

Student perceptions of referencing

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The aim of this workshop is to present and discuss the findings of a research study supported by the LearnHigher and WriteNow Centres of Excellence in Higher Education.

The aim of this study was to identify how students perceive the roles of referencing in academic writing; to identify the main referencing problems for students; and to consider the implications of the findings for higher education institutions, and in particular for staff development.

A total of 278 students across 14 UK institutions of higher education were involved and the study has identified that many find referencing a time-consuming and difficult experience.

The main practical issues for them are related to understanding when they should reference, and the referencing detail required. However, the practical difficulties were compounded by the range of referencing styles they encountered; inconsistent advice and feedback from tutors; and a lack of clarity as to understanding when and how they could integrate their own experiences into assignments.

For many students in the survey, a fear of being accused of plagiarism was at the core of their difficulties and resulted in referencing being regarded as a form of defence against such accusations, rather than as a tool for the development of their own arguments.

One of the challenges for institutions is how we can encourage students to select and manage evidence and to use referencing as a tool to develop their 'own voices' in assignments.