

Referencing

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When we learn anything, telling the time, mathematics, why some things make us very ill, we learn it in one of three ways. One way is by **doing it**, one way is by our five senses and one way is by **being told**.

The first and second way fall into the category of “research” and learning by research is very unusual. The third way, being told, is the way we learn most things and **those things must be referenced**.

The examples* listed below, of knowledge which **does not** need to be referenced and **does** need to be referenced, are very simple and clear. Deciding if something needs to be referenced is not always simple and clear but by **referring** back to these examples, and **thinking**, you can usually work it out. If you cannot work it out **you must ask someone who knows** for example your teacher.

Why is it essential to reference?

You **must** reference knowledge because people reading or hearing your knowledge may not understand it and want to know more about it. The reference tells them where to find the knowledge. It is a tradition **and a rule** in western places of learning that you reference **all** knowledge which is not known by **everyone**.

Examples* of knowledge which does need to be referenced and does not need to be referenced

A three-year-old cuts her finger with a knife. She sees the blood come out and feels the pain. She has learned the the finger has blood in it and cutting it causes pain. As a medical student 20 years later she will not need to reference that knowledge.

A medical student talking about a neck injury in a presentation may refer to amount of blood lost. If she states that a 30% loss of blood is considered serious, she will need to reference it, perhaps using: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?type=printable&id=10.1371/journal.pone.0057594> accessed March 25 2020

If I ask her how she knows there is blood in a body, she can answer “I have seen it come out.”

If I ask her how she knows 30% blood loss is serious, she cannot answer. “I read it somewhere” is not acceptable.

Asking yourself how you know something is a good technique for deciding whether to reference something. Another good rule is: if in doubt, reference it but remember, you don't have to reference “gravity” to Newton.

There are some lesser reasons to reference knowledge. Read about the “Piltdown Man” which was for many years considered by some to be a “missing link” in the evolution of man from apes. Just search piltdown man hoax for a fascinating story.

Another reason for referencing is that it shows that you have read many experts' work and therefore you know your subject.

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How do I reference?

There are many referencing systems, Harvard, APA etc. Your University, School or Faculty will tell you which one to use.

If they don't tell you, you ask. You **cannot** choose yourself. You may think they are the same, but **they are not**.

There are many in the Internet - free

https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/t4-media/one-web/university/library/how-to/UHI-mini-Student-referencing-guide-en-N_A.PDF accessed 25 March 2020

Most UK universities have instruction on referencing. You can find one at the above link. It is a pdf file.

Exercise

Locate the journal article at: <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?type=printable&id=10.1371/journal.pone.0057594>

Read the references at the end of the article and find out what they mean using the Harvard reference guide above.

Health Warning Do not be unhappy if you are confused by all this. What matters now is that you know what a reference looks like, you know everybody has to use them and you know they help you learn. **There will be more on referencing later.**