Book Review: The complete guide to referencing and avoiding plagiarism

Colin Neville. Open University Press Study Skills, 2007

This book is not only a "must read" but a "must do", as it is rare example of a book on referencing and plagiarism that seeks not only to outline the how and why of referencing, but also to provide clear guidance on the where. Although aimed at students, it is useful for the information professional, whether in their first post or having several years experience behind them. As the use of the Internet continues unabated, this volume is a timely reminder that referencing is "part of [our] societal value system"[1]. The author, Colin Neville, has taken this necessary but essential skill of referencing and given it a makeover.

The relatively slim volume (a mere 200 pages) touches on all issues relating to referencing and many of the issues on plagiarism. It is divided into 10 chapters covering the whys and wherefores of referencing, a chapter on plagiarism and an overview of different reference styles. This can be particularly useful for information professionals who move from one subject area to another. There are four appendices, a useful set of references to follow up and a substantial index, which backs up a frequently asked question chapter!

The chapter on plagiarism, although relatively short, I thought gave a sense of the need for clear referencing. It is this context that students are often not aware of and why referencing is seen as so difficult. With the Net generation, this needs to be reinforced and has recently been the topic of a JISC report on the academic misconduct benchmarking research report[2] (2). Personally I would have liked to have seen this as the opening chapter rather than buried in the middle. The chapter on referencing in action – which I would bet is the most used chapter, along with the FAQ chapter – provides clear examples of how to cite 19 broad types of sources (books and journals, as you would expect but also cartoons, posters and sculptures). This chapter forms just over a quarter of the book. Within the electronic sources section I was pleased to see comment made on evaluating sources before inclusion in a reference list. However I would like to have seen more reference made to evaluation of resources generally, so that, although there is guidance on how to cite a podcast or a text message, users would think why they are referencing such material in the first place. This is an essential element in any information literacy training for students.

I was disappointed that there was no reference made to bibliographic or reference software. There are many tools that have been available to student groups and information professionals for a number of years. These packages, such as Endnote or Reference Manager, or newer social bookmarking tools such as citeulike, support the reference process, and an updated version of this volume should include a chapter on them.

Throughout the volume there are exercises and quizzes to engage the reader and their inclusion means this is less of a dusty "how to" reference book but an essential, practical guide that should be on every student's and every Information Professional's desk. Although aimed at students, the volume will appeal to any UKeIG member.

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[1] Neville, C. 2007 *The complete guide to referencing and avoiding plagiarism*,

Open University Press, p4.

[2] *JISCPAC Academic misconduct Benchmarking Research report*.
http://www.jiscpas.ac.uk/AMBeR/index.php [accessed 21 August 2007]