Sometimes when you look at your reading list or assignment, it's hard to work out whether the reference is to a book, a chapter in a book, a journal article, a paper from a conference or from the Web.

Although there are different styles of constructing a citation to a piece of work, such as how the author’s name is shown or the position for the date, there are common features which make it easy to identify the various types of work cited, once you know what you to look for.

This brief guide will help you to spot the differences between types of references. This is important to know before you start trying to find them in libraries.

Books
Most reading lists you will receive include references to books that are key texts. Here are some citations or references to books. The part of the reference that tells you it is a book is the publisher and the place of publication. Edition numbers are sometimes mentioned, e.g. 6th ed. ‘Ed.’ after a name means the person is an editor. The phrase ‘[et al.]’ after a name means that there are more than 3 authors for a work so only one is given, for brevity.


Chapters in books
Some books are made up of a collection of chapters or articles, each written by a different author, and usually with an overall editor(s). Your reference list may specifically mention the author of a particular chapter of a book (so that you read the right part of the book!) The reference contains double information – the names of the author and the editor; the title of the chapter and the whole book. These are references to chapters in books.

The part of the reference that tells you it is a chapter or part of a book is the word ‘in’ followed by the editors and title of the whole book. Like references to books, they also have a publisher and place. You will need to search for the book under the name of the whole book’s title and/or author in the catalogue.


Journal articles
Reading lists are likely to have references to journal articles, where researchers publish their work. The part of the reference that tells you it is a journal article is the volume number, the issue number or month, and the page numbers. Also notice that publisher or place of publication are NOT given in journal references.


Sometimes the title of the article is not given, you just have to look up the volume and page numbers given.

Often the journal name is abbreviated. Typing this into the online catalogue will not always work due to the way searches are indexed. You will have to determine what the full title is by asking your lecturer / supervisor or a librarian! But you can sometimes just guess, for example the last journal title cited above is for the Journal of Comparative Physiology, A.
Papers from conferences
Your reading list may have a reference to a paper presented at a conference or seminar, or to the complete published papers of a conference or seminar. These are generally known as conference proceedings. Often signified by the words Proceedings ..., Conference ... or Papers from ...; the name of the conference and the organisation involved.


Online documents
You may find references to online documents and sites. These references often contain a web address (the URL—Uniform Resource Locator) and the word ‘Retrieved’ and the date that it was last read online.


DOIs
You may see a DOI next to a journal article citation, e.g. doi:10.1016/j.physletb.2003.10.071. This is a Digital Object Identifier, a unique number which is assigned to each journal article individually. A DOI is guaranteed never to change, so it can be used to link permanently to electronic documents which can then be cited in a reading list or list of references / bibliography. To find a document using a DOI, firstly copy the DOI of the document you want to open. Then, open the following DOI site in your browser: http://dx.doi.org. Enter the entire DOI citation in the text box provided, and then click Go.

Incomplete references
Unfortunately, reading lists and bibliographies will occasionally give incomplete information. Here are some problem citations and some hints to help you discover what you need.

- A journal article without volume and pagination details – but at least you know the year so you can look at Science for 2006 online or in print in the Library to find the article by author name.
- Two different dates – probably two different editions and it doesn’t matter which one you choose / can find.
- No volume given and there are a couple of volumes each year for this journal. You could look at page 35 in each volume for 1985 online or in print in the Library.
- This is not an incomplete reference; it is a time-saving convention which means that this item was written by the same author as the previous one in the line.

How to find books and journal articles in the Balfour Library
- To find printed and electronic books use LibrarySearch at http://search.lib.cam.ac.uk/. See also ebooks@cambridge at http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/electronicresources/ebooks.php
- Use the printed journals finding guides located around the Library to find printed volumes on the shelves
- Find an online journal title at ejournals@cambridge at http://camsfx.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/cambridge/az [Hot tip for when searching for journals on catalogues: be aware that journal titles may use American spelling e.g. behavior instead of behaviour!]
- Use citation databases such as Scopus or Web of Knowledge, which can be found at eresources@cambridge, under the ‘databases’ tab, at http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/electronicresources/ Librarians can help you!