The APA 6th edition referencing system

Referencing is a standard practice for acknowledging information sources in academic writing at university. Whenever you write an assignment that requires you to find and use information, you are expected to reference all the sources of information and ideas included in your writing.

This handout provides guidelines for using the APA 6th edition referencing system. There are two components to an APA reference:

1) an in-text reference in the body of your assignment:
   Chan (2011) explores a range of themes and ideas ...

2) full reference details in your reference list:

This guide is divided into two parts. The first part (pp. 1-10) illustrates the basic rules for APA 6th edition referencing, provides a sample text which uses APA 6th edition referencing, and answers some frequently asked questions. The referencing guide in the second part (pp. 11-17) contains specific rules and examples for a variety of different reference types.

Part 1 Basic rules

Why do we reference?

Most academic assignments require wide reading so that previous and current thinking about a particular topic can be identified. It is important to show your reader that you have sought out expert, reliable sources to help support and develop your thinking on your topic. The referencing in your assignment should:

- demonstrate good research practice
- show the range of ideas and approaches you have found and thought about
- acknowledge where those ideas came from
- tell your reader where they can locate the sources you have used

Referencing also helps you to avoid plagiarism. If you present someone else's ideas, and/or the way they express their ideas, as if they are your own work, you are committing plagiarism. Plagiarism can be unintentional due to poor referencing, but the consequences are always serious. Accurate referencing helps you to avoid this.

In-text references

1. When to reference

Every time you include someone else's words, ideas or information in your assignment, an in-text reference must be provided. Insert an in-text reference whenever you:

- paraphrase someone else's ideas in your own words
- summarise someone else's ideas in your own words
- quote someone else's ideas in their exact words
- copy or adapt a diagram, table or any other visual material
2. How to reference

An in-text reference is provided each time you refer to ideas or information from another source, and includes the following details:

- the **author's family name** (do not include given names) + the **year of publication** + page numbers when needed.

There are two main ways to present an in-text reference:

a) Integral referencing

The reference is in the body of your sentence, with the author's family name integrated into the sentence structure, and the date is given in brackets. This type of reference is often used when you want to give prominence to the author.

*Lam (2010)* argues that Hong Kong needs to further assimilate into the Pearl River Delta economy if its long term growth is to be assured.

b) Non-integral referencing

The reference is enclosed in the sentence in brackets. This type of reference is often used when you want to give prominence to the information.

The Hong Kong economy expanded by 2.3% in the third quarter of 2011 (*Census and Statistics Department, 2012*).

3. Including page numbers

Page numbers should be included when you:

- use a direct quote from a particular source
- copy tables or figures, or present specific information like data/statistics

*Cheung (2012)* notes that “universities in Hong Kong need to strengthen their academic credentials” if they are to compete in the world economy (*p. 48*).

There are many ways to cite a direct quotation. It is recommended that the page number should be placed after the quotation. See below for examples:

1. According to Palladino and Wade (2010), “a flexible mind is a healthy mind” (*p. 147*).
2. In 2010, Palladino and Wade noted that “a flexible mind is a healthy mind” (*p. 147*).
3. In fact, “a flexible mind is a healthy mind” (Palladino & Wade, 2010, *p. 147*).
4. “A flexible mind is a healthy mind,” according to Palladino and Wade’s (2010, *p. 147*) longitudinal study.
5. Palladino and Wade’s (2010) results indicate that “a flexible mind is a healthy mind” (*p. 147*).


You can also include a page number when you take an idea from a particular page. However, it would not be appropriate academic style to include a page number in all or most of your in-text citations if you are only taking ideas from a source.
4. Use of “et al.”

Where there are several authors (first time more than six), only the first author should be used followed by “et al.” (which is Latin for et alia meaning ‘and others’):

Wong et al. (2005) found that the majority …

or as a non-integral reference:

Recent research (Wong et al., 2005) has found that the majority of …

“et al.” should be used the second time for three or more authors.

The following chart shows how to format in-text citations for APA 6th edition referencing style:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of citation</th>
<th>Integral</th>
<th>Non-integral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of authors</td>
<td>First citation in text</td>
<td>Subsequent citations in text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three authors</td>
<td>Tsui, Leung, and Collins (2010) find ...</td>
<td>Tsui et al. (2010) find ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four authors</td>
<td>Wong, Lam, Collins, and Smith (2010) mention ...</td>
<td>Wong et al. (2010) mention ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five authors</td>
<td>Preston, Lee, Chan, Smith, and Au (2010) report ...</td>
<td>Preston et al. (2010) report ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six or more authors</td>
<td>Finney et al. (2010) assert ...</td>
<td>Finney et al. (2010) assert ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups (easily identified by abbreviation) as authors</td>
<td>The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HKHA, 2008) states ...</td>
<td>The HKHA (2008) states ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups (no abbreviation) as authors</td>
<td>Animals Asia (2007) defines ...</td>
<td>Animals Asia (2007) defines ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With page number for quotation</td>
<td>Chan (2010) argues that “…” (p. 15).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Ellipsis and square brackets

Ellipsis refers to dots in the middle of a sentence. Their purpose is to let the reader know that some part of a quotation has been left out. If it is necessary to interrupt a quotation you are citing in order to clarify something, you should enclose your remarks in square brackets.

**Original:** “Students in the university should study outside class, in all credit bearing subjects, for at least 6 hours a week.”

**With text omitted and clarification:** “Students in the university [The Hong Kong Polytechnic University] should study … for at least 6 hours a week.”

**Sample text with in-text referencing and reference list**

APA in-text referencing uses author’s surname and year. Include a page number (or paragraph number for online sources) for direct quotations. The reference list is in alphabetical order.

Until recently, development in the textile and clothing industry has focused on “technological and cost aspects” (HKRITA, 2012, para. 5). According to Chen and Burns (2009), emphasis has been placed on keeping the price of the “final product low and increasing efficiency in production” (p. 255). Tukker et al. (2011) further point out that designers, manufacturers and retailers have paid less attention to other dimensions of the offering, e.g., ownership and related business models, as well as consumer wishes and values. Hence, the products are designed and produced according to regularly changing trends that enable quick profit (Lee & Chen, 2009), rather than radically rethinking the ways of designing and manufacturing the offering that is based on consumer needs and sustainability as proposed by Park and Tahara (2011).

**References**


The reference list

1. What it does

The reference list provides full bibliographic details for all the sources referenced in your essay so that readers can easily locate the sources. Each different source referenced in your essay must have a matching entry in your reference list.

It is important to note that the reference list is not a bibliography. A bibliography lists everything you have read, while a reference list is deliberately limited to those sources for which you have provided in-text references. A bibliography is not needed unless specifically requested by your lecturer.

2. How it looks

The reference list is titled “References” and must be:

- arranged alphabetically by author’s family name (or title/sponsoring organisation where a source has no author).

- a single list where books, journal articles and electronic sources are listed together. Do not divide into separate lists.

The main elements required for all references are the author’s name(s), year, title and publication information. The basic reference formats are shown in the following examples. These should be followed exactly, paying special attention to details of capitalisation, punctuation, use of italics and order of information.

3. Journal article format

First author’s surname, Initials., Second author’s surname, Initials., & Third author’s surname, Initials.
(Year of publication). Title of article. Name of journal, Volume number(Issue number), Page range of article.

4. Book format

First author’s surname, Initials., Second author’s surname, Initials., & Third author’s surname, Initials.

(Year of publication). Title of book. City of publication: Publisher.


5. Internet source format

Name of organisation. (Year of publication). Title of page. Retrieved from url


Frequently asked questions

1. How do I cite two or three authors?

When there are two or three authors for a reference, include all their family names in the in-text reference, in the same order that they are listed in the original source. For example:

- According to Choi, Fang, and Lee (2012), students in Asia are more studious than their North American counterparts.
- Wong and Morrison (2011) strongly support the use of technology in the classroom.
- Asian students devoted on average 16 hours per week to out-of-class study compared to 10 hours for North American students (Choi, Fang, & Lee, 2012).
2. **How do I cite when there are many authors?**

If there are six or more authors, you should only use the first author’s family name in the in-text reference followed by the abbreviation “et al.”. For example:

- This is supported by Wilson et al. (2011) in their educational change study.

For subsequent citations, you should use “et al.” for references with three or more authors.

3. **In the reference list what should I do when there are many authors?**

   **If there are two authors:**
   List by their last names and initials. Use the ampersand “&” instead of “and”.


   **If there are three to seven authors:**
   List by their last names and initials; commas separate author’s names, while the last author’s name is preceded again by ampersand.


   **If there are more than seven authors:**
   Include the first six authors’ names, then insert “…” and add the last author’s name.


4. **How do I cite when there is no author and/or no date?**

   When no person is mentioned, include the title of the source or the authoring/sponsoring organisation in place of the author.

   For example:

   - The centre aims to improve students' communication skills to enable them to attain excellent results in their academic and professional lives (English Language Centre, 2012).

   - Oral presentations, like written assessment tasks, should contain an introduction, body, and conclusion (“Making the most of oral presentations,” 2011).

   When no year of publication is given, use the abbreviation “n.d.” which stands for ‘no date’ in place of a year, or give an approximate date preceded by “ca.” which stands for ‘circa’.

   **However, be cautious about using sources without dates.**
   **A source with no date might not be reliable.**
5. **How do I cite information from one author (Author 1) which I have found in a book or journal article by another author (Author 2)?**

Sometimes you will need to refer to authors whose work you encounter secondhand (i.e. mentioned in other people’s work) rather than firsthand. You should mention both authors (Author 1 and Author 2) in your in-text reference, but would only list the actual item you read (Author 2) in your reference list.

For example, if you read an idea by Choy (Author 1, published in 2005) in a source by Martins (Author 2, published in 2010) you would need to mention both authors in your in-text reference. For example:

- One scholar (Choy, as cited in Martins, 2010) argues that ...
- Choy (as cited in Martins, 2010) believes that ...

However, in the reference list you should only list Martins (Author 2, the source you read) and not Choy (whose idea you read about in Martins).

6. **How do I cite multiple sources by the same author published in the same year?**

If an author has published more than one item in the same year, place a lower case letter of the alphabet next to the dates in your in-text referencing to distinguish between these separate publications. For example:

- Preston argues that a man paints with his brain, not his hands (2011a) and reiterates this elsewhere (2011b).

You must also include these lower case letters in your reference list entries as well. The order in which you attach the letters is determined by the alphabetical order of the titles of these sources.

7. **What if there are two authors with the same family name?**

Occasionally you will need to reference two different authors who share the same family name. To avoid ambiguity, include the author’s first initial after their family name in the in-text references. For example:

- Urban deprivation in Hong Kong has been seen to increase in the first decade of this century (E. Chan, 2010). Whether this will affect the language skills of fresh graduates in Hong Kong is still disputed (C. Chan, 2010).

8. **How do I present exact quotations?**

Short quotations of fewer than thirty words should be enclosed in double quotation marks (“ ... “) and be accompanied by an in-text reference including a page number (where possible).

For example:

- Research indicates that “students in Hong Kong devote on average 5 hours a week to their English studies from the age of four” (Leung, 2010, p. 31).
Longer quotations of more than thirty words should be presented without quotation marks and indented (using Tab key) at the left. For example:

According to Obama (2006), America:

should be more modest in our belief that we can impose democracy on a country through military force. In the past, it has been movements for freedom from within tyrannical regimes that have led to flourishing democracies; movements that continue today. This does not mean abandoning our values and ideals; wherever we can, it’s in our interest to help foster democracy through the diplomatic and economic resources at our disposal. (para. 45)

9. Where exactly do I put the full stop when quoting and/or citing?

Full stops must always be placed at the very end of a sentence, after the quotation and/or in-text reference. For example:

- According to Mooney (2011), “exam pressure in Hong Kong has lessened slightly in the past decade” (p. 88).
- Research indicates that students in Hong Kong have had four mobile devices before their 18th birthday (Samson, 2012).

10. Can I cite two or more sources at the same time?

Yes. Use a semi-colon to separate the sources in the in-text reference, and list the items alphabetically according to their authors’ family names. For example:

- Social networking has had a major impact on young people (Chan & Erickson, 2012; Lam & Mok, 2008).

If referencing multiple sources by the same author, present the items in chronological order (oldest to most recent) and separate them with commas. For example:

- Burns (2006, 2009, 2012) argues that there should be more universities in Hong Kong.

11. Can I paste the URL of a webpage into my essay as an in-text citation?

No. Follow the author-date in-text referencing conventions for all sources. If you are unsure how to reference a website because there is no author or date information, follow the guidelines provided for referencing sources without authors or dates.

12. How do I cite e-mail messages?

E-mail messages from individuals should be cited as personal communications. Because they do not provide recoverable data, personal communications are not included in the reference list. Cite personal communications in text only. Give the initials as well as the surname of the communicator, and provide as exact a date as possible. For example:

- E. Cartman (personal communication, June 28, 2015) reveals that ...
- ... (S. Marsh, personal communication, May 5, 2015).
13. How do I reference a speech?

You do not reference the speech itself. Instead, you should find an authoritative source for the text. Then you simply reference the book, video documentary, website, or other source for the quotation. The reference format you need will depend on the type of document you have used. For example, if you want to cite Martin Luther King’s speech, your reference would be as follows:


The in-text citation would include the surname of the author or editor of the source document and the year of publication. For example, your sentence might look like this:

- Dr. King declared, “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed” (Smith, 2009).

Another example is if you want to cite Barack Obama’s speech from a website, your reference would be as follows:


The in-text citation would include the author of the website and year of publication. For example, your sentence might look like this:

- President Obama announced that in Iraq too much money has been paid for services that were never performed … (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2009).

14. How do I cite images such as photographs from websites?

All images including graphs, charts, maps, drawings and photographs are referred to as figures. You need to label the image as a figure and place a caption (i.e. a brief explanation of the figure) directly below the image, which includes any acknowledgement that the image is reprinted/adapted from another source. For example:


The in-text citation would be like this:

- Figure 1 shows that …

Your reference would be as follows:

## Part 2 Referencing guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of source</th>
<th>In-text references</th>
<th>Reference list</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>Surname of author, year of publication</td>
<td>Surname of author, Initials. (Year of publication). <em>Title</em>. City of publication: Publisher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books with different editions</td>
<td>Surname of author, year of publication</td>
<td>Surname of author, Initials. (Year of publication). <em>Title</em> (Edition number). City of publication: Publisher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books with no date</td>
<td>Surname of author (n.d.)</td>
<td>Surname of author, Initials. <em>(n.d.)</em>. <em>Title</em>. City of publication: Publisher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Example:</strong> Wong (n.d.) states that students need to read more widely and ...</td>
<td><strong>Wong, B. K.</strong> (n.d.). <em>Fostering creativity</em>. Oxford: Blackwell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ebooks and pdfs</td>
<td>Surname of author, year of publication</td>
<td>Surname of author, Initials. (Year of publication). <em>Title</em>. City of publication (if known): Publisher. <strong>Retrieved from URL</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Journal articles (with author)** | Surname of author, year of publication, (page number for direct quotations)  
Examples:  
Poon, Lee, Chan, Jones, and Smith (2003) argue that students should refer to sources properly ...  
Lam (2005) stresses that “students need to be mindful of the importance of referencing” (p. 91). | Surname of author, Initials. (Year of publication). Title of article. *Name of journal, Volume number*(Issue number), Page range of article.  
| **Journal articles (no author)** | “Title of article (first few words),” year of publication  
Example:  
Many organisations already use this method (“Organisational change,” 2010). | Title of article. (Year of publication). *Name of journal, Volume number*(Issue number), Page range of article.  
| **URLs and DOIs** | Surname of author, year of publication  
Example:  
Anderson-Clark, Green, and Henley (2008) believe that students should ...  
If the article has a DOI, use it in your reference. If there is no DOI, include the journal homepage URL in your reference. | Surname of author, Initials. (Year of publication). Title of article. *Name of journal, Volume number*(Issue number), Page range of article (if given). doi: #  
| **Electronic journals** | Surname of author, year of publication  
Example:  
... and this has been formulated by Halonen et al. (2010) who ...  
(use et al. when citing 6 or more authors the first time; 3 or more authors the second time) | Surname of author, Initials. (Year of publication). Title of article. *Name of journal, Volume number*(Issue number). Retrieved from url  
**Internet sources (electronic only sources)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of organisation, year of publication, (paragraph number for direct quotations)</th>
<th>Name of organisation. (Year of publication). <em>Title of article</em>. Retrieved from URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Government/Company reports**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of department/company, year of publication</th>
<th>Name of department/company. (Year of publication). <em>Title of article</em> (Number of document - if given). City of publication: Publisher.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**DVDs or films**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For a film or DVD, use the surname of the director and year of release.</th>
<th>For a film the suggested elements should include:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Law (2010) captured the imagination of … If there is no director, it is suggested that a non-integral reference should be used with the first few words of the title with year of release.</td>
<td>Surname of producer, Initials. (Producer), &amp; Surname of director, Initials. (Director). (Year of release). <em>Title of motion picture</em> [Motion picture]. Country of origin: Studio or distributor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Type</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube videos</td>
<td>It is suggested that a non-integral reference should be used for YouTube sources. <strong>Example:</strong> ... celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2007 (HongKongPolyU, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper articles (with author)</td>
<td>Surname of author, year of publication <strong>Example:</strong> Van der Kamp (2012) believes that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper articles (no author)</td>
<td>If no author is designated, cite the first few words of the title, and the year. <strong>Example:</strong> There should be more car free streets (“Put pedestrians first,” 2012). (non-integral citation recommended)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Online magazine articles | Surname of author, year of publication  
| **Example:**  
Toobin (2013) comments that ... | Surname of author, Initials. (Year, Month Day of publication). Title of article. Name of magazine.  
**Retrieved from** URL  
| Translated work | Surname of author, year of publication,  
(page number for direct quotations)  
**Examples:**  
Freud (1914) stated that ...  
Freud (1914) stated, “…” (p. 109). | When quoting from a foreign language work in the main body of the text, the quote should be provided in English.  
Surname of author, Initials. (Year of publication). Title.  
(Initials. Surname of translator, **Trans.**). City of publication: Publisher.  
| Chinese sources | Surname of author, year of publication,  
(page number for direct quotations)  
**Examples:**  
Xiao (2008) shows that ...  
According to Xiao (2008), “…” (p. 37). | Do a romanisation of the author’s name and title of book/article. If readers cannot read Chinese, add a translation of the book/article’s title in square brackets. If there is no official translation, list the item at the end of the reference list alphabetically.  
Surname of author, Initials. (Year of publication). Title  
[Translation of book/article’s title]. City of Publication: Publisher.  
| Foreign sources | Surname of author, year of publication  
**Example:**  
Kundera (1984) derides ... | When quoting from a foreign language work in the main body of the text, the quote should be provided in English.  
Surname of author, Initials. (Year of publication). Title  
[Translation of book/article’s title]. City of Publication: Publisher.  
| Lecture notes | Surname of author, year Example: Jenkins (2010) implies that ... | You are advised not to cite university lecture notes - to do so is often deemed unacceptable. You ought to locate, read and cite the sources and references provided in the Reading List or References in the lecture notes. However, the following guidelines may assist you should you need to cite lecture notes:

Surname of lecturer/author, Initials. (Year). *Title of lecture notes* [Lecture notes]. Name of institution, Month Day of lecture.

Jenkins, J. (2010). *Developments in computer-assisted learning* [Lecture notes]. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, October 12. |
|---|---|---|


Name of ordinance, Cap Chapter number s Section number, *Laws of Hong Kong* (Year of edition).


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| Conference papers available online | Surname of author, year of publication  
**Example:** Abdoli and Kahani (2009) discuss ... | Surname of author, Initials. (Year, Month of publication). *Title of paper. Paper presented at* title of conference, Location of conference. **Retrieved from** URL  
|---|---|---|
| Online forum, discussion group, or blog post | Surname of author, year of publication  
**Example:** Gates (2015) suggests that ... | Surname of author, Initials. (Year, Month Day of publication). *Title of post [Description of form]. Retained from* URL  
| Speeches (See p. 10 for details) | Surname of author/editor of the source and year given as non-integral citation  
**Examples:** Dr. King declared, “...” (Smith, 2009). President Obama announced that ... (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2009). | Surname of author/editor, Initials. (Year of publication). *Title of speech. City of publication: Publisher.*  
Name of organisation. (Year, Month Day of publication). *Title of speech. Retained from* URL  
| Images from websites (See p. 10 for details) | All images are referred to as figures.  
**Example:** Figure 1 shows that ... | Surname of author/artist, Initials. (Year of publication). *Title of image [Format of document]. Retained from* URL  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References with missing details</th>
<th>If there is no obvious publication date, aim to establish the earliest likely date, for example,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010? = probable year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. 2010 = approximately 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>201- = decade certain but not year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>201? = probable decade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you cannot identify the name of an author, city or publisher, use the following terms:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anonymous = author is anonymous or unidentifiable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s.l. = no city of publication (Latin: <em>sine loco</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s.n. = no named publisher (Latin: <em>sine nomine</em>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>