

## Frequently asked questions

### 1 How long should a quotation be?

There are no hard and fast rules. However, it is usually expected that quotations will be quite short. Often sources are just mentioned in passing.

The mark you gain for your assignment will depend in part on how well you have used the word limit. If you use long quotations you waste this word limit, as you won't gain many marks for material contained in quotations.

### 2 I worry that I can't express my ideas as well as the people who write books and articles. Why do I need to use my own words when their words are better?

In deciding how many marks to give you, your tutor will consider not just the quality of your writing but also what your writing reveals about your academic skills – your interpretation, the ways in which you have used published information, your ability to structure an argument, and so on.

You will gain marks by demonstrating your ability to select from sources, to cite and reference them accurately, and to draw material together succinctly using a number of sources. Tutors cannot give you marks for words written by someone else.

### 3 What is a 'citation'?

Whenever you use or refer to material from another source, you are 'citing' that source: this mention of the source is the 'citation'.

For each citation, you should provide a corresponding reference. Gather together the references for all your sources in a single list at the end for your work.

### 4 If I have used material from the internet, do I still need to give a reference?

You should give references for all of the materials you cite, including internet pages. Materials on the internet may change more quickly than printed materials, so your reference should include the date on which you accessed each source. For example:

Friends of the Earth. <http://www.foe.co.uk>. [Accessed 01/10/2009.]

In your work, cite any webpage you use as if it were a printed source. For example:

Friends of the Earth (2009) estimate that forests in Indonesia could have disappeared completely by 2020...

### 5 If I have rewritten material from a book or the web in my own words, should I still give a reference?

Yes – even though you are not using exactly the same words as the book or web page, you are still making use of someone else's original work and it is courteous to acknowledge this.

Acknowledgement of sources is also a fundamental aspect of good academic practice: compiling a comprehensive references list demonstrates to your tutor that you are aware of academic conventions.

## 6 What if one source refers to another source – which one do I cite?

Suppose you include a quote from a source which you have found reproduced in another document. The original source is the 'primary source' and the document you are reading is a 'secondary source'.

If you can, confirm the quotation by referring directly to the primary source. If you can do this, you can reference the primary source directly and you need not mention the secondary source (unless you are also using it in another way).

If you cannot access the primary source yourself, copy out the reference to it as it appears in the references list in the document you have. Then write 'Cited in:' and add a reference for this secondary source.

Giving both sources in this way makes it possible for the reader to locate the primary source. It also alerts the reader to the fact that your information depends on the accuracy of the reference provided in the secondary source.

## 7 How exact do my references need to be?

Your references should be very exact, in wording and in style. Tutors, markers and external examiners are usually quite particular about referencing, right down to the commas or full stops and the capitalisation of initials!

If you provide any reference that is only 'more or less' right you will probably lose marks. To attract the maximum marks, be sure to check your references thoroughly both for the accuracy of their information and the style in which they are presented.

## 8 Why might my referencing lose marks?

Even minor errors in referencing may cost you marks. For example, you will lose marks if you:

- do not cite any source documents
- quote or refer to ideas or information without naming your sources
- fail to provide references for the sources you do cite
- include references to sources that you have not cited in your work
- use authors' forenames when you should give only initials, or vice versa
- omit the year of publication
- omit the publisher's name (if a book)
- omit the article title, journal title or volume number (if a journal)
- put the different parts of your references in the wrong order
- put the references in the list in the wrong order – typically they should be alphabetical by author's surname (Harvard) or numerical by order of citation (Vancouver).

In general, if you present your references in any form that does not exactly match the method required for your course, you may lose marks quite unnecessarily. Make time to become familiar with the referencing system your course uses.