

Novel Referencing Style Based on DOI® for Digital Publications

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ABSTRACT

The various formats of referencing styles adopted by different scholarly disciplines often leads to confusions, errors and lack of traceability of resources cited. To address these challenges we herewith propose a simple and easy to use referencing style based on the digital object identifier (the DOI® system), which in our opinion will not only improve the traceability of resources cited but will also lead to harmonisation of referencing across various scholarly disciplines. With increasing adoption of digital publications, it is our view that the novel DOI® based referencing system proposed here will be resourceful and less prone to potential citation errors.

Key words: Citations, Referencing, Scholarly work, Manuscripts, Styles.

Referencing is fundamental to scholarly writing wherein it plays an essential role of acknowledging the rationale of previous work to your own scholarly work.^{1,2} Different scholarly disciplines have adopted customised styles of referencing to suit their needs (Table 1). All these customised referencing styles have two common elements^{1,2} i.e., 1) in-text presentation of the reference (citation) and 2) reference/bibliography list presented at the end of a scholarly work.

Typically the most common sources which are referenced in the biomedical scholarly writing are either book, book chapter, journal article or website.^{1,2} Besides these the less commonly used source for referencing are newspaper/magazine article, policy document, podcasts, conference proceedings/papers, Act of Parliament, cases, case notes, blogs, software, interviews, lectures, etc. The increasing diversity of sources to be referenced together with a large number of biomedical journals adopting different referencing styles often leads to significant confusion and waste of time. While several software tools are available to format the required referencing style, the access to software involves significant costs. Another area of concern with the current referencing system is the inaccessibility or traceability challenges of the cited references.² While an experienced scholarly writer may find the problems posed by various referencing styles non trivial due to being in an autopilot mode, these may be of significant challenge to scholars/students early in their carrier. Hence there is need to develop a simple and standard referencing style which can be suitable for all, easy to adopt, less prone to errors and importantly which can be easily accessed for verification.

With the expansion of open access journals priming digital publications, increasingly the digital object identifier (the DOI system)³⁻⁶ is widely adopted to identify most forms of scholarly publications. Although like any other new system the DOI system has some limitations, nevertheless the DOI system offers an approach to simplify and standardise the referencing style, which is hence proposed in this brief report. Below are some examples of how the DOI system can be used for referencing which in our opinion is simple, easy to use, less prone for errors and accessible.

Citation of journal article in text

The efficacy of *Osmium sanctum* extract in repelling and control of fungal gnats was recently reported.¹ This study provides a considerable refinement to a sustainable and environmental friendly approach to control of fungal gnats.²⁻⁴

Citation of journal article in reference/bibliography list

1. <https://doi.org/10.5530/bems.6.2.6>
2. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocontrol.2019.104101>
3. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jam.15032>
4. <https://doi.org/10.3958/059.044.0217>

Citation of book article in text

A detailed description of the drug discovery development process included in a recently published book¹ is a valuable teaching resource to students specialising in pharmacology. In this book an exclusive chapter² on stem cells-based drug discovery is very insightful.

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Table 1: Currently available referencing styles which are widely used in most scholarly publications.

Referencing style	Used By
American Mathematical Society (AMS) and London Mathematical society (LMS)	Mathematics
American Psychological Association (APA)	Education, Language and Linguistic Science, Psychology
Chicago referencing style	English (also use MLA), History, History of Art, Music
Harvard referencing style	Archaeology, Biochemistry (as well as Vancouver), Biology (as well as Vancouver), Economics, Environment, Health Sciences, HYMS (as well as Vancouver), Management, Philosophy (as well as MLA), Politics, Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media (as well as MHRA)
Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers	Computer Science, Electronics
Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA)	Theatre, Film, Television and Interactive Media
Modern Languages Association of America (MLA)	English, Philosophy, humanities subjects
Oxford Standard for Citation of Legal Authorities (OSCOLA)	The York Law School
Vancouver (developed by International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE))	Biochemistry, Biology, Hull York Medical School

Citation of book in reference/bibliography list

1. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5534-3>
2. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5534-3_10

The major advantages of this DOI® system-based referencing style are:

1. Simple, economical and easy to use.
2. Easy to trace the validity and reliability of the cited reference.
3. Potential to avoid citation bias.
4. Easy to optimally track citations.

Although the DOI® system-based referencing style has many advantages, the major limitation is with citing sources which don't have a DOI assigned. This limitation can be easily overcome by wider adoption of the DOI® system by all forms of digital publications. Considering the progressive development towards digitisation of past and present resources this limitation of DOI® system-based referencing style can be overcome within a reasonable time frame. Moreover DOI® system-based referencing style has the flexibility to be used effortlessly without or with specific software tools.

Another major benefit foreseen by using the DOI® system-based referencing style is the potential for harmonisation of referencing across various scholarly disciplines, which in our opinion will be resource efficient.

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