

An Introduction to Referencing and Avoiding Plagiarism at the University



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What is plagiarism?

The University of Manchester defines plagiarism as “presenting the ideas, work or words of other people without proper, clear and unambiguous acknowledgement”.

Plagiarism includes:

- Using quotations without acknowledging their origin
- Paraphrasing another author’s work without providing a reference
- Including a reference in the bibliography without noting where you have used it in the text
- Submitting someone else’s work as your own

When does plagiarism occur?

Accidentally, resulting from:

- misunderstanding what is and isn’t acceptable (“I didn’t know what I was doing was plagiarism”)
- not adapting to the academic culture in the UK (“This wouldn’t be a problem in my home country”)
- poor organisation (“I didn’t have time to check my work and my referencing because I left my assignment until the last minute”)

Deliberately, resulting from:

- a lack of self-confidence (“My own work isn’t good enough”)
- external pressure (“I must succeed, everyone is expecting me to do well”)
- laziness (“Others do it, so why shouldn’t I?”)



How do I reference correctly?

Do establish which referencing system is used by your particular course. The two most common referencing systems used at the University of Manchester are the Harvard system and the Vancouver system.

Do leave yourself enough time after you finish writing an assignment to check that the references in the text and the final reference list (sometimes known as bibliography) are complete.

Don't omit a reference if you are unsure as to whether one is required: if in doubt it is better to include it.

Do add your references as you write. If you leave referencing until after you have finished the assignment you risk forgetting to add some of them, which could lead to an accusation of plagiarism.

Do note the details of anything you're reading at the time. This will make it easier to reference and enable you to go back to it later if necessary.

Do be consistent! If you've managed to reference a source correctly once, you should be able to do so every time.

Don't be afraid to ask your academic advisor or any academic in your School if you have any questions about referencing. It is your own responsibility to ensure you understand how to reference and avoid plagiarism.

What do I need to reference?

It is important to recognise that referencing is required for any type of contribution to the text that does not originate from the author.

This includes written texts such as:

- books
- journal articles
- chapters in edited books
- websites
- primary sources

It is usually necessary to reference:

- a computer program
- a diagram
- a graph
- A TV programme/DVD
- an illustration
- primary sources (wherever possible students should consult the original source when it is presented in a secondary source).
- an idea

This is not a comprehensive list, but gives some indication of the breadth of possible sources that might require a reference.

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Why are referencing and plagiarism important for me?

Referencing is a process intended to enable readers and markers to:

- understand how the writer's ideas relate to and are influenced by others
- identify other sources that support, expand upon or relate to particular parts of the text
- trace primary or secondary source material

Learning a new system of referencing is a challenge that every student faces at some point in their University career. In our experience most students who are found guilty of plagiarism do so unintentionally because they are unsure how to reference properly. However, irrespective of whether there was intent students found guilty of plagiarism are subject to disciplinary procedures. Therefore, it is important that every student takes the time to ensure they understand how and when to reference properly, in order to avoid accidental plagiarism.

Still unconvinced? Have a look at some of the penalties that were applied in cases of plagiarism during 2008/2009:

- the original mark reduced, affecting the overall mark for the course unit (26 students)
- the original mark reduced to zero, affecting the overall mark for the course unit (79 students)
- a lower class of degree awarded (2 students)
- permanent exclusion from the course (3 students)

Where can I get more help?

Your course or departmental handbook is a good place to start. You can also seek advice from your academic advisor, or the Student Guidance Service. Don't forget that you can ask someone if you need some help!

More information about plagiarism and study skills can be found at www.manchester.ac.uk/sgs.

Written by Alex Drury in association with the Student Guidance Service, the Office of Student Support and Services and the Teaching and Learning Support Office for The University of Manchester.