Gábor Lövei's scientific communication course for students and scientists explores the intricacies involved in publishing primary scientific papers, and has been taught in more than twenty countries. "Scientific Writing for the Non-English Speaker" is the distillation of Lövei's lecture notes and experience gathered over two decades; it is the coursebook many have been waiting for.

The book's three main sections correspond with the three main stages of a paper's journey from idea to print: planning, writing, and publishing. Within the book's chapters, complex questions such as 'How to write the introduction?' or 'How to submit a manuscript?' are broken down into smaller, more manageable problems that are then discussed in a straightforward, conversational manner, providing an easy and enjoyable reading experience.

This volume stands out from its field by targeting scientists whose first language is not English. While also touching on matters of style and grammar, the book's main goal is to advise on first principles of communication. "Scientific Writing for the Non-English Speaker" is an excellent resource for any student or scientist wishing to learn more about the scientific publishing process and scientific communication. It will be especially useful to those coming from outside the English-speaking world and looking for a comprehensive guide for publishing their work in English.

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14. How to Cite References

A manuscript containing innumerable references is a mark of uncertainty rather than a mark of scholarship
Day and Gastel, 2006

Known facts have to be mentioned in a primary paper, to help the readers to understand the new information. Known facts are marked by tense (present) and by a citation: indicating the discoverer by citing the work where the discovery was made public. Details of the cited works should be listed at the end of the paper, so that interested readers can find more information on the aspects cited.

Reference lists cannot, and should not, be exhaustive. This, as expressed very succinctly in the quote above, requires that you exercise your judgement about importance. Cite only significant, citable references (an item that has a digital object identifier (DOI) can be cited).

Also, be aware that different types of publications carry different weight. The primary paper is considered the most reliable source of information, because it presents the empirical evidence for the discovery or statement. Review papers and books closely follow — but they are not primary publications, and they rarely present the empirical evidence in full detail. At the other end of the spectrum are the various non-primary publications, yearbooks, websites, and personal communication. Choose carefully among them.

Do not cite a publication that you have not seen. This is a dangerous, if not rare, practice. Judging from “propagating errors” (checking for the reappearance of printing errors in subsequent citations of the same paper), Simkin and Roychowdhuri (2003) estimated that only ca. 20% of the authors citing a famous paper had actually read the original publication. This is dangerous because, when citing a paper, one must summarise the main points, or the reason for citation. So, the content of
the whole paper will be summarised in a few words (by someone else other than the author); hence, this is an interpretation of the original findings. A subsequent citation, if it is based on this short, interpretative summary, will rephrase this summary, and distortion is inevitable. As credibility and precision is very important in science, the consequences can be very unwelcome.

If citing a paper that you have not seen is unavoidable, the format should be: XYZ 1874, cit. BB 1999. In the Reference List, give bibliographic details of the citing publication — the one that you have seen.

References should, preferably, be of sources that are obtainable, so that any reference could be checked if one so wishes. Therefore, it is wise generally to avoid citing unpublished data (unobtainable), unpublished manuscripts (unobtainable), abstracts (no proofs are presented to substantiate any claims), theses, government reports (both are published in a few copies only, and frequently difficult to obtain — although they are increasingly made available electronically), personal communication (person rarely available to testify). If you want to cite someone’s opinion that has been given to you directly, such personal communication should be cited giving the full name and workplace of the person supplying the information, followed by the words “personal communication”. This should not be included in the reference list. If you cite a personal communication, it is wise to keep a printed copy of that correspondence for your files.

Papers that are “in press” can be cited. This, however, does not equal, submitted” or in preparation”. Many journals require that any “in press” citation is accompanied by a letter from the editor of the publishing journal clearly stating that the paper cited has been accepted for publication in that journal. This equally holds for your own, or for others”, “in press” papers.

Citation Conventions

In-text citation:

In the text one should usually give the surname followed by the year of publication in parentheses; otherwise both the author’s surname and year should appear after mentioning the relevant fact from the paper cited.
In the case of one or two authors, the surname(s) are always given in full: Smith (1980), Smith and Jones (1981). When there are more than two authors, the rules may vary. Some journals require the listing of three or four authors at first mention. Subsequent mention of the same paper is by the “first author et al.” system: Smith, Jones and Little (1982) at first mention, Smith et al., (1982) later. More than four authors are usually cited as “Smith et al. (year)” even on first mention. If there are multiple citations in one sentence, the sequence is normally chronological, but sometimes alphabetical. You should check the journal requirements.

Do not place all citations at the end of the sentence. This can be difficult to read in the case of a composite sentence. Citations at the end of the sentence mean that all cited items state all the things mentioned in the citation. Often this is not the case: one paper is cited for the first part of a sentence, and another one for the latter part. The citation that supports one part of a composite sentence should be clearly indicated by placing the citation immediately after mentioning the fact.

**Style**

When citing a paper, follow an effective citation practice. This means that the relevant paper has measured, evaluated or proven the fact for which you cite it. Do not cite a paper simply because the desired sentence is somewhere in that paper. The reason for citation should, in most cases, be because of the results section of the cited paper.

Avoid the evaluative citation style. You are not asked to assess others’ intellectual capacities. Do not write sentences like: “Jones’ very elegant paper (1998)”, or “Smith’s long-discredited theory (1966)”. If you cite a paper, do not judge it, but give a clear reason why you have cited it.

**The Reference List**

At the end of the paper, you should collect and present all bibliographic details of the cited publications so that readers who want to find further information can find the sources of your citations. Every item that was cited in the text must be listed here with the required details, and everything that is on the Reference List must be cited in the paper at least once (you can cite the same article several times).
While there is little difference of opinion over what bibliographic details are necessary to find a literature item, the formats in which one should present this information are bewilderingly varied and, sometimes, illogical. We scientists have, so far, failed to come up with a uniform way of presenting bibliographic information. I hope for, but do not expect, a future when there is a unification of citation format.

The three most common are the following, based on the CBE Manual (see Box 9 for examples):

The “uniform requirements for biomedical journals” (Vancouver system).

This system lists the cited items in the sequence of citation in the text, without considering the author’s name or year of publication. The citation itself is an Arabic number, usually in superscript. This system is followed by the Nature group of journals, Science, and several other reputable journals. Despite its name, however, it is far from “uniform” — many journals follow other formats.

The Chicago Manual of Style — alphabetical.

This forum recommends the alphabetical listing of cited items. According to this system, the cited publications are first ordered by the alphabetical order of the first author’s surname. After this, a chronological order is used. In case of overlap, the second author’s surname is considered, and so on. In the case of an identical author team and publication year, letters indicate the difference: “Magura et al., 2010a; 2010b”.

The Council of Biology Editors Manual — the alphanumerical listing of publications.

This style differs little from the previous one, except that, after arranging the publications alphabetically, they are numbered. In the text, only these numbers are included, and they point, unequivocally, to the relevant citation. Journals following this system argue that this improves readability, because the text is not broken by frequent parentheses and authors names and years, which are, from the point of understanding the argument, irrelevant.
14. How to Cite References

Box 9. Samples of citation styles

Paper:


Book:


Book chapter:


Website:


For journal articles, a complete citation includes the surnames of all authors, plus initials, the year of publication, the title, the name of the journal, the volume, and the numbers of the first and last pages of the cited article. Today, due to seemingly ever-larger teams and, thus, ever-increasing number of authors on papers, there is a limit to the number of authors to be listed, which you should check in the “instructions to authors” of the journal. The issue number is not usually needed, because volume pages are continuously numbered. For the precise format, check the journal requirements — you must follow them.

For chapters in compilations, collections, or books, the above details should be given but, also, the names of the editors, the title of the whole volume, and the publisher details. For an Internet resource, try to find all the above plus the full address (the URL), and the date of access. This is necessary because Internet-based information is ephemeral; the half-life of such material varies by discipline but can be as low as 1.4 years (Oguz and Koehler, 2016). If available, use the DOI of the document — this makes it more easily traceable.
There used to be abbreviation rules for journal names, and some journals still follow them. If in doubt, write out the full name, and the editor will help you to find the appropriate abbreviation. Follow them closely, because if your reference style is very different from the required format, your manuscript will be returned for re-formatting before it is even considered for review.

An estimated 60% of published papers are not published where they were first submitted, and it is a rarity that journals follow an identical reference format; authors therefore often have to re-format their manuscript before sending it to another journal. Consequently, it is wise to have a full database, with all possible elements present for a citation, because it is much faster to delete superfluous things from a manuscript than to type in missing ones. For your database, collect all bibliographic detail.

Reformatting a manuscript is necessary, but not creative, work; reformatting a reference list is a thankless and, potentially, unnecessary task. Fortunately, all major word-processing programs can link up with one or more literature databases, and can import citations from there. Such literature databases include, for example, Reference Manager, EndNote, or Zotero. Obtain and learn the use of one of them — they are more or less equivalent. They can be linked up to large Internet-based databases, such as Web of Knowledge or Scopus, and bibliographic data of selected articles can be downloaded directly.

The real advantage comes when you want to include citations. You have to open both programs, and can import the full citation, in a pre-defined style, into your manuscript. While you have to check the precision of these imported citations, they ease, tremendously, the compilation of the reference list, and save a lot of hassle and time if it must be reformatted for another journal.