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READING, REFERENCING AND THE MANAGEMENT OF INFORMATION

Reading

Ideally, the bulk of your reading should come early on in the investigation, though in practice a number of activities are generally in progress at the same time and reading may even spill over into the data-collecting stage of your study. If you're working to a strict time scale (and you will be, even if you have the luxury of being on a three-year full-time PhD programme), try to discipline yourself to ensure that reading doesn't take up more time than can be allowed. This is easier said than done because when you begin work on a topic, you're never sure what might be important and what might be irrelevant. Even if you're very disciplined about reading and resist the temptation to be led astray by some really interesting-sounding books or articles which may have nothing whatsoever to do with your topic, you'll still find it difficult to confine reading to precise time slots. It's rarely possible to obtain copies of all the books and articles at exactly the time you need them and there will always be new publications which may seem to be the answer to your prayers and which you consider just have to be read. The one thing we always have to accept is that we can't do everything. We have to do the best we can in the time

available – and not to use 'more reading needed' as an excuse for not actually getting down to writing and what else needs to be done to progress the research!

Any investigation, whatever the scale, will involve reading what other people have written about your area of interest, gathering information to support or refute your arguments and writing about your findings. Reading as much as time permits about your topic may give you ideas not only about the research others have done but also about their approach and methods – and this is important, because everything you do from the start of your research will be preparation for the production of the final report.

Experience has shown that no matter how sophisticated we may consider ourselves to be as learners and researchers, we all need to be reminded about the importance of systematic recording. As soon as we begin to read, we begin to record and we have to include all the necessary detail. Next week, next month, 'one of these days', 'when I've got a minute' or 'when I've finished reading these 50 journal articles' won't do. We all think we shall remember, but after several weeks of reading, memory becomes faulty. After a few months, we may vaguely recall having read something some time about a particular topic, but when, where and by whom escapes us. After a longer period, the chances of remembering anything are remote.

Note-taking and guarding against plagiarism

As you read, make notes of what seem to you to be important issues and highlight them. You will be on the lookout for recurring themes, categories and keywords which will become increasingly important in your search for a structure or framework for your own research. Priorities (and issues) will inevitably change as your reading continues. You will in all probability abandon some of your early categories and identify others but keep a record, even of your early abandoned categories. You never know. They may crop up again in your later reading.

Take care with your note-taking. A particularly perceptive observation by an author may often illustrate a point you might

wish to refer to, or even quote, at a later stage. Always make it quite clear in your notes which is the quotation and which is your paraphrase, or when you come to write up your project, you may find you are committing the sin of plagiarism.

Plagiarism is using other people's words as if they are your own. Remember that all sources have to be acknowledged, including paraphrases of other people's words *and* of other people's ideas. The issue of plagiarism has become a major issue in schools and in higher education, as a result of the availability of model answers to examination and assignment questions on the Internet – for a fee. It seems that large numbers of people are now prepared to pay for 'a guaranteed A grade essay' and blatantly submit the essay, or parts of it, as their own. The development of materials on the Internet has greatly increased the number of plagiarists who, apparently, can see nothing wrong in submitting such material as their own. This has become such an issue that plagiarism software has been developed and now is regularly used, particularly in universities, to check examination and assignment texts.

There have been some unfortunate well-publicized plagiarism cases recently which have brought discredit to the individuals concerned and now supervisors are on the lookout for any examples in your drafts. Most institutions now have guidelines on plagiarism, and make it clear that the penalties for infringement will be severe. These range from giving plagiarized work a fail grade to expulsion from the course. However, the final responsibility is yours, so take care. Guidelines are regularly updated, so make sure you have a copy of the latest version which in all probability will be provided in your institution's programme handbooks and in any codes of practice relating to academic standards. However, the best way to ensure you will never use other people's words or ideas as your own without acknowledgement is to be meticulous about your note-taking and in recording exact details of references.

If you are making an exact copy of wording, add inverted commas at the beginning and end of the extract. Record the chapter and page numbers, show clearly if you have left out any word or words in the text by adding three full stops, and file the extract where you know you will be able to find it, even if this requires some cross-referencing. If you have the facilities, it's an even

better idea to photocopy the extract, adding details about the source in the usual way (library staff will advise about copyright regulations).

There's one more thing to bear in mind as you read and make notes, namely the need to ask yourself whether you can trust what you read. This is always difficult, but ask yourself whether any other sources corroborate a particular source. What does the research/report/document actually say, and what evidence is provided to support the findings? What is known about the author? Do you suspect bias? If so, why? Are sources fully referenced so that you can check them? Brendan Duffy considers all these questions and many more in the 'Critical analysis of documents' section of Chapter 7. Before you begin any concentrated period of reading, refer to this chapter and section and devise your own 'authenticity' checklist.

I keep a record of everything I read, even sources which have proved to be of no interest or use to me. Other people don't and have made it clear to me that as far as they are concerned it's stupid to keep records of useless sources and they are not going to clutter up their files with rubbish. They may well have a point and you may agree with them, but I tell myself there must have been some reason why I decided to look at the book or article in the first place. The title may have sounded interesting, or I might have read other works by the same author which impressed me. It would follow then that some time in the future, the title may still sound interesting and the author may still be remembered as having produced quality work in another context. I might come across the reference again, and ask to borrow the book again. I might have asked for a copy on inter-library loan, and there are costs involved with that. All this would be a waste of time and money, and in any investigation, whether small or large, there is never enough time to do everything that has to be done. A note to remind me why I decided the work was of no interest is enough to jog my memory and to enable me to abandon that particular line of enquiry. We all have our own ways of working and you will have to decide what your own particular practices are.

Referencing



In the early days of an investigation, it may seem enough to jot down a reference on the back of an envelope, but old envelopes thrown into a box will not provide a reliable resource, and the likelihood is that references will be incomplete and difficult to track down at a later stage. If you are only going to need half a dozen references, then scraps of paper may serve, but as your investigation proceeds, you will accumulate many sources of information and an orderly system of recording is essential *from the day you start reading*.

There are several perfectly acceptable ways of recording sources and other information. The Harvard method, i.e. author's surname and date, which I use in this book, has a number of advantages over other methods. It avoids footnotes, which are awkward to deal with and all sources mentioned in the text appear at the end of the report and not chapter by chapter. Most institutions will have a preferred 'house' style which you will be expected to adopt. If you are left to decide yourself, you will need to consider which of the available options suits you best. Different supervisors (and different publishers) adopt different styles. Look at the bibliographies or references sections at the end of several books. The likelihood is that you will find different approaches, though each will contain the following information.

For books

- Author's surname and forename or initials
- Date of publication
- Title (underlined or italics) and which edition, if appropriate
- Place of publication
- Name of publisher

For example:

May, Tim (2001) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process*, 3rd edn. Buckingham: Open University Press.

As you see, this is the third edition of a book first published in 1993 and so the number of the edition must be included. A new edition will incorporate a significant amount of upgrading and new writing, whereas a reprint is just what it says, namely the production of more copies of the original publication. Only new editions need to be noted.

A word about the punctuation. There is no reason why a full stop should appear after the title or '3rd edn'. You might prefer to use a comma or to leave a space. You might decide it would be better to indent the second line in order to make the author's name stand out more clearly. If you wanted to, you could put the author's name in capitals. Make up your mind and whichever approach you adopt, *every single reference you record from then on must be the same* – but remember, always check your organization's guidelines before you start.

Where there are three or more authors of a book, the same format will apply as for one author, but there are one or two things to note. When sources are referred to (cited) in the text of your report, there is no need to include the full reference. It is sufficient to write 'As May (2001: 42) says . . .'. I like to have page numbers because, without them, it becomes time-consuming and sometimes impossible to find where the quotation appears in the book, though many authors do omit them.

If there are three or more authors, then it's customary to use '*et al.*' (and others) in the text for the second and subsequent names, though again, practice does vary. There is no full stop after 'et' because it is a complete word, but there is after 'al.' because that is an abbreviation for the Latin 'alia'. The full reference will appear in the alphabetic list of references at the end of your report. If an author or authors had more than one publication in the same year, then suffixes 'a' and 'b' should be added after the date of publication.

Let's move on. The referencing rules and regulations are not finished yet. There are certain differences if you are recording information about a journal article or a chapter in a book.

For journal articles

The author's surname, forename or initials and the date of publication are the same as for books but then, you are required to give

- the title of the article (sometimes in inverted commas, sometimes not);
- the title of the journal from which the article or chapter is derived (generally underlined or in italics, though again, not always);
- the volume number of the journal, the issue and page numbers.

For example, for a journal article:

> Whitehead, N. (2003) 'Herbal remedies: integration into conventional medicine', *Nursing Times*, **99**(34): 30–33.

The volume number is generally in bold type and the issue number in brackets after the volume number. Page numbers of journal articles are always given.

For chapters in books

For a chapter in a book, something on the following lines would be appropriate:

> Wragg, T. (2002) 'Interviewing', in M. Coleman and A.R.J. Briggs (eds) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

This is a chapter in a book which was edited by Coleman and Briggs and so (eds) is added after their names. After the 'in', the convention is that initials should be placed before rather than after the surname. However, follow whatever convention your institution requires.

Citing journal articles and other materials taken from CD-ROMs or the Internet

Remember that if you make a record of electronic journal articles, in addition to giving the full reference details as above, you also need to indicate that the sources were obtained from a CD-ROM or online. For example:

- Name of author
- Title of article (not underlined/italicized)
- [CD-ROM] or [Online] in square brackets
- Journal information (journal title underlined or italicized)
- Date of article
- Available from: or retrieved from: . . . name of service, URL of web site and date it was accessed. The URL (universal resource locator) is the unique address of the server on which the document is stored.

Practice may very slightly but the main point is that sufficient information must always be provided so that other researchers are able to retrieve the article from the database.

Some of the citations of electronic sources are quite complex so if your library provides guidance about how they should be recorded, follow that advice. However, if no guidance is given, it's best to check with Cite Them Right at http://www.unn.ac.uk/central/isd/cite/, produced by Richard Pears and Graham Shields at Northumbria University. This is an excellent, regularly updated (and at present free) site which gives guidance on how to cite a wide range of electronic and many other materials including email correspondence, computer programs, bibliographic databases, newspapers and electronic conferences.

Creating, editing and storing references electronically

Software such as EndNote, ProCite and Reference Manager has been available for some time now and new versions will no doubt continue to appear on the market. Bibliographic software has many advantages for researchers. For example, EndNote gives us

the facility to create, store, organize, retrieve and cite references in our reports. Its library (database) holds more than 30,000 references and it allows us to search and manage the online bibliographic databases. Once we know how, we are able to produce our own bibliographies in various formats and, if we're clever enough, to insert graphics into text. Copyright and licensing restrictions may apply to some databases and electronic journals which restrict what we are permitted to print but others will allow us to download items direct into our own records. We may even be able to access summaries of journal articles, texts of newspapers, dissertations, abstracts of doctoral theses, books and conference proceedings.

You may find that your library will provide you with on-campus access to and support for one or more of the established systems. If so, you're lucky. Never ignore the facilities which are on the doorstep, particularly if they come free. However, many researchers are part-time, live or work some way from their main academic library (or are even based overseas), spend little or no time on campus and need to be able to access the software at home.

If you can provide evidence that you are an 'academic user' and wish to have access to your institution's databases and other facilities at home, that may be possible. Ask your supervisor what steps have to be taken. If she or he doesn't know, or says home access is not permitted, look further. Always look further. Ask one of the librarians. I always believe librarians know everything, and they generally do. They will know the rules and will tell you what is involved. However, even if permission for home use is given by your library, you need to be aware of one or two other requirements – and probably costs.

For example, you will discover that referencing and online search software take up quite a lot of space on your hard drive and require a great deal of available memory, so if you plan to work from home, you will not only need to be fairly computer-competent, but you will also need a computer that is up to the job. You may find you have to upgrade your computer or even buy a new one, as I did. That will cost, so before you commit yourself to anything, check the hardware requirements with one of the software suppliers.

When I decided I really had to become familiar with electronic referencing and to gain access to bibliographic databases, I optimistically thought it would be a straightforward and fairly quick matter. I read the helpful leaflets and attended the courses provided by the library and I practised. I have to confess it has taken me a lot longer than I thought it would and I am still learning. When I am working in the campus library, there is generally someone on hand to assist, but when I am at home and find I am not sure about or have forgotten some procedure, I am dependent on the EndNote manual. I really do wish it would stop telling me that the methods are 'simple' and that everything is 'made easy' when I find myself constantly asking what this, that or the other means. I had the same problem with the computer manual in the far-off days of venturing into computer use. Now manuals aren't generally provided with computers and I am dependent on what to me is the unhelpful computer help menu. I even find myself lamenting the lost days of the manual about which I once constantly complained.

I appreciate that not all people have these difficulties, and thank goodness for that. I have known people who, when they bought their first computer, sat down one Saturday and appeared to have mastered it by Sunday evening. Some of my former students have told me they found the bibliographic software similarly easy to understand and use and said they really enjoyed getting to grips with the techniques of electronic referencing. They found the instructions provided in the manual to be perfectly clear and they shook their heads in bewilderment at my inability to cope with something so simple. So, best not to listen to me. Best to listen the many students who have gone through the learning process, are now competent in the use of their selected software and who appreciate the amount of time the referencing facility saves them.

In an ideal world, the necessary process of familiarization and practice should take place *before* you start your research proper because once you begin, you have little time to spend time on unravelling the highways and byways of a new system. That's the theory, and it's good sense but not many of us live in an ideal world. Once your research starts, you will inevitably be short of time for the numerous things you have to do, so if you're working

on a small project with relatively few references (say, 20 or fewer), you should perhaps ask yourself whether the time and effort involved in becoming familiar with a new electronic system warrant such a commitment.

There are a lot of 'may's and 'sometimes' in this section and it's difficult to avoid them. Organizations operate in very different ways, impose different conditions, regularly change their rules and I'm afraid it's up to you to find out which conditions apply in your own case. I do not wish in any way to imply that investing in and becoming competent in the use of bibliographic software are a waste of time, money and effort. Quite the reverse. Electronic referencing is magic and just what we all need, but you should be clear about what is involved.

If you decide to go ahead, work at it and never suffer in silence. If you're baffled, search out people who aren't, particularly if they are frequent users of the software you have selected. Ask for their advice – and don't be embarrassed at asking what you're afraid may seem like stupid questions. There are wizards everywhere if you can find them. Oh, and one more thing, as I always say. *Never* rely totally on your electronic magic. Keep back-ups of some kind. It's immaterial which, but something. Even magic can let you down sometimes.

The card index

I confess that in this electronic age, I still use cards as one method of keeping a record of references. These days, in libraries, I often seem to be in a minority of one by being laptop-less. Laptops may be portable but as far as I'm concerned, they are heavy to carry around all the time, and they're quite expensive to buy. Cards weigh, and cost, practically nothing; they fit comfortably into a pocket and as long as you always have a few on hand, you will always be in a position to make a full record of sources on the spot, wherever the spot might be. The cards are my back-up copy (or one of my back-up copies) and I transfer the information on to my computer as soon as I can. That provides the second copy *and* gives me the beginnings of a full list of references, in alphabetical order.

I still have memories of one terrible time when, somehow or another, almost fifty pages of script disappeared without trace from my computer. So now I do my best to cover all eventualities. After all, what if a power cut loses all my work, or, more probably, what if I press the wrong button one day and send ten chapters into oblivion? Back-up floppy disks and/or CD-ROMs of course and that's what I should have done or I wouldn't have lost 50 pages, would I? Ah, but what if a burglar takes my computer? It's happened before, hasn't it? Some of my colleagues think that my obsession for keeping copies in various forms is excessive and are not backward at telling me so. Perhaps they are right, but don't let anyone tell you there is only one way of doing things. It's immaterial which methods you select to make your copies as long as copies are made, so decide which ways suit you best and then keep to them.

The management of information

It will now have become clear that it isn't enough just to record the details of publications, on cards or on whichever electronic system you adopt. Even in a small project you will need to establish an indexing and cross-referencing system because there's no point in doing a large amount of reading if, at a later date, you can never find what you are looking for. As you read, get into the habit of examining how authors classify their findings, how they explore relationships between facts and how key issues emerge. Methods used by other researchers may give you ideas about how you might organize and categorize your own data.

Those of you who have created and stored references electronically will have had the opportunity to identify key words at the same time as you record your sources. This can be helpful, but whatever method of cross-referencing and indexing you select, the approach is fundamentally the same. Somehow or another, even in the very early stages of your research, you are thinking about ways in which you will be able to find who wrote what about different topics. The last thing you need is to spend days or even weeks looking for something you know you read,

somewhere. You need to be able to go straight to it. Easy? Well not really. Orna reminds us that

> By the very fact of bringing items together in *one* way (by author, by main subject, by date of addition to the store for example), it separates items that have *other* things in common. The same author may have written articles on a number of quite different subjects, so while that arrangement makes it easy to find everything by a given author, it makes it hard to find items on a given subject.
>
> (Orna 1995: 49)

Well, life was never meant to be easy and we just have to do the best we can to ensure we have some sort of system which is easy to maintain and which is likely to give reasonable access to most of the source material and topics in your store. As Orna says, 'there is no "right way" of doing it and successful researchers use a wide variety of strategies' (p. 36). I keep to what have become habits of a lifetime, or at least of writing. As I've said earlier, I still record references on cards, and then transfer the information to the computer, but I start a cross-indexing system almost from the start of reading. The main card will include all the necessary referencing detail, but if that particular article or book raises interesting issues relating to 'grounded theory', 'literature reviews', 'women' or whatever, then another card with the heading of 'grounded theory', 'literature reviews', 'women' will include brief references (e.g. Bluebottle 2000: 46) indicating where I came across those topics and where I can find notes, books and journal articles. I start with general headings and only move to more detailed headings as the reading develops. For example, if I discover items relating to women chief executives in hospitals, I can add a sub-group to the general 'women' index.

If you are comfortable with computer-based indexing, then keep to that or devise your own cunning system which may defy logic for everyone else, but which works for you. But the one thing you can't do is do nothing.

Your system will enable you to group and sort your findings under headings, allow you to refer to notes, quotations and comments about items in books or articles which you might have

read months earlier and in all probability would have forgotten without your indexing system. Moreover, the small effort involved in producing a system will be providing you with the bones of a future literature review – and that will resolve many problems when the time comes to write the review.

No system is absolutely guaranteed to be perfect, and you may still occasionally find yourself in the position of rummaging in box files or trying to dredge your memory about something you once read somewhere *but* your system will ensure that rummaging and dredging are reduced to a minimum. We don't have time to mess about in boxes, so get going with your cross-referencing.

A lot of fuss about nothing?



Well, no. Just acquiring the tools of the trade. Referencing can be irritatingly pernickety, but once you've established a routine, recording information becomes (or should become) automatic. If you assimilate the information in this chapter and if you record your sources accurately and consistently, you will have begun to establish good research habits and to lay the foundations of your own research. You will be rewarded for your hard work, if not in heaven, then certainly when you come to write your report. You will be able to locate information easily, to regroup and reclassify evidence and to produce referenced quotations to support your arguments.

Incidentally, if you were thinking of asking whether I always get references spot-on right every time, I should have to admit that I can't make such a bold claim. All I can say is that I do my best to check that I've noted and included everything because I know the grief errors and omissions will give me if I'm careless. I doubt whether any researchers, even the most experienced and the best, would be bold enough to claim they never made a mistake. The British Open University employs experienced course team writers and researchers to produce their course materials and readers. They are supported by expert, specialist course team librarians and have full access to the university library's print and online resources. Writing is their job, and yet Sally Baker, who is one of the specialist librarians recalls that

> Unfortunately, from the number of whey-faced academics and researchers about to submit papers or theses who are found panicking in libraries as they desperately search for missing sources, page numbers, authors' initials and so on, it is apparent that even an occasional lapse in recording bibliographic details can result in hours of wasted time at the point when time is particularly short.

Trying to be kind, she continues:

> It is inevitable that you will from time to time lack a similar detail from a reference – sometimes as a result of others' incorrect referencing – but if you adopt a disciplined approach to information management you will be able to minimize the number of occasions when this occurs.
>
> (Baker 1999: 69)

She's right. So do your utmost to record every single detail at the time you read and record and that will go a long way to reduce stress and frustration to a minimum.

Reading, referencing and the management of information checklist

1	Read as much as you can about your topic in the time you have, and keep a record of what you read.	Try not to exceed your time limit. It's easy to read on and on in the search for enlightenment.
2	Decide on a system of referencing sources.	The Harvard method is probably the easiest to deal with, but check whether your institution has its own rules.
3	When you record sources, make sure you always note the author's name, forename or initials, date of publication, title, place of publication and publisher. Remember to keep more than one copy.	There are variations for books, articles in collections and journal articles. It's not easy to remember all the detail, so keep model cards until you are familiar with the requirements.

4	Make notes of what seem to you to be important issues. Look for and keep a 'first thoughts' list of categories and keywords.	Make it clear in your notes which are the authors' words and which are your paraphrases, though paraphrases also need to be cited.
5	Ask yourself whether you can trust what you read. Any sign of bias? Is referencing accurate?	What evidence do the authors provide to support their claims? Check Chapter 7 for information about sources, evidence and the analysis of documentary evidence.
6	Electronic referencing can be the answer to all our prayers. You may have access to online bibliographic databases at your own institution, so ask, and if familiarization courses are offered, make sure you attend.	But if you plan to work from home, consider the time it will take to familiarize yourself with the various techniques, the cost, whether your computer has the necessary space on the hard drive *and* sufficient memory.
7	Make sure you get usernames and passwords. Ask in your department, the library or the computer helpline – and don't take 'Not available for you' for an answer.	Because without them, you may not be able to get access to the material you want.
8	Establish a system of indexing and cross-referencing.	There's no point in doing a large amount of reading if, at a later date, you can never find what you are looking for.
9	If you record your sources accurately and consistently you will have begun to establish good research habits and to lay the foundations for your own research.	You will be rewarded, if not in heaven, then certainly when you come to write your report.
10	A lot of fuss about nothing?	Certainly not! Just getting to grips with the tools of the trade. If you decide you can't

be bothered to deal with the detail or will sort it out 'later', then referencing will give you real grief later on in your research, so be warned. Keep those model cards to hand and check each reference to make sure everything is included. Well, all right. I suppose that even the most pernickety amongst us isn't perfect, so if you know you have an incomplete reference, at least give it an asterisk, colour-code it or do something to indicate that you need to get the detail sorted as soon as you can.

Further reading

Baker, S. (1999) 'Finding and searching information sources', Chapter 5 in J. Bell, *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers in Education and Social Science*, 3rd edn. Buckingham: Open University Press. Sally Baker is an experienced and skilled librarian at the Open University and, as far as I am concerned, knows a great deal about literature searches. This chapter includes sections on literature searching, search structure, sources of information, citations, getting to know your library, selecting keywords, finding books, journal articles, theses and Internet resources and managing information. Finally, the example of a literature search is provided, as are numerous Web page addresses, many of which are still current.

Orna, E. with Stevens, G. (1995) *Managing Information for Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Pears, R. and Shields, G. (2004) *Cite Them Right: Referencing Made Easy*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Northumbria University Press. This can be accessed via http://www.unn.ac.uk/central/isd/cite/ and is updated regularly by the authors. They give examples of new media, such as the Internet, text messages, virtual learning environments and provide advice relating to plagiarism, secondary referencing and common conventions. They plan to produce an updated electronic version of the book in the near future, but I still like to have the print version to hand.

I use it regularly. Obtainable from Northumbria University Press, Northumbia University, Ellison Place, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8ST (tel. 0191 227 3700) or email: er.books@northumbria.ac.uk).

Rumsey, S. (2004) *How to Find Information: A Guide for Researchers*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. The section on referencing, plagiarism and keeping up to date with new developments is particularly useful.