separated by a semi-colon:

(Gallagher, 2015; Nettelfield, 2014, p. 24)

The second component of the Harvard system is a single complete list of references given at the end of the article. This list should be arranged in alphabetical order by the (first) author’s surname. It should NOT be divided by types of source i.e. books, articles and so on. The reference list must contain all literature cited in the main text and any occasional notes; it may not contain a reference unless the work has been explicitly cited.

The format of each reference starts with the last name of the author, followed by their initials, a full stop and then the date of publication in brackets. The entry then continues with different formats for books, chapters in edited books and journal articles as follows:

Books (authored and edited)


Chapters in edited books


Journal articles


Paper presented


Electronic [online-only] journal articles


Web page


NB The author of a web page can be an individual or a corporate body. The publisher is the organisation responsible for maintaining the website.

Newspapers


Never use Latin referencing expressions such as op cit, loc cit, ibid, and avoid any abbreviation terms. In circumstances where one or a few texts are referred to many times, it may be acceptable to introduce an acronym into Harvard referencing as a shortcut, so long as it is explained clearly on first use. For instance, John Locke’s Two Treatise of Government might be abbreviated to TTG. If in doubt, check with your tutor.

Plagiarism: what is it?

‘Plagiarism’ means the presentation of another person’s work in any quantity without adequately identifying it and citing its source in a way which is consistent with good scholarly practice in the discipline and commensurate with the level of professional conduct
expected from the student. The source which is plagiarised may take any form (including words, graphs and images, musical texts, data, source code, ideas or judgements) and may exist in any published or unpublished medium, including the internet. Self-plagiarism is a form of plagiarism and is considered as serious as all other forms.

Plagiarism may occur in any piece of work presented by a student, including examination scripts, although standards for citation of sources may vary dependent on the method of assessment.

Identifying plagiarism is a matter of expert academic judgement, based on a comparison across the student’s work and on knowledge of sources, practices and expectations for professional conduct in the discipline. Therefore it is possible to determine that an offence has occurred from an assessment of the student's work alone, without reference to further evidence.