RESEARCHING AND WRITING ART HISTORY ESSAYS

4 REFERENCING

Proper referencing is essential in essay writing. This refers to published material only. Please do not reference your lecture notes.

When you look up information in books and articles, you can use the references and bibliographies supplied by other writers to find further material. Properly referencing your own work makes it possible for others to look up your sources. It also allows you to introduce points of view with which you do not necessarily agree, and to set up reasoned debate within your essay.

4.1.1 Academic integrity and plagiarism

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means no cheating. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. The University defines plagiarism as follows:

The presentation of the work of another person or other persons as if it were one’s own, whether intended or not. This includes published or unpublished work, material on the Internet and the work of other students or staff.

It is still plagiarism even if you re-structure the material or present it in your own style or words.

Note: It is however, perfectly acceptable to include the work of others as long as that is acknowledged by appropriate referencing.

Plagiarism is prohibited at Victoria and is not worth the risk.

Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct and may be penalized severely. Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- an oral or written warning
- suspension from class or university
- cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course.

Find out more about plagiarism and how to avoid it, on the University’s website at: http://www.victoria.ac.nz/students/study/exams/integrity-plagiarism.

4.2 Quotations
There are two main ways of incorporating quotations into your writing. Where you only use a phrase or a short sentence, it can be included in a sentence of your own but should be enclosed in **double quotation marks**:

> The “myth” of Antipodean cultural isolation was addressed by Bernard Smith in 1961, when he wrote: “The historian is to myth what the ferret is to the rabbit. The historian burrows down after myth, hunts it out and destroys it if he can.”

If you wish to quote a passage of three lines or more, it should be indented from the main text and either dropped in point size (or distinguished by single spacing as opposed to the double spacing of your main text). **Do not use quotation marks on these indented quotes.**

> The treatment of the Aborigines by Australia’s European colonists, who treated the indigenous inhabitants as virtually sub-human, has bequeathed a lasting legacy within Australian culture. As Bernard Smith asks in a 1980 lecture:

> How shall we redeem it [white Australian culture] from the guilty awareness that these acts of genocide and attempted genocide were being enacted most vigorously at that very time when our own white Australian culture was being conceived and born?

There are many different systems used for references and bibliographies. The bibliography in section 7 (p. 37) lists a number of authoritative sources. They can be complicated and somewhat confusing, but the examples used here are in the style preferred by Art History. **Whichever method you choose, you must be consistent.**

### 4.3 Referring to works of art

Paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints and photographs should always be referred to using the conventional format: Artist’s full name, *Title of work in italics*, date (location in brackets). Names of buildings and items of decorative arts are not underlined or italicised. For example:

Mary Frederica Marshall, *River Hutt Looking from the Fern Ground*, c. 1845 (p.c.)

Le Corbusier, Chapel at Ronchamp, 1950-54 (Ronchamp, France)

Thomas Germain, Royal silver tureen, cover, liner and stand from the Penthièvre-Orléans Service, 1733-34 (p.c.)

These examples use ‘c.’ to stand for *circa*, which is Latin for approximately or around (sometimes written ‘ca’) and ‘p.c.’ to stand for private collection. Works in public collections require the name of the city and the institution. For example:

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Kowhaiwhai patterns, Te Hau-ki-Turanga, 1842 (Wellington: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa)

It is important to give the accurate location of a work on first mention in the body of your text, as there are sometimes two or more works of the same title by the same artist. Not all books give the location of works, so you may need to find the location by looking at other sources (and remember that location can change over time). It is acceptable to use abbreviations for well-known collections. Some examples are:

NY: MoMA for New York: Museum of Modern Art

London: NG for London: National Gallery

NY: Met for New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art

If you are unsure of the appropriate abbreviation, you should give the location in full.

Your subsequent references to the same work do not need the location, but in the first instance and in cases where confusion might arise (perhaps more than one work of the same title) they should be stated in full. It is not necessary to give the dimensions and/or media of works of art unless this information is integral to the point you are making. If this is the case, weave the information into the text of your essay.

**Exhibition titles** should also be distinguished from the rest of your text with ‘inverted commas’ or with *italics*. If you are also giving titles of individual works (in *italics*), ‘inverted commas’ are preferable for exhibition titles.

**Illustrating your essay** with images of works of art will leave your tutor in no doubt as to which particular work you are talking about, especially if it is a lesser-known or obscure work, or you are placing emphasis on a certain detail of the work. Place these illustrations in an appendix and refer to them in the text by figure number (fig. 1, fig. 2, etc.). Record full details under the image, including artist, title, date, medium, dimensions, location and collection. Images of famous works do not need to be included, and you will not be penalised if you do not use illustrations.

**4.4 Footnotes and endnotes**

Footnotes and endnotes generally contain information on quotations or references in the text (see 4.2). They can also be used to mention related material or incidental information which would be too distracting if included in the main text. They should be kept as short as possible. Footnotes are indicated by a superscript number at the end of the sentence containing the name, phrase, or quotation to which they refer, and appear at the base of the page – under a horizontal line and in a smaller typeface (see below). The footnote function within Word will execute this automatically, and will change the numeration as you insert footnotes.
Endnotes serve the same purpose as footnotes, but appear at the end of the essay – as commonly seen in periodicals. Like footnotes, endnote numbers should be sequential throughout the essay. Use Arabic numerals (1,2,3) rather than the Roman ones also on offer (i, ii, iii).

In general, it is best to avoid copious footnotes, as they tend to interrupt the flow of your essay. Try to restrict them to references or brief explanations only. It is not necessary to footnote ideas or assumptions that are or were generally held to be true. For example, it is not necessary to give a source for such statements: ‘By the end of the 18th century in Europe, it was generally accepted that the earth was round’.

There is often confusion about how to refer in footnotes to the same book several times or two or more books by the same author. We recommend the use of a short title for subsequent citations. The following is a guide to dealing with a series of references to writings by a single author:

According to Bernard Smith, European artists on Cook’s voyages applied a combination of the pictorial conventions of the topographical and picturesque traditions to their representation of Pacific landscape subjects, which resulted in a new type of landscape which Smith calls the ‘typical landscape’.¹

Painters like William Hodges saw the New Zealand landscape through the lens of the Baroque landscape tradition as practised by painters like Salvator Rosa.²

In a later book on the same subject, Smith restated many of his original arguments.³

¹ Bernard Smith, European Vision and the South Pacific, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Harper and Row, 1984), 1. [Make sure you give full publication details including page numbers.]
² Smith, European Vision, 65-66. [Use the same format for any further references to this particular book by Smith.]
³ Bernard Smith, Imagining the Pacific: In the Wake of Cook’s Voyages (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1992), 1-5. [If you refer to this book again you must give the author and short title, i.e., Smith, Imagining the Pacific, to distinguish it from the other books by the same author.]

Use the short title format rather than the Latin abbreviation like ‘ibid.’ (in the same source) or ‘op. cit.’ (in the work cited).

4.5 Bibliography

Start your bibliography on a fresh page at the end of your essay, and place it before your illustrations (if you are using any). You should list only those books and articles which you have actually used. They should be listed alphabetically by surname of main or first author. The bibliography allows your reader to follow up ideas or issues that you raise in your essay. It should not include standard reference works such as language dictionaries or the Bible. Remember: Do not reference lecture notes in your bibliography, nor your course handbook. Any relevant item within the handbook should be referenced in the usual fashion.
Your bibliography lists the research literature used for your topic for the benefit of your reader. It should be as comprehensive but also as concise as possible. Unnecessarily long bibliographies annoy rather than impress your reader, especially if they contain obviously irrelevant material. On the other hand, you must include all relevant material you have used, even if you have not quoted from it directly.

4.6 Footnote and Bibliography conventions

There are several different ways of setting out the information in your bibliography. You can use either footnotes or endnotes (see 4.4). Footnoting is the style we prefer in Art History. In general, the more information you give, the better. Here are some examples of how to reference different types of publications.

Footnotes and the bibliography generally include information on the author, title, and facts of publication.

• **Author:** single or multiple authors; single or multiple editors; or gallery or museum for an exhibition catalogue (when there is no identifiable author/editor).
• **Title:** title of the book; title of the essay or chapter in an edited collection; title of an article and journal; or title of a webpage or site.
• **Facts of publication:** city of publication, publisher and date for books; volume, issue, date and page numbers for journal article; URL for website or online database.

The format to cite a publication in footnotes and the bibliography follow slightly different conventions.

The Art History Programme recommends a simplified form of the Chicago Manual of Style format, where both footnotes and bibliography are organized as a single sentence.¹

• In a **footnote** the bibliographic details are organized as a single sentence, since the footnote is a continuation of the text. The author and title are separated by commas, and the facts of publication are enclosed in parenthesis (brackets). The author’s name is given in standard order, with the first-name before the surname. The title of books is set in italics, while the title of article, essays or chapters are enclosed in quotation marks.
• The **bibliography** is organized alphabetically by lead author’s surname, so each entry begins with the lead author’s surname (subsequent authors appear in standard order). Book titles are set in italics, while the titles of articles, essays or chapters are enclosed in quotation marks.

Many library catalogues and databases now provide citation tools to automatically produce a bibliographic citation for a publication. These tools can be useful; however, it is necessary to check the accuracy of the citation, and correct any errors. For instance, the citation tool for Te Waharoa, the VUW library catalogue, does not distinguish between the different

¹ In the full Chicago Manual of Style format, the bibliographic entries follow a different format: the author, title, and the facts of publication are separated by a period (full-stop). For more information see “Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide,” Chicago Manual of Style Online, 16th ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), accessed 4 May 2017, http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html.
contributors to a publication (author, editor, translator, museum, etc.). You can find the citation tool under the “save/export” tab on the right-hand side of the catalogue entry.

Publication titles can be capitalized in one of two styles: i) headline style, where all major words are capitalized (as in the examples below); or ii) sentence style, where the first word and any proper nouns are capitalized. However, one style should be used consistently throughout the text and references in an essay, so do not alternate between headline and sentence style.

4.7 Examples of footnote and bibliographic entries

Below are examples of some of the most common publication types you will use in an art history essay. For more information see the “Chicago-Style Citation Quick Guide” at http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html, which includes more information and wider range of examples.

**Book with single or multiple authors:**


**Book edited by one or more people:**

**Footnote:** Francis Frascina and Jonathan Harris (eds), *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts* (London: Phaidon, 1992).

**Bibliography:** Frascina, Francis, and Jonathan Harris (eds), *Art in Modern Culture: An Anthology of Critical Texts* (London: Phaidon, 1992).

**Essay or chapter by an author who is not the author or editor of the book in which it is published:**


**Exhibition catalogue:**
Large exhibition catalogues frequently include a group of essays, but may lack a clear primary author. If an editor or curator is clearly identifiable, list the catalogue under his or her name:


In some instances there is no identifiable author or editor. In this case list the catalogue under the gallery or museum where the exhibition was held. Art gallery, *Title*, Place of publication, Publisher (often the gallery), date.


Periodical or journal article:


For articles accessed electronically, give full details of the published article, then the date accessed, and the stable URL or doi (digital object identifier). This information is usually listed when you access the article on the database, on the article coversheet (in JSTOR), or at the bottom of the first page of the article. Where no stable URL or doi is provided, list the database consulted. Do not include a lengthy search string.

Stable URL


DOI


Database


Dictionary or other reference book entry (for example, The Dictionary of Art):

Author(s) of the entry, “Title of the entry,” Title of dictionary in italics, Editor’s name, Place of publication: Publisher, date of publication, volume number, page numbers.


Many reference books are now available online. For instance, The Dictionary of Art is now available as Grove Art Online. If you are consulting the online version, you can use the following reference format:


Internet references:

Author/Organisation, “Title of item,” precise date when accessed, URL:


Conference papers:

Published papers follow the conventions for the relevant type of publication. Unpublished conference papers can be referenced as follows:


Personal Communication:
APPENDICES

5.1 Learning Objectives

The following are the learning objectives of Art History:

100 level
To develop an understanding of the chronology of art history within a framework of ideas and themes

To introduce students to the skills of visual analysis; the language of art history, theory and practice; and the concepts needed to progress in the discipline

To develop skills of analysis and argument by encouraging students to evaluate the visual and to read selected texts of art history with care, using both to construct an argument

To develop skills in the written presentation of art historical material (writing and editing)

To ensure students have basic library skills appropriate to the discipline

To encourage participation in tutorial discussions

To make students aware of exhibitions and art collections in the Wellington region

200 level

1. To introduce students to the chronology and key artists in particular periods or areas of art history

2. To develop students’ skills in visual analysis and, where applicable, to the materials and techniques used in the art of a particular period

3. To develop students’ ability to analyse and interpret art within the relevant social, political and theoretical contexts

4. To introduce students to some major themes and currents in writing about art of a particular period or area

5. To develop students’ ability to gather and organise relevant information and evidence from published material (that is, secondary sources) and to further their ability to construct an argument using this material

6. To develop further students’ ability to present material which is coherent and well-written and which demonstrates an understanding and application of the conventions of academic writing (including appropriate citation, referencing and documentation);

7. To develop skills in reading art history and to make students aware of the range of available library resources;

8. To develop students’ ability to contribute to group discussions

9. To encourage students to view relevant art exhibitions and collections

300 level

1. To introduce students to more specialised studies of art and to specific areas of theory and debate within art history

2. To refine students’ skills of analysis and interpretation within the specific context of the course

3. To develop students’ ability to recognise and evaluate a range of different approaches to art historical material
To encourage students to produce substantial pieces of written work which
demonstrate their ability to think and write critically
To ensure the consistent application of the conventions of academic art historical
writing
To ensure that students are able to use the full range of reference systems in the
University Library, including periodicals and on-line data bases
To develop student skills in the presentation, analysis and discussion of visual
material in tutorials
To further encourage the viewing of artworks and the use of other primary resources

400 level

1 To familiarise students with historiographical and methodological debates in art
history
2 To encourage students to apply their skills to the critical examination of visual and
textual material
3 To develop student capacity for independent work, including the formulation,
analysis and refinement of topics
4 To ensure that students make full use of library resources and unpublished material
appropriate to their individual areas of study
5 To refine student skills in seminar presentation and oral debate
6 To prepare students for further post-graduate research in art history
7 To introduce students to the standards required of scholarly articles and papers and
to the application of their research and writing skills in the work place

5.2 Sample assignment marking sheet:
(note that the format may vary slightly for different courses)

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
SCHOOL OF ART HISTORY, CLASSICS & RELIGIOUS STUDIES

ART HISTORY   ESSAY MARKING SHEET

NAME:    COURSE NO:
TUTOR:    DUE DATE:
          (2% deducted for each day late)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>components of essay</th>
<th>outstanding</th>
<th>excellent</th>
<th>very good</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>satisfactory</th>
<th>adequate</th>
<th>fail</th>
<th>comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNDERSTANDING &amp; DEFINITION OF TOPIC:</strong> Is the main point of the essay clear and relevant? Is all the discussion related to the topic?</td>
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<td><strong>FORMULATION &amp; DEVELOPMENT OF ARGUMENT:</strong> Is the essay structured so that the ideas and argument is developed in an orderly way? Does the essay flow logically from the introduction to the conclusion?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>USE OF VISUAL AND WRITTEN RESOURCES:</strong> Have the major sources been consulted? Do the sources used in the essay adequately support its main point? Are pertinent visual resources used to support the argument?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ORIGINALITY &amp; INDEPENDENCE OF THOUGHT:</strong> Has some element of independent thinking been demonstrated? Have you ensured your point of view is clear to the reader?</td>
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<tr>
<th>components of essay</th>
<th>outstanding</th>
<th>excellent</th>
<th>very good</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>satisfactory</th>
<th>adequate</th>
<th>fail</th>
<th>comments</th>
</tr>
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</table>

29
### REFERENCING:
Are all ideas, facts, paraphrases and quotations taken from sources cited accurately and adequately? Are works of art properly documented within the text? Can the reader refer from the essay back to the sources used?

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### STYLE & MECHANICS:
Does the style allow the clear communication of ideas? Is the essay free of excessive grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors?

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### GENERAL COMMENTS:

### GRADE:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<th>75-79</th>
<th>70-74</th>
<th>65-69</th>
<th>60-64</th>
<th>55-59</th>
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<th>40-49</th>
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<td>Excellent</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
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<td>Good</td>
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<td>Good with some weaknesses</td>
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<td>Satisfactory to good</td>
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<td>Satisfactory</td>
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<td>Fail Well below standard required</td>
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5.3 Interpreting grades:

Course grade ranges and indicative characterisations

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pass/fail</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Normal range</th>
<th>Midpoint</th>
<th>Indicative characterisation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>A+</td>
<td>90%-100%</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>Outstanding performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>85%-89%</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>Excellent performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>80%-84%</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>Excellent performance in most respects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>75%-79%</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Very good performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>70%-74%</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Good performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>65%-69%</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Good performance overall, but some weaknesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>60%-64%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Satisfactory to good performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>55%-59%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Satisfactory performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>50%-54%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Adequate evidence of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>40%-49%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Poor performance overall, some evidence of learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>0-39%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Well below the standard required</td>
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<td></td>
<td>K</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fail due to not satisfying mandatory course requirements, even though the student’s numerical course mark reached the level specified for a pass, usually 50%. A student whose course mark is below 50 should be given a D (40 – 49) or E (0 – 39), regardless of whether they met the mandatory course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Overall pass (for a course classified as Pass/Fail)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fail (for a Pass/Fail course)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.4 Good Writing Checklist

WORDS: precise – the right choice? appropriate – the right register? (not too colloquial) concise – all needed? idiomatic – used and combined in accepted ways? organised into good sentences?

SENTENCES: correct – grammatical? make sense? effective – easy to follow? varied – differ in length and pattern?
organised into logical paragraphs?

**PARAGRAPHS:**
- one per topic?
- topic sentence?
- everything on the topic?
- internal organisation logical?
- links to other paragraphs logical?

**STRUCTURE:**
- thesis statement?
- paragraphs all relate to thesis?
- paragraphs in logical order?
- paragraphs linked to one another?
- paragraphs lead logically to conclusion?
- conclusion confirms thesis?

**EVIDENCE:**
- relevant?
- appropriate?
- accurate?
- sufficient?

**CONVENTIONS:**
- spelling, punctuation correct?
- bibliography complete and accurate?
- quotations properly acknowledged?
- footnotes clear and accurate?

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**5.5 DO**
- formulate and present your own argument based on research
- check word count
- allow plenty of research time
- ask for help if you are stuck
- check with your tutor that you are on the right track
- edit your writing
- keep a copy of your essays and learn from past mistakes

**DON’T**
- type or write neatly
- answer the question
- plan your structure carefully
- reference correctly and fully
- learn from feedback on essays
- list facts and descriptions from books
- exceed word limit
- ask for an extension after due date
- panic
keep writing if you are unclear about the question
leave no time for ‘tidying up’
throw essays away without reading the marker’s comments
forget to staple the pages

6 THE USE OF THE APOSTROPHE

NEVER WRITE “IT’S” UNLESS IT IS SHORT FOR “IT IS”

DO NOT USE AN APOSTROPHE FOR DECADES (1790’s, 1850’s, 1900’s)

The apostrophe is used in English for two main purposes. One is to indicate possession (the man’s head); the other is to indicate a missing letter (it’s = it is).

POSSESSION

• The possessive apostrophe replaces (or can be replaced by) the word “of”
The paintings of David = David’s paintings
Winckelmann’s theories = the theories of Winckelmann

• The rule is to put the apostrophe after the possessor and add an “s” if the possessor is in the singular
Gauguin’s trip to Tahiti

• When the possessor is in the plural simply put the apostrophe after the plural possessor
The academicians’ theories = the theories of the academicians
The museums’ initiative = the initiative of the museums

• The only exception to these rules relate to possessive personal pronouns, which do NOT take an apostrophe
His hers theirs ours yours its

NOTE: The commonest mistake is to place an apostrophe in the possessive its

• Proper nouns (names of people and places, usually capitalised) which end in “s” are sometimes given another “s” as if they were singular
William Hodges’s paintings or William Hodges’ paintings (both are correct)
MISSING LETTERS AND ABBREVIATION

• One of the commonest uses of the apostrophe is to indicate the contraction of a pronoun and a verb, echoing spoken language but increasingly common in journalism. AVOID IN ACADEMIC WRITING.

I’m (I am) she’s (she is) you’re (you are) we’re (we are)
I’ve (I have) [she has] you’ve (you have) we’ve (we have)

Contractions of negative verbs may bring alterations in the shortened form

Don’t (do not) can’t (cannot) didn’t (did not) won’t (will not)

IT’S ITS USAGE THAT’S TORTURE

Murdering the apostrophe is a neon light to a who’s who whose grammatical sensibilities are strained, says KEITH AUSTIN. A group of more than 100 wellknown literary figures in Britain – including Martin Amis, Andrew Motion and Fay Weldon – was recently asked to nominate which grammatical mistakes annoyed them most. At the top of the list, behind split infinitives and clichés, was the misuse of the apostrophe. My only objection to this is the misuse of the term “misuse”; the apostrophe isn’t so much misused these days as tortured, horribly disfigured or murdered (although The New Fowler’s Modern English Usage is more prosaic, calling them “gross disturbances”).

It is a pet hate of mine that, in my days as chief sub-editor of the Herald, was guaranteed to induce either utter despair or a towering rage that would have put King Lear to shame. So it is good to see someone making a stand against, perhaps, the written word’s most frequent mistake. Of course, not everyone agrees on the correct use of that most pertinent of pen flicks, that most crucial of key strokes.

The American columnist William Safire has waged a long battle of attrition against people such as myself who believe that the use of 1980’s/1970’s/1960’s to describe a decade is erroneous. As you would expect, Safire is eloquent in his defence of the apostrophe in this instance. But wax as lyrical as he might, he’s wrong. The 1980s is plural; it describes every year of that decade – all 10 of them. There is no apostrophe needed – and I’d put money on it.

In fact, once I nearly did. A few years ago, after many dark winter months driving past Sydney’s gaily lit Taylor Square and gritting my teeth at the sight of the huge neon radio station sign boasting that it was the sound of the 90’s (grrr), the sign was taken down. It seemed an opportune time to ring the station and beg to buy this largest of misplaced apostrophes from them. The sweet young thing who took my call was nice enough to pass on the old loony caller to the firm that made the sign. Sadly, the wording was broken up before I could make an offer they couldn’t refuse. It would have looked great on my desk at work, and I could have brained errant reporters with it.

The apostrophe was invented in the 16th century to indicate that a letter or letters had been omitted when two words were joined together (it is = it’s). That’s 400 years, and we still can’t get it right.
Look, it’s easy. Join two words together and you whack in an apostrophe to show something’s missing. OR you use it to indicate possession: as in, "the girl’s dress", "the dog’s collar" or "the chief sub’s neon apostrophe is blue".

Pronouns? It’s a no-go area. Plurals? Don’t use it (unless it is possessive and then the apostrophe goes after the final s). Music shop owners in particular should beware: one more sign offering hundreds of CD’s for sale will prompt pyromania. One of my favourites is the American television advert for, get this, Toy’s R Us. A single toy? If only . . .

(Sydney Morning Herald, 15 July 1999)

7  BIBLIOGRAPHY


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