

---

# Creating a new Harvard referencing guide at the University of Lincoln



Helen Williams  
Academic subject librarian  
University of Lincoln  
[hewilliams@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:hewilliams@lincoln.ac.uk)



Judith Elkin  
Academic subject librarian  
University of Lincoln  
[jelkin@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:jelkin@lincoln.ac.uk)

Marishona Ortega  
Senior academic subject librarian  
University of Lincoln  
[mortega@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:mortega@lincoln.ac.uk)

---

## REFERENCING GUIDE AND APP

We planned to spend this summer writing a Harvard referencing guide and app. It was one of those summer jobs, you know, the ones that don't always get finished. Amazingly, they *are* both completed with time to spare so we thought we'd tell you about it!



The majority of academic departments at the University of Lincoln ask their students to reference their work in the Harvard style. Some departments have written their own guides, some endorse the library's guide (which was produced over five years ago) and some recommend guides produced by other universities. All these guides are different as Harvard is open to differing interpretations depending on the writer's individual choice: it seems possible that there are as many different ways of using Harvard as there are academics and librarians and this guide is yet another interpretation.

**WHY WE WROTE THE GUIDE**

As subject librarians we spend lot of time supporting students in referencing their work; we do this with caution because there are many guides circulating in the university. It has always been the library's ambition to create a referencing guide that would appeal to all our academic departments using the Harvard style. We are aware, however, that this is an impossible task: the guide would not only need to explain *how* to reference and cover everything a student *might* reference, with copious examples; it would have to be easy to use and update, and academic staff would want to recommend it to their students.

**A LEISURELY START**

In May we began to think about producing our guide. Initially we were under no pressure as we had all summer to write it and upload it on to our website. We began with a leisurely look at the many referencing guides produced by library and academic staff from within the University of Lincoln, as well as those created by other university libraries. This was a useful exercise as it gave us ideas for the appearance of the guide, but it also highlighted just how big and daunting a task we were undertaking. We put together a proposed table of contents (TOC), which included all the information sources that students have asked for help with, especially those that hadn't yet made their way into the various guides, such as apps and Google books. We circulated this TOC to our subject librarian colleagues for their comments and received useful feedback which we incorporated.

Then, in early June, the University's English Language Centre (ELC) offered the library funds to pay for the design and printing of a guide that could be given to their summer school students and then used for the rest of the students in the new academic year. This was exactly what we needed to help us produce a more professional looking guide; it also gave us the opportunity to explore the possibility of creating a referencing app and / or referencing generator. The funds from the ELC needed to be spent by the end of the financial year so we had to write the content and have it designed, printed and in the building by 31 July, bringing our deadline forward considerably.

**THE DESIGN**

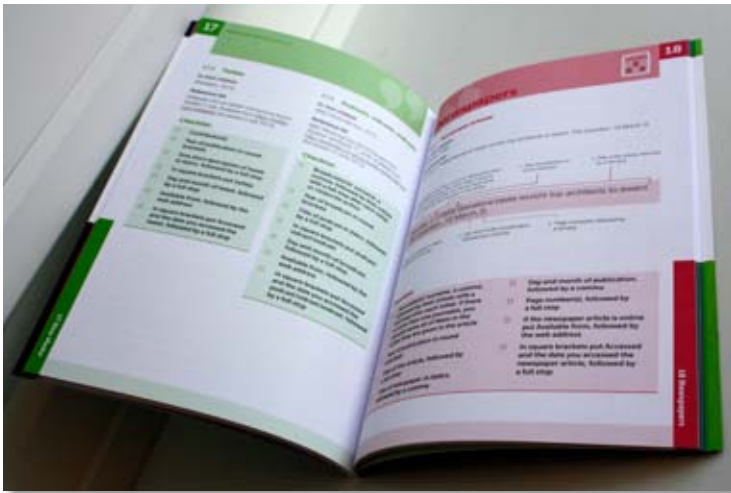
Our brief to the design team was to create a professional guide that was useful to the students, attractive and that they would want to keep. We used a local design company who listened to our ideas and agreed that the guide would also work well as an app; we were pleased they could produce both the print guide and the app. We are proud that the app will be the University of Lincoln's first and, as far as we are aware, the first university library referencing app. In creating an app to sit alongside the print guide, we would have a product that meets the changing needs of students, gives us control over amendments to the content and the ability to use push notifications to advertise events in the library.

**IN WHICH WE PICK UP THE PACE**

With the incentive of a professionally designed and printed handbook, and the motivation of a much shorter deadline, we set to work in earnest. We agreed on the TOC, which eventually resulted in eighty types of information sources. We were to some extent limited in how much we could include as the format of the guide was intended to be no more than sixty pages. However, this changed as we worked on the document and realised that, in order to create something that was useful, we would need to include diagrams. This not only increased the size of the guide, it also added additional workload to an already tight schedule. Spending time on the diagrams resulted in our forfeiting the planned index.

## HOW HARD WE WORKED

During the five weeks we had to produce the guide all three of us had annual leave booked consecutively for the first three weeks. In the end we only had a fortnight together, so we had to work a lot of extra hours during that time. We shared the TOC between the three of us, which meant that we each had a set number of examples and checklists to work on independently before coming together in the final two weeks. The introduction was written and all the examples and checklists were amalgamated into one document. The final fortnight was quite intense as, like all those who are professionally obliged to care about referencing, we all have our own personal style preferences on which we were forced to compromise. It is surprising how passionate one can be about the placing of commas and full stops.



## THE FINISHED PRODUCT

The printed handbooks arrived at the end of July; they look lovely, and we are very pleased and proud! The designers aim to complete the app for the end of August, available to the entire world! Work on the app has been less stressful for us as the content and layout needed only minor modifications.

## WHAT WE ARE STILL WORKING ON

Our new Harvard referencing guide forms the structure for an online tutorial that we are currently working on. This will complement the guide and app and will be available for academic staff to embed in our virtual learning environment. In addition to the tutorial we are also in the process of updating our customised Harvard output style in RefWorks, so that when students use the bibliographical management software it will replicate the style in our referencing guide and app.

## WHAT WE WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

We found it difficult to decide at what level to pitch the guide, especially the introduction, where we explain how to reference. In the end, time and space constraints resulted in the assumption that the user would have some knowledge of referencing and plagiarism. We hope to complete an online tutorial to consolidate this by the start of the academic year.

- We would be more rigorous about planning at the start of the project.
- Some of our examples could have been better. Although it was useful to have difficult examples to test our agreed style, these were not always ideal for demonstration purposes.
- We would have liked to include an index.
- If we had had more time we would have liked to share and receive feedback from colleagues *before* the guide was sent to print, as they will also have to promote and use it.
- The design company only quoted for one edit, which was not appropriate for this type of document: in our naivety we didn't question this, which resulted in our negotiating an additional edit and incurring expense at the very last minute. With a document like this, we would suggest budgeting for a minimum of two edits. If we were to do this again we would budget for three edits as it's so important that there are no mistakes.