

The Complete Guide to Referencing and Avoiding Plagiarism

Colin Neville: *The Complete Guide to Referencing and Avoiding Plagiarism*, Open University Press, Feb 2010, 288pp. Price £18.99 (paperback only)

This is the second edition of a guide, first published in 2007, from the Open University Press Study Skills series, and it still deserves its place as a staple of library collections and student reading lists.

Packed with helpful advice, it is however more than just a “how to” manual. The opening chapters acknowledge that many students find the business of referencing burdensome and confusing. The results of a research project on student perceptions of referencing are used to set the tone of the book, using quotes from students to introduce each chapter and main topic, and using examples of difficulties and frustrations to guide readers to relevant sections.

The practical guidance is well organised:

Chapters 1-3 outline the “what”, “why” and “when” of referencing, and these are reinforced by the FAQs in Chapter 7. A wide range of queries and misconceptions is dealt with concisely, sympathetically, and helpfully.

Chapter 4 looks at plagiarism, copying and pasting, and paraphrasing, and is later balanced by Chapter 8, which gives tips for students to find their own voice and express their own ideas.

Chapters 5 and 6 outline the principal referencing style groups, with examples of the most common schemes in use. They are complemented by many examples of referencing for a variety of common and uncommon sources in Chapter 9.

The guide is aimed at students writing essays and assignments. It is written (at times almost too much) in sympathy with the reluctant student, for example, addressing the fear of being accused of plagiarism more than it stresses good research practice and skills development. But, this approach, together with the author’s heartfelt complaint against the plethora of variations in citation styles and lack of absolute standards, does help to win the sympathy of the reader.

As a practical handbook, it is easy to use, particularly the wealth of practical examples in Chapter 9. This section could benefit from more thorough indexing, e.g., the index entry for dissertations directs the reader only to the section on referencing electronic sources, whereas dissertations are also covered elsewhere in detail, in their traditional format.

The guide will be a great source of material for librarians or others teaching referencing and good academic practice, particularly the sections on student perceptions, and the FAQs. For completeness, I would like to have seen more pointers on the use of reference management software and more discussion of differences in referencing practice between subject disciplines.

The essential message about referencing is what librarians and lecturers have been teaching since the beginning of time, namely: get yourself organised, be methodical, spend a little time and effort getting things right from the beginning, and you'll save yourself time and aggravation in the end. One can't help wondering whether students in a hurry will take the time to read beyond the practical reference sections of this book and learn this valuable lesson.

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