Citations are not used simply to avoid plagiarism; they have other important roles too.

Referencing allows you to acknowledge the contribution of other writers and researcher in your work. Any university assignments that draw on the ideas, words or research of other writers must contain citations.

Referencing is also a way to give credit to the writers from whom you have borrowed words and ideas. By citing the work of a particular scholar you acknowledge and respect the intellectual property rights of that researcher. As a student (or an academic) you can draw on any of the millions of ideas, insights and arguments published by other writers, many of whom have spent years researching and writing. All you need to do is acknowledge their contribution to your assignment.

Referencing is a way to provide evidence to support the assertions and claims in your own assignments. By citing experts in your field, you are showing your marker that you are aware of the field in which you are operating. Your citations map the space of your discipline, and allow you to navigate your way through your chosen field of study, in the same way that sailors steer by the stars.

References should always be accurate, allowing your readers to trace the sources of information you have used. The best way to make sure you reference accurately is to keep a record of all the sources you used when reading and researching for an assignment.

Citations also make your writing more persuasive.

Exercise: Look at the two paragraphs below: which one seems more authoritative?

Paragraph one

The importance, or otherwise, of lyrics in popular music, and academic approaches to song lyrics, is subject to much debate. The supposed ‘poor’ standard or presumed meaninglessness of popular music lyrics, become a means to critique popular music. Conversely, it could be argued that too much attention is given to a song’s lyrics, to the point where the music itself is overlooked; it is also possible to overestimate the degree to which the music listener actually listens to the words, or perceives them to be the site of meaning in a song. Nonetheless, Simon Frith suggests that lyrics do allow songs to be ‘used in particular ways’: lyrics facilitate certain ‘creative articulations’. In the case of protest music, the lyrics allow a song to be made to speak to political issues.

Paragraph two

The importance, or otherwise, of lyrics in popular music, and academic approaches to song lyrics, is subject to much debate (Frith, 1998; Shepherd, 1999; Fornas, 2003). The supposed ‘poor’ standard or presumed meaninglessness of popular music lyrics, become a means to critique popular music. Conversely, it could be argued that too much attention is given to a song’s lyrics, to the point where the music itself is overlooked: it is also possible to overestimate the degree to which the music listener actually listens to the words, or perceives them to be the site of meaning in a song (Shepherd, 1999:172). Nonetheless, Simon Frith suggests that lyrics do allow songs to be ‘used in particular ways’ (cited in Martin, 1995:273): lyrics facilitate certain ‘creative articulations’ (Johnson, 2000). In the case of protest music, the lyrics allow a song to be made to speak to political issues.

The paragraphs are identical, except for the absence of citations from paragraph 1.
The first paragraph may be just as interesting as the second, but within an academic context, a context that requires you to show from where you have taken ideas, the second has far more authority, it is more persuasive. It shows that the ideas you are discussing are matters that are important to your particular academic community.

**What kind of information do I need to reference?**

Printed books are not the only sources that require acknowledgement. ANY words, ideas or information taken from ANY source requires a reference.

Reference when you are using words or ideas from:

- books and journal articles;
- newspapers and magazines;
- pamphlets or brochures;
- films, documentaries, television programs or advertisements;
- websites or electronic resources;
- letters, emails, online discussion forums;
- personal interviews;
- lecturers or tutors (not always necessary, but check with your lecturer or tutor about their preferences before you draw on their ideas).

Reference when you reprint any diagrams, illustrations, charts or pictures.

No need to reference:

- when you are writing your own observations or experiment results (for example, a report on a field trip);
- when you are writing about your own experiences (for example, a reflective journal);
- when you are writing your own thoughts, comments or conclusions in an assignment;
- when you are evaluating or offering your own analysis;
- when you are using ‘common knowledge’ (facts that can be found in numerous places and are likely to be known by a lot of people) or folklore;
- when you are using generally accepted facts or information (this will vary in different disciplines of study. If in doubt, ask your tutor).