

BOOK REVIEW

Umali Saidi. 2018. A Pocket Guide to Academic referencing. Africa Institute for Culture, Peace, Dialogue and Tolerance Studies. Pp 76. ISBN 978-0-7974-9403-9.

Despite the introduction of referencing software like Mendeley, Zotero and Cite-U- Like, academic referencing remains a nightmare for most students and lecturers in most academic institutions as has been shown by research (Mufanechiya, 2012). As such, many have been found guilty of the cardinal sin in academia, plagiarism. Plagiarism can be defined as theft or use of academic material without due acknowledgement and attribution.

The transition from High school to University has often proven difficult and students often do not know why it is important for them to even reference in the course of producing academic essays. Saidi's "A Pocket Guide to Academic Referencing" is a welcome addition to literature on academic writing and referencing. Beyond explaining what academic referencing is about, Saidi walks readers through the need for such after demonstrating in the book's Introduction how we consistently engage in referencing daily as we seek to demonstrate to our audiences the veracity of what we will be communicating.

The book evidently enters a marketplace that is already loaded with thick volumes on the subject which students and lecturers alike hardly read unfortunately but is a very welcome addition. One is left wondering how the book is a welcome addition to such a market given that there are so many books on academic writing such as those by Colin Neville and John Flowerdew (Flowerdew, 2013; Neville, 2010). The book aptly describes itself as a pocket guide and is literally what it claims to be, the book is small enough to fit into one's pocket but loaded enough (in terms of information depth) to be useful. Such combination makes it an easy go-to choice.

The pocket guide nature of the book however has its setbacks. The book explores only three referencing styles (Harvard, American Psychological Association and Chicago) in detail. This may be a flaw and it may have been necessary to include such information on the cover as there are so many other references styles in existence though these three are considered some of the most basic and generally used styles. The decision to explore these three is however accounted for (though not explicitly or in detail) on page 9 of the book where the author mentions that there are two basic systems in use: the Tarubian models also known as the numeric referencing systems and the name-date systems. The APA and Harvard systems fall into the latter class while the Chicago systems falls into

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the Tarubian model. As such Saidi accounts for his decision to discuss just these three systems as they are meant to be representative of other similar systems. An attempt should have been made to however explicitly inform readers of this aspect as readers may dismiss the publication as being limited if they do not venture into the text fully.

Though the book concentrates on three main referencing styles, described earlier as being a setback, the concentrated approach also turns out to be an advantage as the author allows himself room to explore each of the three approaches fully. With the Harvard system for instance, Saidi shows readers how to deal with in text references fully by presenting as many scenarios and examples as possible. The same is done in the discussions on APA and the Chicago referencing systems.

The author's approach is one that is mostly student friendly as Saidi is economic with his words, choosing to convey only that which is necessary and avoiding the complexity and verbosity that is characteristic of most academic texts. Saidi for instance does not bore his readers by going into a long history of how academic referencing came to be institutionalised but lists reasons for the endeavour in clear language and in point format. The text thus comes across as student friendly. The conversational tone keeps audiences engaged and it is quite possible for one to go through the book in one sitting.

In keeping with an end-user centred approach, the book explores and exemplifies how writers in academia should go about doing in-text and end-text referencing. Readers are shown when and how to use direct quotations, paraphrase, indentation, and ellipsis (pages 10-13) as well as how to compile end text references or the bibliography. At this stage, the book publishers or typesetters chose to use a font colour that may be too light for some in the examples and may prove difficult to read for persons with eyesight challenges, but such is a window-dressing matter which does not take away too much from the book. Unlike other academicians who theorise endlessly, Saidi chooses exemplification over theory showing how writers in academia can reference from textbooks, journals and magazines. Eventually this culminates in a very practical, user-friendly book.

Overall, this “pocket-guide” is a one resource that is worth the attention of anyone who wants to write correctly within academia and not spoil their writing because of a failure to follow the basic conventions of referencing.

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