Writing and citing - definitions and explanations

Sources are the materials or people that assist you in proving a point, that support a certain position, either by being an authority in the area or otherwise providing an essential piece of information. Your sources should be credible and valid. Primary sources are preferable to secondary sources or third hand accounts provided, of course, that the primary sources are available. However, it is not enough to just have sources; you must demonstrate to the reader what your sources are both to increase your credibility and to enable the critical reader to check on your sources. Critical readers may want to check a detail or, perhaps, consult the sources to check whether your interpretation is the same as theirs.

Citations can take a number of different forms. These show exactly where you obtained the information or data. The citation can be in the form of a parenthetical citation within the text footnote (footnotes can also take the form of extended commentary). The APA method does not use footnotes, but instead uses parenthetical citations. You may still use footnotes, but then it should be for the purpose of explaining a concept, term or phrase which you prefer not to explain in the body of the text.

References provide the complete bibliographic information necessary to find a particular source. From a library perspective another term for references could be "bibliographic entry". Note that references and citations need not be identical. For example the exact page from which a quotation appears must be indicated in the citation but this information should not be included in the reference. Traditionally all references appear at the end of the paper or thesis but before any appendix that you might have. You are recommended to divide oral resources from written; electronic resources might be included among the written resources or might form their own division. All lists of references should be in alphabetical order.

(These instructions are partly taken from The process and art of writing by Joe Strahl)

Parenthetical citation within the text

Parenthetical Citations: Author's name and page numbers are placed in the body of the text in parentheses, with full bibliographical data in a list at the end of the text.

- When a journal or book has two authors, always cite both names when referenced within the text. (Bennett and Henrys, 1998).
- When there are more than two authors, cite all authors the first time a reference is made, then use first author and et al. and date. (Bennett, Cerf, Corolla, Packer, Sayre, 1998). Followed later by (Bennett, et al., 1998).
- Corporate authors are spelled out each time, although a familiar acronym may be used the second and subsequent times. (National Aeronautical Space Administration, 1998), followed in later citations as (NASA, 1967).
- If the source has no author, then quote the first few words of the citation as it will appear in your Reference List: ("Child development quiz", 1998), or a book (Henrys's influence today, 1998).
- If authors of different items have the same surname, use their first name initial to distinguish.
- If the author is mentioned in the text it is enough to put only the publication date in parenthesis directly after the authors name. Sample text: As Jones (1991) suggests wombats are very cuddly. However, the work carried out at the Australian Institute of Marsupials by Bloggs (1992a) shows that they can be vicious. Further work in the Queensland bush by Bloggs (1992b) confirms this. On balance my supervisor agrees (Movsovic 1994) although she admits Jones (1991) might have a point.