

# *Self-citation : A practical guide*

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All of us who are involved in any kind of academic writing have to conform to minimum standards such as the meticulous recording of source material in the form of references. It is generally thought that there are three main reasons why people use references. These being (i) the expression of an idea has been put forward more clearly elsewhere by someone else, (ii) to make specific reference to relevant past literature and (iii) to provide suggestions for further background reading.

These reasons can also be applied to self-citation. However, self-citation has additional advantages. Self-citation references can also be used to (i) let journal reviewers and referees know who has written the paper (which may not always be a good thing!), (ii) to establish to readers your reputation in a given area and/or (iii) satisfy cravings to see your name in print! In this short article I aim to examine the art of self-citation in academic writing and give some effortless hints and tips.

It has previously been asserted that self-citation is academia's way of expressing one's ego although this was based on anecdotal evidence rather than any kind of empirical investigation (Griffiths, 1998a). After an exhaustive literature search it perhaps came as no surprise that I found absolutely nothing on the subject of self-citation except a manuscript by myself (Griffiths, 1998b) which has been described as the best article in this area (Griffiths, 1998c). So what can the experienced self-citation expert get up to in the course of a single article? Self-citation aficionados are known to use such tricks as referring to themselves in less conventional formats such as letters to national newspaper (e.g. Griffiths, 1998d), articles in national newspapers (e.g. Griffiths, 2004a), educational leaflets (e.g. Griffiths, 1993a) or consultancy reports (e.g. Griffiths, 2002a).

However, these work most effectively if they are buried away amongst more conventional references such as books and refereed journal articles.

Those experienced in self-citation will often sink to even murkier depths. For instance, self-citation is an excellent way of introducing something that seems implausible into your argument. Two common ways to disguise implausibility is the liberal use of such phrases as "paper forthcoming", "manuscript submitted for publication", "internal report" or "personal communication" (however, the latter should be used very sparingly as it suggests that the author is someone who talks about things more than writing them). If you sprinkle these into an article and intersperse them with a few very genuine citations such as books you wrote which received very good reviews (Griffiths, 1995; 2002b) or some of your good refereed journal papers spread across a number of years (Griffiths, 1991a; 1993b; 1994; 1996; 1997; 1999; 2000; 2001; 2003; 2004) it can look very professional and in some cases impressive.

For the really experienced, secondary self-citation or embedded self-citations can often be useful. This is a technique where you can use quotes attributed to you in a newspaper or magazine article written by someone else (e.g. Griffiths, 1991b) although it looks as though it is one of the author's *bona fide* references. However, as my last word on the subject, I will leave you with one practice you should definitely avoid. I am referring to the inclusion of self-citation by pseudonym which has been described as "a despicable habit to be stamped out at any cost" (Mithgriffs, 1997) although this may not be as serious as it was once thought as it has been claimed that no-one reads references and footnotes anyway<sup>1</sup>.

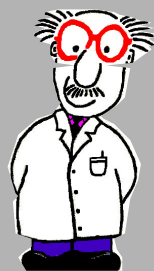
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