Using Harvard: basic principles

In your essays, reports and other assignments, you will need to acknowledge that ideas and information in your work are taken from other sources, ie the books, journal articles and other materials that you have consulted. One way to do this is to use what is known as the Harvard system of referencing, and in one or more of your disciplines you may be asked to use this method. This handout explains some basic points about using the Harvard system. You should also consult any guides made available by your departments.

With the Harvard system of referencing you do not use footnotes or endnotes, but instead refer to your sources in abbreviated form in the body of your writing. You give full details only in the references list or bibliography at the end.

Using a general idea or information

When you take a general idea or information from a source then you give the author’s surname and the year of publication only:

The Australian climate is changing rapidly (Brown 1993).

You may decide to use the author’s name as an ‘active’ part of your sentence, perhaps when you are engaging in criticism of the author’s argument. In this case, the surname of the author remains out of brackets:

Brown (1993) claims that the Australian climate can be predicted easily, but she fails to consider how expensive this is.

Quoting directly

If you are quoting directly, using the author’s words exactly as they appear in the original source, then you must give the page number(s) as well as the surname and year. You need to indicate where the quotation begins and ends:

The Australian climate is "relatively stable and easily predicted" (Brown 1993:23).

According to Brown (1993:23), the Australian climate is "relatively stable and easily predicted".

You give the page number, or inclusive page numbers, even if you are not quoting directly, when the idea or information occurs only at a specific point in the source, eg data on rainfall in Canberra in a general book about the Australian climate.

Same author and published in the same year

Sometimes you may use more than one source written by the same author and published in the same year. In this case you add to the year of publication the letters ‘a’, ‘b’, ‘c’, and so on, in the order in which you refer to the sources:

Johns (1989a) stresses the importance of rivers, which she believes are forgotten by urban planners (Johns 1989b).

In this case, Johns (1989a) would appear before Johns (1989b) in your references list or bibliography.

Two or more authors

Where there are two authors for a particular source, you give the surnames of both authors in the order in which they are given in the original source:
Average temperatures are increasing (Brown and Jones 1992).

According to Brown and Jones (1992), average temperatures are increasing.

If there are three authors, you give all names (in original order) when you first mention the source. If you refer to the source again, you only need to give the first name and then ‘et al.’ (from the Latin, meaning ‘and others’).

Miller, Lewis, Adams and Harvey (1992) claim that Australian cities are poorly planned. Some suggest that this is a problem unique to Australia (Kent 1990), but Miller et al. (1992) note many examples in other countries.

If there are more than three authors you can give the first name and ‘et al.’ every time. For your references list or bibliography you need to indicate all of the authors as in the original. In some disciplines it is becoming acceptable to use the English ‘and others’.

More than one source

If you find an idea or information in more than one source, you may want to refer to each of the sources. This can increase the apparent strength of any claims that you make. The sources are listed in order of publication date:

Waste disposal is Australia’s most important environmental issue (Talbot 1990, Clarke 1991, Piggot 1993).

Combine ideas or information from different sources

When you combine ideas or information from different sources, you need to show this clearly:

The Australian climate is changing rapidly (Brown 1993), and human behaviour is mostly responsible for this (Simmons 1990). Lowe (1994) argues that this behaviour will be difficult to change.

Using cited information

Sometimes you need to refer to an idea or information from a source you have not consulted yourself, but which was mentioned in another source which you did consult. For example, you may have read a book by Owen who refers to an idea from a journal article by Farley. You indicate this as follows:

Farley (1992, cited in Owen 1995) claims that bushfires are becoming less common.

An acceptable variation is to omit the word ‘cited’:

Bushfires are becoming less common (Farley 1992, in Owen 1995).

In your references list or bibliography you include only the source you consulted yourself (ie, Owen 1995) and not the source that had been cited.