On learning to write those **** references

James Hartley

I MUCH ENJOYED the recent paper in *Psychology Teaching Review* describing new approaches to teaching psychology students how to write the references at the end on an essay or lab report (Williams et al., 2014). These approaches dwelt on why referencing is important and showed this clearly to students through demonstrations and group activities.

Nonetheless, it is hard for students to understand why all these details have to be written in the right order and the right type-style – depending upon which reference system is used.

Consider the following example:

Test yourself. Does one abbreviate 'centimetres' as cm or as cm.? Does one abbreviate 'feet' as ft or as ft.? Does one test 10 subjects or ten subjects? Does one test 8 subjects or eight subjects? The rules of the American Psychological Association lead to answers of cm, ft, 10, and eight. The rules of the Modern Language Association lead to answers of cm., ft., ten, and eight. Learning to write a psychology paper involves learning certain rules that are unique to writing psychology papers.'

(Excerpt from Sternberg, 2005, p.3)

More recently, Landrum (2013) delimited 73 writing skills that students need to learn when writing in the APA style – including the proper use of 'and' and '&' in in-text citations, using 'one space after a period ending a sentence', and making 'proper use of et al.', etc. Regrettably, Landrum does not appear to see anything at all ludicrous about this. And, even worse, we shall no doubt have to spend more time teaching our first-year students how to do the references 'properly' when citing social media. Panel 1 might be helpful (or alarming) in this respect.

Rules for referencing texts in the social media.

Social Media Citation Guide

	MLA	APA
BLOG POST	Lastname, Firstname. "Title of the Blog Post Entry." Blog Title. Publisher. Date posted. Web. Date Accessed.	Lastname, Firstinitial. (Year, Month Date). Title of the Blog Post Entry. [Web Log Post]. Retrieved from http://thewebsite.com
YOUTUBE VIDEO	Title of Video. Date of Publication of Video. YouTube. Web. Date Accessed.	Lastname, Firstinitial. (Year, Month Day). Title of video [Video file]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/specificURL
TWEET	Lastname, Firstname (Username). "Enter the tweet message here." Date posted. time viewed. Tweet.	Twitter handle. (Year, Month Day). Enter the tweet message here. [Twitter post]. Retrieved from http://twitter.com
FACEBOOK POST	Lastname, Firstname. "Enter Facebook post here." Facebook. Date posted [Date accessed. <web address>]	Username. (Year, Month Day). Enter Facebook post here. [Facebook update]. Retrieved from http://facebook.com
EMAIL	Lastname, Firstname. "Subject of Message." Message to Recipient's Name. Date of Message. Email.	In text citation only (personal communication, Month Day, Year)

©TeachBytes 2013.

I suppose that, these days, with electronic devices, the spadework is done for us. EndNote, for example, boasts that it covers over 6000 styles of referencing. (But not all students have access to such devices, and why anyone should want such a number is a mystery to me.) CROSSREF might be easier.

However, the problem is further exacerbated by the fact that different disciplines employ different reference systems and thus students doing joint honours, or combinations of disciplines in the first year may have to learn to use three or even four different referencing systems. Some universities (e.g. Coventry), have tried to get around this problem by devising a university-based system of referencing (based on the Harvard MLA system, called the CU Harvard system (Contact: CU's Writing Centre for further details). The students are aware of the fact that other reference systems exist – and indeed they use them in their postgraduate studies – but the basic aim is that referencing should be standardised across the University. Unfortunately, like most systems, it does not entirely succeed in doing this.

Here I want to propose that we do something more drastic. I want to suggest that students should not be taught the minutiae of referencing in psychology until they reach a later stage: the second-year for example. After mastering psychology for a year, students might be more ready to grasp the point of using accepted referencing systems (such as the APA system for psychologists). Provided our first-year students can be encouraged to provide the main information in their lab reports and essays – author, date, title and place of publication – why does it matter so much how this information is typographically presented?

Correspondence
Professor James Hartley
School of Psychology,
Keele University,
Staffordshire ST5 5BG.
Email: j.hartley@keele.ac.uk

References
Landrum, R. E. (2013). Writing in the APA style: Faculty perspectives of competence and importance. *Psychology Learning & Teaching, 12*(3), 259–265. www.wwords.co.uk/PLAT
Sternberg, R.J. (Ed.) (2005). *The psychologist's companion: A guide to scientific writing for students and researchers* (4th ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Williams, G.J., Emerson, A., Larkin, R.F. & Norman, C. (2014). Four activities to promote student engagement with referencing skills. *Psychology Teaching Review, 20*(1), 88–93.