

Why we cite, what we cite, how we cite

Citations are an important currency in academic publishing. Success of an article or a publication is measured in the number of citations it inspires, so ensuring your own work is properly cited is of the utmost importance. With publishers increasingly using cross reference technology to verify the originality of submitted articles, getting citations right has never been more critical. This guide has been put together to help you avoid the pitfalls of citation that authors can unintentionally fall into.

What to cite

Anything which has provided you with information, data or opinions needs to be cited. This includes email exchanges, personal correspondence, multi-media, as well as books, journals and web sources. The appearance of citations will vary according to reference and journal style, but the principle of behind citing all academic work remains the same whatever the publication style or subject area.

Self-citation

One of the most common reasons for a submission failing an originality check is self-plagiarism, with authors borrowing from their own previously published work.

Remember, even your own work needs a citation.

It's good news though: studies show that self-citation is more likely to lead to being cited by other authors (Fowler and Aksnes (2007) and Hellsten *et al* 2007 (as cited in Korner 2008))

Why we cite

The key reason for citation is to acknowledge use of other people's work. If you use someone's work, you need to give them credit for it. This includes reproducing any figures or data, taking a sentence or passage verbatim, paraphrasing, or using their ideas.

By using other studies or reports that support or give grounding to your ideas, it gives more authority to your own work. This can be useful if the topic you are commenting on is subjective.

It is important to be open and honest in your work, and show readers where you got your information from. By displaying your sources it is showing readers that your work is reliable and can be trusted.

Finally, fully crediting other people's ideas is the best way to reveal your own original thoughts.

Key reasons for citation

- Giving credit where credit is due
- Give support to your ideas or claims
- Refers interested readers to other sources on the same subject
- Displays the integrity of the research and the author's erudition
- Aligns the article with a particular school of thought
- Shows respect for fellow academics and researchers

How we cite

Quoting verbatim

When using words or sentences from another source verbatim, it is essential that these are placed in quotation marks, according to journal or reference style.

e.g. Bill Smith said “cats are superior beings to dogs” (2012, 94)

...the average birth weight of babies “has increased year on year, many up to 10lbs in 2012” (Brown, 2012, 16)

Paraphrasing

When using an idea/fact or paraphrasing, quotation marks are not needed, but the citation must be included

e.g. Bill Smith (2012, 94) claimed that cats are better than dogs.

The average birth weight of babies has increased each year since 1998 (Brown, 2012)

e.g. It has been shown in previous studies (Smith, 2010; George, 1999) that cats are better than dogs, but also that a small minority of people interpret their humility for aloofness (Felix, 2005, 71-2).

Sources within sources

It is important not to mislead readers by citing sources which you have not consulted; this includes citing a ‘source within a source’. For example:

According to Felix (2005) 98% of dog owners think cats to be supercilious creatures.

If you have not actually read Felix (2005) but read the statistic in the Smith 2012 paper, it would be wrong to cite Felix here as it would be misleading your authors into thinking that the Felix paper was read and used in your paper, when in fact it was the Smith paper that was consulted. Another reason that this is problematic is that Smith could have been mistaken – perhaps it was actually 89% according to Felix but Smith mistyped it, this error would then be reproduced in your paper if the original source is not consulted.

If you can’t get hold of the original paper, or if it is in a language you don’t read, you can get around the problem by mentioning that you are citing a source within a source:

According to Felix (2005; as quoted in Smith 2012, 79) 98% of dog owners think cats to be supercilious creatures.

Commonly known: facts that need no citation

One situation in which you don't need to cite is when a fact is commonly known. For example, if were to write 'India has a population of roughly 1bn people', you do not need to provide a source for this. It is commonly known information and not something that is taken from a specific source.

If, however, you were to write 'India has a population of 1,220,206,354 people' then clearly this very specific data has been sourced from somewhere and needs a citation.

What constitutes 'common knowledge' may vary between subject strands; if in doubt, include a citation.