Harvard Referencing Guide for Biological Sciences

The phrase “Harvard referencing style” is a widely-used and very generic term used to describe an author-date referencing and citation style. There are many different variations in this system – for example, some guides mention the use of page numbers in in-text citations, whereas others do not.

This document presents the version preferred by the School of Biological Sciences and reflects the “Harvard referencing style” that is widely accepted in scientific publications. It differs in some areas from the guide published by the University of Sydney Library, which in turn uses examples from the Style manual for authors, editors and printers, 6th ed.

Acknowledging sources

Citations (in-text referencing)

When you use an idea, thought, result or other aspect of someone else’s work in your own work, you need to paraphrase the other person’s work and then cite the source. Citations appear in the following format (note that page numbers are not included):

(SurnameOfAuthor YearOfPublication)

For example:

… which is similar to the pattern observed in another species of fish (Jones 1999).

It is preferred to cite the source after paraphrasing the idea, thought or other aspect of the source. This is called making the ‘information prominent’ and is preferred.

You are permitted to use the author’s name as the subject of a sentence (‘author prominent’), but this is not good practice. For example, the following is acceptable but makes the sentence more difficult to read and can break the flow of your text:

Jones (1999) observed an increase in activity over time, which is similar…

If you wish to cite a source that you have not read yourself but is cited in a source you have read, the general rule is not to do this. Always find the original source, read it, and then paraphrase it and cite it. The reason is that another author’s understanding or interpretation of the original source may not be exactly correct or contextually relevant, so you should always go back to the origin of the idea or thought.

References (reference list)

All sources that you cite must be included in the reference list, and only those sources that you cite should be in the reference list. The reference list is not a bibliography – it is not a collection of all the sources that you have read in order to gather background information for your writing. Instead, it is a full listing of all the sources you have cited, so that the reader can go and find the sources that you have cited.

The reference list must appear at the end of your work and should start on a separate page. The list of sources must be sorted in ascending alphabetical order of the surname of the first author (not the order in which the sources are cited). You must format the reference list so that it is easy to distinguish one source from the next.

Citations

Formatting citations

That way that you cite a source does not depend on the type of source (i.e. journal article, book, book chapter, website, etc), but rather the number of authors who produced the source. Also, the style of citations does not change depending on whether it is the first time or subsequent times that a source is cited in your text.

For one author, the style is:

(SurnameOfAuthor YearOfPublication)

For example:

… reflected in a similar study on alpaca diet in the tropics (Smith 2003).

For two authors, the style is:

(SurnameOfFirstAuthor and SurnameOfSecondAuthor YearOfPublication)

For example:

… is greatly increased following heavy precipitation (Walker and Watson 1994).

For three or more authors, the style is:

(SurnameOfFirstAuthor et al. YearOfPublication)

The abbreviation ‘et al.’ (short for et alia) mean ‘and others’ in Latin. Note that there is a period after ‘al’ since it is an abbreviation for ‘alia’. Traditionally, ‘et al.’ has been italicised in citations, however the modern trend is to not italicise. It does not matter if you italicise or not – just keep it consistent throughout your writing. For example:

… which is more than double the rate that has been previously observed in frogs (Wu et al. 2010).

Some styles place a comma between the author name(s) and the year (e.g. Nguyen et al., 2004), while other styles do not (e.g. Nguyen et al. 2004). The modern trend is towards no comma. It does not matter which one you use, as long as you are consistent throughout your writing.

Multiple sources within one parenthetical citation

Sometimes, multiple sources say similar things and you may want to cite all of these sources. In these cases, list the citations within one set of parentheses in order of ascending year and separate them with semicolons. For example:

… which has been observed in studies on beetroot leaves (Clarke 1975; Palmer et al. 1999; Fuller and Cochrane 2007).

Quoting

The general rule for direct quoting and citing (as opposed to paraphrasing and citing) is not to do it. Unless the phrase that you wish to directly quote from a source is ground-breaking and life-changing, you should
always paraphrase the idea/thought. Direct quoting is frowned upon in scientific writing, unless the quote is indeed life-changing. If you absolutely must use a direct quote, enclose the word-for-word quote in quotation marks and cite the source immediately after the quote. For example:

… rabbits have previously been found to be “purple orbs of plasma” (Fullan 1997).

References

The way that a reference is presented in the reference list at the end of your work depends on the type of the source.

Journal articles

Journal articles are the bread-and-butter for scientists. We publish our work in journals so that people around the world can learn from and build upon our research. The style for referencing a journal article is:

AuthorSurname, AuthorGivenNamesInitials (YearOfPublication) TitleOfArticle. JournalName, VolumeNumber: ArticleStartPage – ArticleEndPage.

For example:


Note how the authors are listed in the order that they appear in the actual publication (see image below). If there are multiple authors, list their names one after the other, separated by a comma (or a semicolon – it does not matter as long as you are consistent throughout your entire reference list). Journal names can be full names (e.g. Plant Cell Physiology) or abbreviated (e.g. Plant Cell Physiol.) – it does not matter which, as long as you are consistent (and actually use the correct abbreviations). The volume number and article page numbers can be separated by a colon or a comma – again it does not matter which, as long as you are consistent.

As a matter of example, this source would be cited as:

(Makino et al. 2002)

---

2 The order of authors in a scientific publication is significant. See http://www.phdcomics.com/comics/archive.php?comicid=562

3 There are many accepted lists of abbreviated journal names available online, for example: http://images.webofknowledge.com/WOK46/help/WOS/P_abrvjt.html
**Book chapter**

Often, scientists will publish summaries of the research in their field as book chapters. The style for referencing book chapters varies a bit, but the general style is:

AuthorSurname, AuthorGivenNamesInitials (YearOfPublication) TitleOfChapter, in EditorGivenNameInitials EditorSurname (ed.) TitleOfBook, PublisherName, PublisherCity, ChapterStartPage – ChapterEndPage.

For example:


Note that the title of the book is italicised, similar to the title of the journal when referencing journal articles (since the journal is like a book that keeps getting updated and published). In this particular example, also note that there are multiple book editors so the abbreviation ‘eds’ (editors) is used instead of ‘ed.’ (editor).

As a matter of example, this source would be cited as:

(Atkin et al. 2000)

**An entire book**

Referencing a book is similar to referencing a book chapter. In science, books are typically divided into chapters written by different authors who specialise in that particular area and so it is better to cite and reference each chapter individually (see the previous section on referencing book chapters). Occasionally, and entire book will be written by the same author(s). The referencing style for an entire book is:

AuthorSurname, AuthorGivenNamesInitials (YearOfPublication) TitleOfBook, PublisherName, PublisherCity.

For example:


As a matter of example, this source would be cited as:

(Smith and Fuller 2000)

**Websites**

Using a website as a source should be avoided. Sometimes, there is information available only online that comes from a reputable source (such as government reports) that you may use as a source. The style for referencing websites is:

AuthorOrSourceName (YearOfPublication) TitleOfWebsite. URLOfWebsite, accessed DateOfAccess.

For example:

Note that the URL is not presented as an active hyperlink (e.g. not coloured blue and not underlined).

As a matter of example, this source would be cited as:

(Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority 2012)

**Other guidelines**

**Wikipedia**

*Never*, ever use Wikipedia (or similar websites) as a source. However, some articles on Wikipedia contain references to other sources that may prove useful – look up those sources.

**Several sources produced by the same author(s) in the same year**

Sometimes, a particular author (or group of authors) publishes many sources within the same year. In these cases, in the reference list arrange these sources alphabetically by their title and place lowercase letters after the year to distinguish them. In citations, use the year-letter combination.

For example:


Note how for both of these sources the authors are identical. This is the only time you need to use the year-letter system.

Within your body text, you would cite the first source as:

(Makino et al. 1994a)

and the second source as:

(Makino et al. 1994b)

**Using the lab manual as a source**

Your laboratory manual is not a peer-reviewed, published source and therefore should not be used as a source.

**Using lecture notes as a source**

Again, lecture notes are not peer-reviewed or published and therefore cannot be used as a source.
Using a textbook as a source

This is permissible but **not preferred** at all, because the information in textbooks came from real scientists doing real research and publishing real journal articles or book chapters. Therefore, you should always strive to find a research article that contains the information you need, instead of using a textbook as a source. When writing, real scientists do not use textbooks as sources. Since we are training you to write and think like scientists, we strongly encourage you to dive into the massive body of literature and gain your information from the collective knowledge of millions of scientists around the world and through time.