Video tutorial: Which referencing style should I use?

http://www.screencast.com/t/IWJSVUtwAfG

Transcript

Introduction: Welcome to this tutorial on referencing styles from the University of Reading Study Advice team. The tutorial is designed for you to go through at your own pace and you can pause it at any time.

Overview: Everybody knows that referencing is an important academic practice and it becomes even more important when you are studying at university level. But it's quite common for people to think that as long as they've acknowledged the source of their ideas, and done so in a way that means the reader can find the source for themselves, that means that they have referenced correctly.

In fact there are many different styles of referencing - this shows just some of the ones most frequently used at the University of Reading. You need to find out which style is preferred by your department or school and if you are studying modules in more than one department, you may even need to learn how to use different styles for different modules. It's enough to make you hopping mad.

Which referencing style: There are two main differences you may need to pay attention to. The first is in the way the index citations are inserted and the second is how the information in the citations is ordered. In these examples of commonly used styles, you can see that Harvard and Vancouver styles both put in-text references in the body of the text in brackets, while Oxford and MHRA put them in footnotes. In the full citations, the main difference is that Harvard and Vancouver have the date of publication immediately after the author; Oxford and MHRA put it at the end of the citation. There are often small variations on these that are preferred within your department so you must check the examples provided for you. You'll usually find these in the course handbook.

It might seem petty to worry about things like where you put the date, but there are good reasons for getting it right. Different referencing styles are chosen because they work best for the kind of sources you would frequently need to use in your discipline. For instance MHRA, or Modern Humanities Research Association style, is preferred by English Literature at Reading because it has rules to help you when you have to refer very frequently to the same primary text – a novel or poem for example.

Another reason is that it shows you can work academically: that is, that you are thinking about all of the details and the small things that you need to be meticulous and rigorous about and you are making sure that you get things right. Just like if you are not careful about your proofreading it would look as if you don't care about your work, if you don't seem to care about getting your referencing right your reader will start to wonder what else you might not have been careful about.

The last point is that referencing is a key professional skill for academia in the same way as, let's say, knowing the Latin names for common illnesses is for a doctor. You might still be able to cure those illnesses without knowing the Latin names but you wouldn't give the impression of being very professional and that would make it harder for your patients to trust your advice.

You should be able to find out which style to use in your course handbook which is usually on Blackboard. You should also carefully read any instructions you are given with your assignments, as you may be asked to do something different by a particular tutor. If you can't find any specific advice, ask someone in your department – your course tutor, personal tutor or if your department has one, your ASK advisor. One tip is that recent versions of Microsoft Word has an inbuilt facility to reformat references in different styles. So if you have already used one style and you find you should have used another, you may be able to use this to revise your citations. Be aware though that the facility only has a limited number of styles to choose from.

Summary:

So to sum up, there are many referencing styles and you need to make sure you are using the right one for your module.

Using the right style isn't just about being petty, it shows you can work professionally and thoughtfully within your academic discipline.

The best ways to check which style you should use is in your course handbook or assignment instructions. If in doubt, ask someone else, don't just guess.