

FIRST YEAR CORE COURSE LEADERS' COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TOOLKIT

FIRST YEAR COURSE LEADERS TOOLKIT ITEM

Referencing

THE USQ COPs PROJECT

Faculty of Arts CoP
and
Faculty of Business CoP

<http://www.usq.edu.au/cops>



Topic: Referencing

Teaching Design for Referencing

What is the intended outcome?

For students to understand why we reference, and how to incorporate references into their written assessment using the appropriate referencing style.

What is the established practice?

Often, universities and academic staff focus on referencing as a technical skill, which should be dealt with as a compliance issue.

What advantages for the teaching design approach?

- The teaching and design approach frames referencing in positive, educative rather than in negative, compliance terms
- The teaching and design approach allows academic staff to teach referencing as part of more complex professional and academic skills, such as information literacy and written communication
- The teaching and design approach allows academic convenors to approach poor referencing preventatively, through assessment design.

Background

Academic staff members at USQ and elsewhere are concerned about student practice in the use of references and referencing. Despite staff efforts to make students aware of the negative consequences of plagiarism, many students still misunderstand and misuse referencing. Continued problems with referencing reflect a broader national phenomenon that universities and academic staff still struggle to address.

Challenge

Members of one first year, teaching Community of Practice realised that a different approach than one which focused on a lack of compliance was needed to effectively address the problem of poor student practice in referencing. A [brain-storming session](#), with participants including Community members and Learning and Teaching staff highlighted normative assumptions and complexities that underpin referencing as a practice. Clearly, a punitive approach which focused on referencing as merely an issue of compliance could not address such complexities.

Academic solutions for maximum student impact

Community members agreed that a pedagogical approach to the issue of referencing was needed: one which made the normative assumptions that underpin referencing as a practice explicit, and; one, which addressed referencing as a complex skill that overlaps with students' development of both disciplinary knowledge and more generic skills, such as information literacy and written communication. The first approach that members agreed upon was one which would enable them to communicate the normative assumptions that underpin the practice of referencing. The second approach focused on role of assessment design, both as a means of developing the skills necessary for good referencing practice, and as a way of reducing opportunities for students to plagiarise.

As a first step, the Community produced a [pamphlet](#) that could be printed in hard-copy or included electronically on members' course websites. Entitled, *Why Reference at University*, the pamphlet makes explicit the normative assumptions that underpin the academic practice of referencing and provides some examples of how to incorporate the approved referencing style, into an essay paragraph, *as part of the writing process*. It also provides links to technical referencing guides at the University library. Parts of the pamphlet were subsequently incorporated into a Faculty-wide, [Effective Referencing](#) online module, to be completed by those students in their first semester of study who have been identified by course leaders as requiring intervention to develop their referencing skills. Community members have supplemented this resource with [targeted teaching](#) on the practice of referencing. Other members have focused on assessment design.

One community member has designed their [assessment](#) as a developmental sequence of steps: students are required to submit their assessment piece in a series of steps that break the assignment down into related tasks. Since the implementation of this new assessment design, instances of student plagiarism have dropped significantly.

Key points for effective teaching practice

- Provide resources that make norms and expectations that underpin the practice of referencing explicit for students
- Design teaching that makes norms and expectations that underpin the practice of referencing explicit for students
- Design learning activities that teach students to understand the practice of referencing as part of broader learning outcomes, such as the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, and information literacy/written communication skills
- Design assessment with the express purpose of developing students' information literacy/written communication skills
- Design assessment that makes it difficult for students to use others' work inappropriately.

Final word

Like many of their faculty colleagues, many community members involved in this case have tended to view the practice of referencing in isolation, as a technical skill. Only through sharing our own practices and ideas within the group have we come to understand referencing as a skill that is interwoven with other forms of (often higher-order) learning that requires students to express what they know of their discipline in writing, using correct conventions and formatting. This belief now informs many community members' teaching and assessment strategies for improving students' referencing practice.