Tips for editing reference lists

This is generic advice focusing on author–date referencing styles. It is not specific to any single style, and is not exhaustive. Always check whether the publication you are writing for has author guidelines that cover preferences about references and citations.

The following items are roughly in order of importance.

CONTENT

1. Make sure everything you have included in an in-text citation is included in the reference list. If not, add it.

2. Make sure everything in the reference list has an in-text citation. If not, remove from reference list.

   Note: The search function in Word can be helpful in doing these checks. Also consider printing out or saving a separate copy of the reference list so you can tick off or highlight each item as it appears in your citations, and note gaps.

3. Make sure the spelling of authors' names and the dates of publication are the same in each of the citations and the reference list. If there are discrepancies, check which is correct before changing.

4. Is each item in the reference list complete? That is, does it include all the authors, date of publication, journal title and/or book title, article/chapter title, volume and number where applicable, place and date of publication where required (books, reports), page numbers where required (usually for journal articles and book chapters). Are URLs or DOIs provided where required?

5. Consider checking (or at least spot-checking) author names, publication titles, dates and other details.

   This can be done either through cross-checking with your own database, or by doing a quick Google search on author names and year, or publication title.

FORMAT

6. If there is a guideline for authors about formatting in-text citations and reference lists, or a specific style you are using , follow this. If there isn't one (or you don't need to follow one), then see points 7–9 below.

7. **Main message**: whatever approach you take, **try and be consistent.**

8. For **in-text citations**, decide are you:

    a. putting citations in chronological order or alphabetical order?

    b. using commas after names and before years, or only semi-colons between each item?

    c. using '&' or 'and' between author names in narrative and/or parenthetical citations?

    d. using a full stop with et al. or writing it without a full stop (et al)?

Once you have decided, make sure you use the same conventions throughout.

9. For the **reference list**, in the absence of specific guidelines, it is easiest to keep it as simple as possible, while still including all information. For example:
    a. use minimal punctuation (Adam A and Brown C NOT Adam, A. and Brown, C.)
    b. keep to some basic rules (dates always in parentheses or never in parentheses; always italics for book titles and journal titles; eds. or Eds. or eds or Eds for 'editors' not a mixture of these)
    c. for journal volumes, numbers and pages, consider 33(2): 23–30 rather than Volume 33, Number 2, pages 23–30
    d. consider en dashes (–) rather than hyphens (-) for spans of numbers (en dash is ctrl+minus on your keyboard).

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