How to cite literature
by Marc Perkins, February 2003

Introduction

When you include information in a report or an assignment that you learned from another source you should reference that source. In homework assignments this is easy -- simply say who or where you got the idea from. For instance, if you read an article on WebMD.com describing how clinical studies work, and use their description to help you answer a homework question, you should say that you got the idea from WebMD.com. No special formatting is required for homework assignments, though if you take wording directly from a source you must put it in quotation marks.

Longer written assignments (e.g. lab reports and the organism project) require more detailed reference citations. When writing longer scientific works it is critical that all references be cited in such a way that readers can find your references in their own libraries. Additionally the reader must be able to determine which passages in your paper used information from any given source. Biological writing has no one specific format used by all journals, but the basics are similar between most journals. I will describe one style here, based largely on Pechenik's (1997) guide (with some additions from Hacker, 1992). Note, however, that different disciplines may have extremely different formats for references, and thus you should always check with someone in the field (or check a field specific journal) to determine an appropriate style.

In scientific writing you must include both a brief in-text citation after each sentence that contains information from a source and a more detailed citation at the end of the text.

How to cite references in the text of your paper:

When citing sources within the text of your paper, you should state the author and year of publication. For example if Dr. Adolph was the author of a 1999 article you are referencing, you should write the sentence mentioning his work followed by (Adolph, 1999). If there were more than two authors on the article, you should state the name of the first author followed by et al. in italics (Adolph et al., 1999), while if there were two authors it would look like this (Adolph and Perkins, 1999). If you discuss the author of the reference you are citing in the text of the sentence then simply follow the author's name with the year in parentheses. For example, "Adolph (1999) found something really cool." Generally it is better to focus on the results of the study than the people who did the study, so usually the reference will be entirely in parentheses. Finally, if you are citing information that has not been published but which you learned directly from a person, you can cite them by putting "pers. com." after their name. For instance, if Marc Perkins told you something you needed for your report you might describe it and then say (Perkins, pers. com.). If you have multiple references for a single statement list them all at the end of the sentence and separate them by a semicolon in the parentheses.
How to list references at the end of your paper:

In addition to listing the author and year in the body of the text, you must have a "Literature Cited" or "References" section at the end of your paper or report. In this section you will report the full citation of the source, providing enough information so the reader can find the original source you used. When reporting the full citation in your reference section, all authors will be listed. Always organize the references section alphabetically by first author last name and then chronologically. Different journals will use different citation formats, but use the following format for your reports. If you have multiple sources from the same author in the same year simply append a letter to the year to differentiate them (so if Perkins had two papers in 2001 you would list them as Perkins, 2001a and Perkins, 2001b).

Examples of different source citations

Below are some examples of common types of materials. I've listed first the general format, then an example of how to cite a specific reference in the body of your paper, and then a specific reference as it would appear in the literature cited section.

Journal Article
Author last name, initials, other authors. Year. Title of article. Journal name Volume: pages.

For example, a neat paper a few years ago looked at lizard growth (Sinervo and Adolph, 1994).


Note: This format is also used for citing popular magazine articles, but you should add the issue of the magazine after the volume.

Book
Author last name, initials, other authors. Year. *Title of Book*. Publisher, place of publication, pages.

For example, I might want to cite my favorite biology textbook (Purves et al., 1995).


An article from a book
Author last name, initials, other authors. Year. Title of article. In: *book title* (editor's name, editor), publisher, place of publication, pages.

For instance, I might want to cite one of the classic articles on insect nutrition (Simpson and Simpson, 1990), which appeared in the book "Insect Plant Interactions" by Elizabeth Bernays.

**An entry in an encyclopedia or dictionary**


For example, I might want to cite a definition of citation from Webster’s New World Dictionary in this handout (“Citation,” 1994). Since there is no author for a dictionary or most encyclopedias, simply include the section title and year in the parentheses.


**Person**

Person's name. Personal Communication. Date.

If Marc Perkins told you something neat you should reference it like this (Perkins, pers. com.)


**Items from the web**

Author last name, first name (if known). Date. "Title of source." Source address.

If you wanted to cite the Simpsons Archive cast list you would say (Paakkinen, 2001)


**Lab manual or course handout**

Treat most course handouts and lab manuals as books written by their assigned authors.

If you wanted to cite this handout you would cite it this way (Perkins, 2003).


**Literature Cited (for this handout!)**
