

Reference Management

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This reference management software column was originally started because of the development in software to deal with a very basic library issue: that of managing the reference process. The number of citation styles and the software packages available to deal with them has grown exponentially over the past decade, keeping all information professionals on their toes!

Over the summer months though the issue of the sheer number of citation styles has begun to be addressed. Firstly at a very informative conference organised by Colin Neville, to report on a long range study of referencing. This was followed by Alex Gill, an academic from the University of Hull, in an article in the THES requesting a review of citation styles.

“Time consuming and difficult”

This phrase was echoed throughout a recent study by Colin Neville, Referencing Learning Area Coordinator from the LearnHigher Centre of Excellence in the Teaching and Learning network, based at the University of Bradford, on how students perceive the role of referencing in academic writing trying to identify the main referencing problems for students and to then consider the implications for Higher Education especially staff development.

The practical issues they faced include understanding when they should reference and the detail required; range of different referencing styles they encountered; inconsistent advice and feedback; lack of clarity as to understanding when and how they could integrate their own experiences into assignments and the ultimate fear of being accused of plagiarism. Such issues were brought about because of the tensions between conforming to institutional expectations (for example, avoiding plagiarism and acknowledging experts) and using referencing as a way of developing one’s own writing voice in assignments.

Tool for shaping knowledge

Referencing is the tool for shaping knowledge and so needs to be carried out correctly. The study highlighted a number of areas that affect the everyday business of any information professional, whether dealing with students or researchers, including:

- What the role of referencing is and the necessary discussion about the purpose of referencing;
- Outlining different referencing styles;
- Tutor misunderstandings of referencing;
- Learning how to reference including different skills for effective learning, such as time management and note taking.

Colin has provided some excellent guidance on how to encourage better referencing at <http://www.writenow.ac.uk>.

Reformed, unified and simplified

This was the title chosen by Alex Gill (an academic from the University of Hull) for an interesting and thought-provoking article in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* in June (<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=407112>), which proposes a new style to stop the myriad of styles which currently prevail. Specifically, he is suggesting that the Author/Date style be retained (sorry science!) but that the reference type or source material is included to help identify the type of material that is being referred to. As anyone who has dealt with students struggling to understand the nuances of referencing it should not be a game of Cluedo to pull references together. Part of the reason why users find it so difficult is because they are coming to the puzzle from the wrong angle. If references were more managed as part of the workflow, then the difficulties would be less stark. Instead, a bit like writing an abstract for a thesis, references are hastily pulled together prior to submission, rather than being given the consideration they deserve to promote the originality of their work. Alex is trying to gather views from practitioners and professionals alike, so if you have a view on how decluttered reference styles should be, please contact Alex via his blog at <http://academicreflexions.blogspot.com/>.

Update on reference software packages

Now that Microsoft Word 2007 has an integrated citation manager and auto-formats references for around ten major styles, including Turabian, the problem of excessive number of styles may well fade. However the limit to ten citation styles, no option to edit or create a new style and the initial manual input suggests more work by Microsoft needs to be done before this product replaces more sophisticated packages.

Endnote X3 has been released with yet more styles available (this time in chemistry) and the ability to work with OpenOffice.org Writer 3. Of particular use is the ability to manage multiple bibliographies within a word document (such as end of a section, document, etc). For academic institutions, Endnote X3 uses a new preference for EZproxy allowing more recognition of legitimate full-text resources. The direct link with Times Cited feature from ISI

Web of Science allows users to organise personal publication lists for ResearcherID and view personal citation metrics, enabling a more managed approach to maintaining references.

A useful comparison of reference software can be found on Wikipedia at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_reference_management_software.