An Interactive Citation Tool for ESL/EFL Tertiary Students (UG & PG)

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ABSTRACT

One of the major tasks that students are required to master while at university is the writing up of research. Indeed, many content-related courses require some form of research-based written assignment to be produced, whether as a major final-year report, or as a brief essay in which theoretical principles introduced during lectures are applied and described. In all cases, however, the L2 student is often unclear about how to actually accomplish the task of integrating expert opinion and textbook theory into his or her own piece of written text. Launched in the fall of 2003 at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, an interactive 'Referencing Guide' was specially developed for Hong Kong Chinese L2 students. Its main objective is to provide students with an independent and systematic way of learning more about how to integrate research into their writing. The online 'Referencing Guide' provides students with the tools to do the following: read through brief explanations about the various aspects of referencing, use authentic examples of erroneous student writing to identify errors, practice what they are learning by trying out the online interactive exercises, and finally review all of the basic referencing skills necessary for academic writing. Students are also provided with various 'help' functions which make the process interesting and informative. In addition to in-text referencing, the 'Guide' also provides students with the necessary information required to produce a Reference List of source materials. Designed as an independent reference tool, students can have access to the 'Guide' at any time and from anywhere on campus. According to the initial data gathered from user questionnaires, students find the tool both informative and useful in helping them to better understand how they can independently integrate research into their writing.

Keywords

Interactive, independent, english language, referencing/citation tool

BACKGROUND

One of the major tasks that students are required to master while at university is the

writing up of research. Indeed, many content-related courses require some form of research-based written assignment to be produced, whether as a major final year report, or as a brief essay in which theoretical principles introduced during lectures are applied and described. In all cases, however, the L2 student is often unclear about how to actually accomplish the task of integrating expert opinion and textbook theory into his or her own piece of written text. Launched in the fall of 2003 at The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, an interactive 'Referencing Guide' was specially developed for Hong Kong Chinese L2 students. Its main objective is to provide students with an independent and systematic way of learning more about how to integrate research into their writing.

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DESCRIPTION

The 'Referencing Guide' covers several salient areas of relevance for both UG and PG students. These areas include a brief explanation about how and why we reference, examples and practice exercises which cover the most commonly used types of referencing formats according to the American Psychological Association (APA) style, additional information about other referencing style formats etc, and a mini-essay sample where the learner can practice the knowledge that they have acquired by progressing through the various parts of the Guide. In addition to referencing skills, learners will read and practice language structures that will help them to be more aware of tertiary-level academic writing conventions.

RATIONALE BEHIND THE REFERENCING GUIDE

As many students at HKUST still do not realize the serious implications of committing plagiarism, it is incumbent upon tertiary-level educators to make this point clear. Bearing this in mind, then, the first question that one would probably ask is 'Why do some students commit plagiarism?' A typical standard response to this might be something like 'Students are less than committed to their learning while at university, and generally spend more time on developing their social lives' or 'They're simply looking for the easiest and quickest way to complete their writing assignment', or something similar in nature. If, however, we look a bit more deeply into the issue, there are several factors that may contribute to this phenomenon: a general lack of awareness regarding citation conventions and, more importantly perhaps, linguistic difficulties

associated with the integration of information in order to achieve coherence and cohesion in writing.

Common in tertiary education worldwide, students are expected to read and integrate the ideas and research of experts in a given field of knowledge when writing academic papers. Ironically, however, this expectation is also why they might fall into the trap of committing plagiarism. In a desperate attempt to try and answer complex questions and problems in English, (in this case, their second language) students may be found copying anything from a sentence to a whole paragraph from a secondary source without the proper acknowledgement of the original writer or publication. Although it is true that students may not fully grasp the concept or theoretical principle introduced in class so they 'copy' when they are required to write critically about it, it may be equally true that they simply do not have the linguistic proficiency to express these ideas in relationship to their own. Whether the former or the latter reason prevails, the fact remains that if students are required to integrate expert information into their written assignments, they should be acquiring referencing skills for academic writing as soon as they begin their university studies.

THE REFERENCING GUIDE: AN ON-LINE CITATION TOOL

The importance of referencing correctly and accurately are first explained to the learner: 'Proper referencing demonstrates that you are familiar with the normal practices of your professional community, and also that you have researched your topic' (lcms01.ust.hk/sbm). This is immediately followed by a definition of plagiarism. These brief explanations are then followed by examples taken from Y.2 SBM student writing. The rationale here is that the content and examples are both authentic and easily comprehensible for students. After the students are given illustrations of how others have committed plagiarism, the necessity of learning how to reference properly is emphasized.

> Making small changes to an original source does not make the work your own. Instead, without referencing, it just looks like an attempt to deceive (i.e., commit plagiarism). There is nothing wrong with using and quoting sources. In fact, it is normal academic practice. (lcms01.ust.hk/sbm)

The next section of the Guide takes the student into the most interactive area of the citation tool: 'Good Referencing'. At this point, the assumption is that the student has a basic understanding of 'why' and 'how' one references secondary source materials. The 'Good Referencing' section, then, covers the most commonly used citation format types:

1. In-text referencing
2. Direct quote
3. Paraphrase
4. Summary

These citation 'types' are followed by interactive sections that demonstrate how to

produce a *reference list*, as well as how to produce *references for both print and online references* in various formats.

In each section, the student follows a similar step-by-step learning framework which emphasizes both language and skills development:

Step 1. A brief explanation of the concept - text
Step 2. Authentic examples with expert advice - visual + text
Step 3. An interactive exercise which allows them to practice - visual + text
Step 4. A correction mechanism and model answer - visual + text
Step 5. A 'learn more' area that provides additional explanation and illustration - text

Note: A variety of exercise types are rendered in an interactive mode (i.e., multiple choice, drag and drop, highlighting problematic areas etc.)

INTEGRATING LANGUAGE, SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

The final section of the Referencing Guide is called the 'Review' section. In this area, students can practice what they have learned from progressing through the other sections of the Guide. Here, students are provided with a 'Model Essay' entitled 'Managerial Microeconomics: Economic Concepts in Our Daily Life'. When the student clicks on one of the three buttons provided on the screen: *direct quote*, *paraphrase*, or *summary*; the model essay will be 'highlighted' with the corresponding examples (and colors) clearly illustrated. This provides the student with a contextualized visual and text-based example of how the citation types actually appear in an essay.

They can also choose to complete some more interactive practice and revision exercises; but this time, using the model essay. In this section, the student can actually click on small visuals of the source materials, 'zoom up' the text, and then read extracts from the original sources that were used in the production of the model essay. These examples allow the student to see how the texts are used and integrated into a holistic piece of writing, rather than just seeing the examples in isolated 'chunks' of information. The students are also asked to identify citation errors in an erroneous model essay (plus corresponding reference list) as a way of solidifying the concepts that are introduced throughout the Guide.

When the practice and revision exercises have been completed, the student can print out a 'good' copy of the model essay for their own future reference. They can also move on to the final page of the Guide where they are provided with 'Reminders and Resources'. Here, the students are once again reminded of the importance of citation in written documents: '…as you go on to further study, or enter professional life; you will write papers, articles, reports, or proposals. To do this properly, you will need to refer to a style manual' (lcms01.ust.hk/sbm). At this point, the student is given some useful links to several commonly used referencing style manuals such as the APA (American Psychological Association) for social sciences, the Chicago style for journalism and design, and the MLA (Modern Languages Association) for humanities and literature.

CONCLUSION

Thus far, the students who have used the Guide have responded very positively. In summary, their responses (documented in the Writing and Speaking through the Curriculum, 2003 fall semester questionnaire) were that they found the Referencing Guide to be 'informative and useful'. Although the tool was developed for Business Studies students as an integral part of the WSC website here at HKUST, it has obvious cross-departmental application potential as similar 'referencing guides' could be tailored to various disciplines using authentic student writing and subject-specific citation conventions. In any case, the tool is an attempt to make a rather tedious but necessary part of academic knowledge acquisition interesting and informative for both students and educators alike. The benefit of the online environment, of course, is that the materials are accessible anywhere on campus at any time convenient to the learner. Perhaps, more importantly, however, it puts the onus of learning about academic referencing skills upon the learner. This is also beneficial for educators as they need not spend so much of their precious class time on skills and knowledge that can be acquired independently by their students.

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Examples from WSC Website: **lcms01.ust.hk/sbm.**

Appendix 1

Introduction
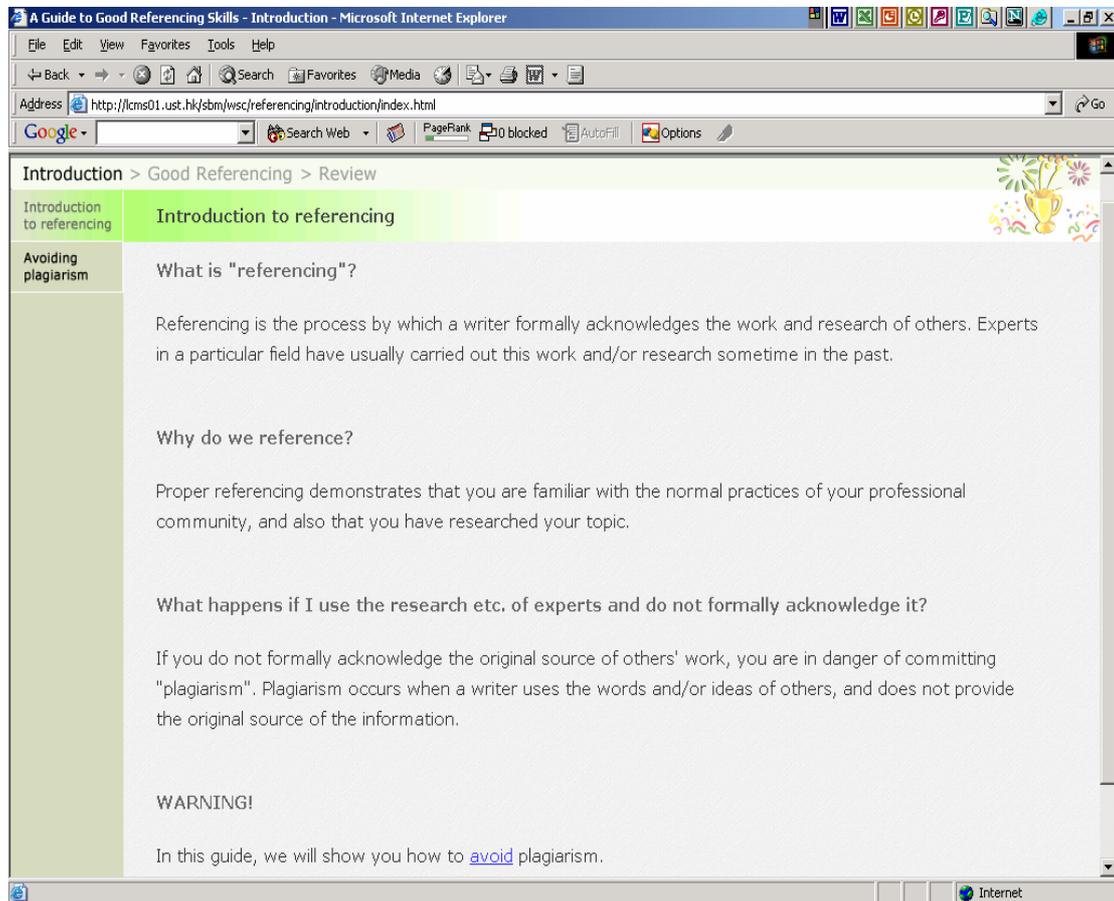
Appendix 2

Avoiding Plagiarism

Appendix 3

Plagiarism - Example
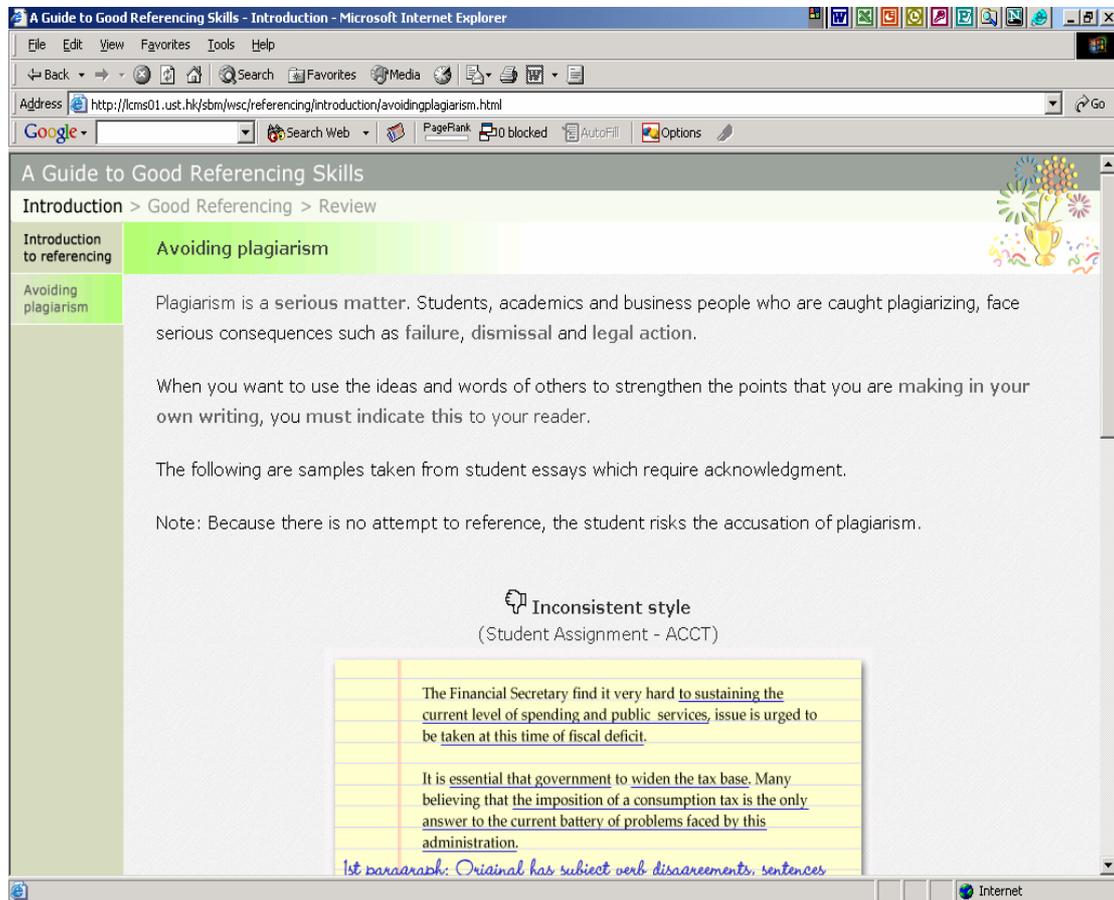
A Guide to Good Referencing Skills - Introduction - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Back

Address http://lcms01.ust.hk/sbm/wsc/referencing/introduction/avoidingplagiarism.html

Google | Search Web | PageRank | 0 blocked | AutoFill | Options

Chunks of "expert-style" language which are often definitions
(Student Assignment - ISMT)

Structured analysis is a traditional system development technique that is time-tested and easy to understand. The first phase, systems planning, initiates from a systems request, which is a formal request that describes problems or desired changes in an information system or a business process. The next phase is systems planning. Its purpose is to define the business requirement and to build a logical model of the new system. In the third phase, systems design, a blueprint for the new system that will satisfy all the documented requirement is created. In the final phase - is the Systems implementation phase - when the new system is constructed.

Students often have difficulties with definitions.

In their research, they find a useful definition and, with few changes, include it in their own work.

In the example above, only the last sentence has been changed. This is obvious because it is the only ungrammatical portion of the paragraph.

Making small changes to an original source does not make the work your own. Instead, without referencing, it just looks like an attempt to deceive (i.e. commit plagiarism).

Internet

Appendix 4

Good Referencing

Appendix 5

Example - Direct Quote

Appendix 6

Review - Model Essay