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PART

1

REFERENCING AND WRITING

1

Writing at university

Reference?

*This is not a reference.
You do not refer to it.*

*Where did you
get this from?*

*Too much quotation –
not enough comment.*

*Your style isn't
academic.*

EVIDENCE??

Comments like these suggest two things:

- ▶ you need to get to grips with referencing
- ▶ you are not yet confident about how to draw on other writers and sources in your own writing.

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This guide is about both of these. The first, referencing, is relatively straightforward. You need to get your head around what referencing is, and why it is such an important practice in UK universities. Then, find out which style of referencing your tutors want you to use. And use it – simple as that.

The point about confidence is trickier. You need confidence in using the conventions of academic writing in your subject area. Again, once you know what these conventions are and understand why they are used, you will be able to reference and write with confidence.

And plagiarism? When you really understand how to draw on other people's ideas and words, then the problem of plagiarism just disappears. It will be your own work that you hand in and you will get credit for it. You will be confident of your ability to write from sources and your tutors will feel the same.

What's different about writing at university?

Quite a lot. That's true no matter where you studied before – whether in the UK or in another country. Nor is it easy to explain exactly why writing at university is different ...

UK universities are research environments. Most tutors and lecturers do research of some sort and base their writing on the style used in the books, articles and reports they read for their research: that's where they, too, hope to publish. So it follows that students are also expected to develop the 'academic' style that matches their field of study.

So what is UK 'academic' style?

Well, of course it varies from subject to subject – after all, dance, science and business are massively different, so the style of writing expected in different areas of study will vary too. But let's try a few generalisations!

You are NOT expected to:

- ▶ write out facts, describe events, and just summarise your reading or lectures (unless you are expressly asked to – for example, to draw up a timeline, outline, describe a process or observation or do a 'summary').

You ARE expected to:

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- ▶ consider a question or topic from several angles: if you are asked to ‘outline’ different theories, studies or interpretations of ‘facts’ or events, you will almost certainly be expected to ‘discuss’ or ‘evaluate’ them too.

You are ALWAYS expected to:

- ▶ Show the EVIDENCE for the statements you make. You will need evidence if the statement is a ‘fact’, or mentions the approach of a particular writer, or describes the findings of a study.

So on to referencing ...

You provide evidence by telling the reader about the source of your information. The reference is the link between what you write and the evidence on which your writing is based. It turns what you write from being just your thoughts and reactions to something that links your ideas with the writings of other people who have thought about the same issue.

