

# I'm rubbish at keeping track of all of my references, and have no idea how to fix this. Help!

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*Dog ate your notes? If you're always scrabbling to find missing references, or if your lecture notes look like a dog's breakfast, here are some tech-savvy tips to help you keep those all-important references safe and sound.*

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Many of us still keep our notes about research sources distributed across a forest's worth of paper products: essay notebooks, class readers, and unlimited small bits of paper.

It's surprising, really; because these days, most of us do the bulk of our research using a computer, usually over the internet. The screen of a PC, smartphone, or tablet—and the frame of an internet browser window—are the main interfaces to our research experience. We use them to search the Library's online catalogue; explore topics using e-research tools like digitised manuscripts; or look up items on Google Scholar. Our research process has gone digital – so it makes sense that the way we capture and store our references should be digital, too.

Don't get me wrong, there's nothing intrinsically bad or wrong with using paper to record notes and references. It's just that many of us have no system in place to make this work effectively. And as a result, we often find ourselves in a state of frustration that the notepad was left at a friend's place; the list of things to look up is obliterated by a coffee stain; and the supermarket receipt with that crucial library call number scribbled on the back got dumped in the recycling bin.

## To avoid the pain of mislaid references, try one—or all—of the following:

1. Use the powerful search results features within [Discovery](#) and the Library [Catalogue](#). With Discovery, add search results to My Folder with a single click, then email yourself the results, or export them. In the Library Catalogue, log in to your Patron Record to establish a catalogue search session, add items to a list, and email or export your results. These services are free, they're very easy to use, and they're right there in the Library webpages where you do your searching.
2. Use a web-based reference management tool like [Endnote Web](#), [Mendeley](#), or [Zotero](#). Capture academic references and articles directly from your browser, and save them to read later, using your preferred referencing format, with a single click. Yes, it's possible. See the Library's [detailed guide](#).
3. Keep a reference list as a separate "To Do" list on your phone—for example, email yourself saved Discovery search results (from My Folder) and copy these straight into a "To Do" list. Your phone travels with you, and so will your references.

4. Try a web-based system to store your notes online, like [Google Docs](#), [OneNote](#), or [Evernote](#). Your notes will be accessible from anywhere with an internet connection.

Web-based reference management tools are very powerful, and they are getting very easy to use. Importantly, many of them are also free to use. The Library has [detailed guidance](#) on how to use its own search features (for the Discovery LibGuide, see “Manage Your Results”), as well as how to use academic reference management tools like [Endnote Web](#).

## How to make a paper-based notes system more effective

If you really do prefer the look and feel of paper to working at your computer or online; that’s fine, go for it. Some people find that writing things down physically helps them to remember things better; others like to be able to order their notes visually in ways that are more difficult to replicate online (although tablets with styluses and “smart pens” are starting to change that); others just like the look and feel, and the history, associated with paper and pen.

Whatever your reasons, if you choose to stick with a paper-based notes system for your references, try the following tips for recording reference information—which can also be applied to the digital domain:

1. Be consistent. Use the same notebook (or recording device) for all your references, instead of splitting up records across a number of different places and devices. If you do have lots of scattered notes and references you can consolidate them by scanning them in to a single document and saving them into your email account or on a USB.
2. Be timely. Always aim to record all the relevant information for a reference at the point where you make a record (e.g. a note) about it. If you are prepared to write down a call number, then it’s worth writing down the author, title, and date of publication at the same time. If you don’t have time to write the reference information down, take a photo of the paper or book with your phone, making sure to capture the author and publication details for when you’re ready to reference it.
3. Stay focused. Try to set aside dedicated time for library or search sessions, and while you are searching for references, try to stay focused on that task and not let yourself get distracted by random web browsing, IM, or Facebook. Your searches will be more productive, you won’t forget to record crucial bits of information, and ultimately, you’ll save time.

## Which referencing style?

It’s important to understand is that there is no University ‘house style’ for references and bibliographies.

Knowing which style to use depends on your subject area, and sometimes, on your subject; different Schools and Departments, and different fields of study, use different styles. It is your responsibility to find out which style to use!

Check your subject reader, handbook, learning guide, or [LMS site](#) to find out which referencing style applies in your subject.

If you don't know which style to use, or can't find the information, try the following:

- Ask your tutor
- [Check the LibGuide](#) for your subject (if available)
- Ask your lecturer
- [Chat online to a librarian](#)
- [Ask a Student Advisor at your Student Centre](#)

What is the difference between all these referencing styles?

How do you reference a journal article using APA 6<sup>th</sup> style? Or a television documentary using Chicago style?

Tip! To see how a reference looks using different referencing styles—or to find out how to reference a particular type of source, using a specific style—use the Library's [Re:Cite](#) tool.

[Re:Cite](#) at the University Library, University of Melbourne

Re:cite covers the following main styles:

- APA 6th – often used in social sciences and related fields such as education, commerce, medicine and nursing
- Harvard - used in many fields, including social sciences and design
- Chicago - often used in social sciences
- MLA - often used in English and other humanities fields
- Vancouver – often used in medicine and science fields
- AGLC – used in law

Note: The above guidelines are general in nature. They must not be used in place of checking which style applies in your subject!

Re:cite also has detailed [printable guides](#) for each of these referencing styles.

## References / Further Reading

Discovery LibGuide <http://unimelb.libguides.com/discovery>

EndNote Web LibGuide <http://unimelb.libguides.com/endnoteweb>

Beginning Research Libguide [http://unimelb.libguides.com/begin\\_research](http://unimelb.libguides.com/begin_research)