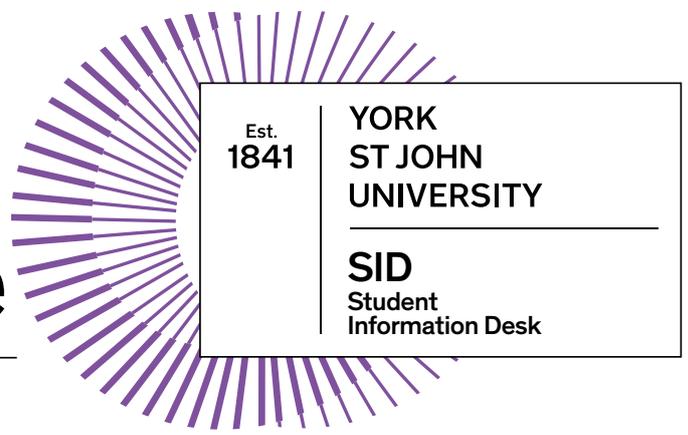


Writing Skills: Using Evidence



STUDENT SERVICES FACTSHEET

In academic writing, your claims should be supported by reliable evidence. Evidence gives your writing authority, and allows your reader to evaluate the basis of your assertions: whether they are just a personal opinion, or whether they are backed up by extensive research.

There are 3 main ways that you can incorporate evidence:

- Paraphrasing: reporting an author's ideas, but using your own words.
- Quoting: citing the exact words from the source, indicated by quotation marks.
- Summarising: condensing the content of longer passages, or even several different sources that come to the same conclusion.

The following paragraph demonstrates all 3 methods:

The question of good writing is one of crucial importance to anyone involved in academia. According to one recent survey, 55% of overseas students stated that they find academic writing difficult (Jones 2008). This finding is supported by Fitzpatrick (2003, p.208), who maintains that academic writing is 'one of the biggest challenges that overseas students face, and yet there is little support provided to them'; this viewpoint echoes the general trend of the literature (e.g. Kenyon 2007; Clarke and Wood 2009). Support with academic writing thus has an important role to play. The next part of this essay will examine how effective support can be provided. (adapted from Sowton 2012, p.79)

Reading your sources:

Make sure you read relevant books and articles in the early stages of planning your assignment, so that they inform your argument, rather than being tagged on after you have written your whole piece. In addition to providing support for your argument, citing sources should also demonstrate that you have read and understood key research in your field. Name-dropping is not enough: your references should be appropriately introduced and discussed.

In all cases, you must:

- Remain faithful to the author's original meaning.
- Include a clear in-text reference: e.g. (Jones 2008).
- Include the full bibliographical details of each source at the end of your essay, under 'Bibliography' or 'Reference List'. Sources should be in alphabetical order of authors' last names. Information Learning Services have further advice on this. Copying from a book without clearly acknowledging your source is an academic offence: it is plagiarism.
- Always be honest when drawing on someone else's ideas.

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Introducing your sources:

Quotations and paraphrases should be clearly integrated within the text. You can introduce them by clarifying how they will fit into your argument with phrases such as: 'This finding is supported by...' or 'Recent research indicates that...' You will gradually be able to indicate how reliable your sources are, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the works you draw on.

Useful reporting verbs: State, argue, maintain, suggest, propose, indicate, confirm, report, demonstrate, identify, show, discuss, conclude, point out, highlight, underline, examine.

Discussing your sources:

Your quote or paraphrase should be followed by an explanation of what it means and how it contributes to your point. This should show that you have understood the original source and its context.

Critiquing your sources:

As you progress through your degree, your writing should show increasing evidence of critical thinking. You will gradually be able to indicate how reliable your sources are, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the works you draw on.

To comment on the validity and reliability of your evidence, examine the methodology:

- Were the research methods appropriate?
- Was the study biased?
- How large was the sample of informants?

Think about the ideas and conclusions the author presents: are they convincing, or are there any flaws in their argumentation?

Support

For more information on using evidence and referencing sources, take a look at Cite Them Right and the YSJ library referencing guides online: www.yorks.ac.uk/library/referencing/

Alternatively, Study Development offers workshops, short courses, 1 to 1 and small group tutorials.

To book an appointment, contact the Student Information Desk on:

T: 01904 876477

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