

# Plagiarism - avoid it by knowing what to reference

In order to avoid plagiarism, you need to know *what* to reference. There are at least three aspects you should consider:

## 1. Type of assessment task

What and how you are expected to reference depends on the type of assessment task you are working on. For example, you can safely assume that research essays will require full citation. However, other assessments, like a closed book exam, are unlikely to require you to memorise entire quotes and page numbers for any key references. The need to reference in other assessment tasks (e.g. oral presentations) may not be so clear, and in such cases, you should consult your Unit of Study coordinator.




## 2. Common knowledge

Not everything needs to be referenced in all assessment tasks and usually one exclusion is what we can consider as common knowledge. For example, it would not be necessary to reference a statement about Australia being a democracy and not a socialist state, as that is common knowledge. However, discussion of the nuances of opinions from various Australian political parties on a topical issue would typically need to be referenced if your assessment task asked you to contrast such views, because it is assuming that they would not be common knowledge. If in doubt about what can be assumed as common knowledge, consult your Unit of Study coordinator.

## 3. The validity of information

As a general rule, only credible sources should be used. Many websites, general members of the public and other students lack the credibility required as a source in a research assessment task. Credibility is attained through some type of quality assurance process. For example, both qualified professionals and textbooks have been through such a process. However, the internet does not have a standard quality assurance process. Information may be published with no checks for accuracy or substantiation. For example, both qualified professional and academic journals and textbooks have been through such a process.

 The following is a good checklist for evaluating the validity of website sources.

- The website should provide information on the authors of the material presented, whether individuals or organisations AND they should be well-known organisations or individuals with professional standing in the area you are researching.
- All data provided is supported by evidence and research.
- The links provided on the site should refer you to appropriate sites providing further information on the topic, not to advertising or inappropriate adult sites.
- The website provides references to back up facts, theories, and analysis presented and you are able to cross-reference them.
- The site declares its purpose and funding sources, allowing you to judge possible biases in the material presented.

## More Resources



If you would like to learn more about how to judge the quality of internet sites as a possible reference, you can start with the following websites:

- [Evaluating Web Pages: Techniques to Apply & Questions to Ask](#) , UC Berkeley
- [Thinking Critically about Discipline-Based World Wide Web Resources](#) , UCLA



Some of the information for your essay may not come from published sources. You may have learnt something important through a conversation or viewing audio/visual material. Usually the following are potentially acceptable sources of an academic reference:

- Conversation/consultation with your lecturer/tutor or other academics
- News and documentary programmes on TV and radio
- Interview or email correspondence with a professional in the area of research

It is also possible to use private conversations or correspondence as a source of reference in your academic work. To make sure your reference would be acceptable, the following guidelines are important:

- You need to seek permission from the information source to use them as a reference.
- You need to make sure the person has appropriate professional or experiential background to provide you with honest and researched information. Typically another student would not fall into this category.
- You need to record the date and time of the interview or correspondence in your reference.
- You should use a published source, if such is available, and only rely on private interviews or correspondence as a last resort.
- You should double check, when possible, the accuracy of the information obtained through interviews or private correspondence.



Check with your Unit of Study coordinator how they wish conversations to be referenced. For example, do they want ideas from their lecture notes or ideas generated by conversations with peer students to be referenced?