

## Regarding proper referencing

The problem is, of course, that there can only be guidelines, not explicit rules for every single possible sentence you might want to produce.

Personally, I think that as a general strategy you should aim for the following:

- a) Whenever you make a factual statement, give a reference – within reason! There is a context for your essay (for example, you are *not* writing for a class of primary school children). So: don't bother to reference when the fact you report
- can reasonably be considered to be common knowledge for, let's say, anybody up to the educational level of an undergraduate (e.g., "the earth is round" and "the brain consists of different parts" don't ever need to be referenced); or
  - when it is a rather basic piece of information given directly in the lecture (e.g., "action potentials are generated at the axon hillock" might not be common knowledge for *all* undergraduates, but it *should* be common knowledge for everybody *on this particular course* – note, however, that if you use this same information in a totally *different* context, let's say, in an essay on social psychology, then I would recommend that you *do* give a reference.
- b) Whenever you use someone else's arguments or ideas, this *has* to be referenced. For example, don't say
- "Snarks should to be hunted with thimbles and care."
- when in truth this wasn't originally your idea, but somebody else's. What you *should* therefore say is something like
- "According to Carroll (1874), Snarks should to be hunted with thimbles and care."
- c) If the conclusion is yours, but the evidence to support this conclusion comes from somebody else (rather than being either common knowledge or coming from your own research), then again, this has to be referenced: Don't just say
- "When hunting Snarks, it is important to be aware that some may be Boojums."
- when you *could* say
- "In Carroll (1874), the Baker softly and suddenly vanished away after failing to recognize a Boojum. This indicates that when hunting Snarks, it is important to be constantly aware that some may, in fact, be Boojums."
- d) If you use a paraphrase (the classical 'saying it in your own words') or a quote (presenting someone else's words verbatim, and *in quotation marks*), these must be referenced. For a paraphrase, you use the 'normal' style of referencing (Author(s) name(s) and publication year), for quotes, you also should give the page number. However, a few words of caution on either of these:
- Quotes: Avoid them. Really. You don't need them. You are not producing an essay in Philosophy or English Literature, where the exact wording of a phrase is the very topic of your essay. You are producing an essay in a natural science, where the important thing is to know the *concepts* and the *terminology* (e.g., you're expected to know what the striate cortex is, and not to confuse it with the corpus striatum), but it is rather irrelevant how author X or Z happened to phrase these things.
  - Paraphrase: You can't avoid these (after all, you are not – or not exclusively – reporting your own research here). However, it is extremely important to keep in mind that a paraphrase can only *support* your argument (or provide a counter-example, or whatever), but it can not *replace* it! Using someone else's results, ideas, concepts, arguments – even if presented in your own words – is not the same as building your own case (to stick with the example above: If the essay title were something like "It is important to distinguish between Boojums and Snarks. Discuss." I would expect you to be able to answer the simple question 'Well, *is* it important to distinguish between them?' and then to go on and answer the considerably less simple question 'Oh really? Why's that?').

(p.t.o.)

e) Finally, a few more general hints and tips:

- Don't worry about accidentally reproducing somebody else's ideas without ever having heard of them, and then being wrongly accused of plagiarism – the chances of this actually happening are so slim as to be non-existent (after all, you're not yet an expert in the field).
- Don't conveniently 'forget' to put in a reference when you paraphrase something, and then try to wriggle out of an accusation of plagiarism by claiming that you read so much and took such copious notes that you simply lost track of what was yours and what wasn't. *This excuse never works*, because there is a very simple way to avoid such confusion: When you take notes, don't ever copy whole phrases, only jot down the meaning of what you've read. (Try to condense a paragraph into one sentence, and a sentence into a few keywords. This is a very helpful exercise in information extraction, a sure-fire way to avoid plagiarism, and an excellent exam preparation as well.)
- You are expected to produce a *reference list* (listing all the sources you are citing in the text), not a *bibliography* (listing all the sources you might have looked at while preparing your essay, even those you do not cite).
- Check out the publication dates of the references you use – depending on the topic, it might be worth asking yourself whether the information could, perhaps, be outdated (for example, the arrival of new analysis techniques during the last 50 years or so might have changed our idea of neurotransmitter pathways in the brain somewhat...)