

SWOT Analysis

Introduction

A SWOT analysis is a reflective tool used to analyse an individual's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in relation to a certain skill (Bitesize, 2025). In this analysis I will conduct an evaluation of a student's ability in using the Harvard Referencing style, which is one of the most important academic skills taught in the PAPD (Personal, Academic and Professional Development) module. Harvard Referencing is one of the widely accepted referencing methods in higher institutions of learning for acknowledging sources and avoiding academic plagiarism, giving credit to the original authors for their original work (Now Students, 2026).

It is essential for students to understand the importance of referencing accurately to achieve academic success. Accurate referencing helps students demonstrate the level of involvement in school materials and improves the credibility of their arguments in academia. Proper referencing enables students to demonstrate the level of research done while at the same time maintaining academic integrity. This SWOT analysis will be based on the student's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the use of the Harvard referencing style in academic work.

Strengths

One of the main strengths the student has developed in using the Harvard Referencing style is an increasing understanding of in-text referencing and reference list guidelines. Through the PAPD lectures and practising academic writing, the student has become aware of the importance of providing in-text citations when writing academic assignments. For instance, while writing essays the student has been able to incorporate and learn in-text referencing.

A further strength is the student's ability to access credible academic resources through university databases such as Google Scholar and the UWTSD digital library using Harvard referencing properly. According to Stella Cottrell's research on referencing in academic writing, proper referencing is a sign of academic literacy and helps in the development of critical thinking skills (S Cottrell, 2019).

They have also begun to make noticeable progress in how they organise and structure their reference list at the end of their assignment. They are using guidelines provided by the Harvard style, such as alphabetising them and including the main

information such as the authors, dates, titles, and publishers. This helps the reader trace the sources and supports academic integrity.

Additionally, the student has started using the university's referencing guides to refer to the correct formats. This is an example of independent learning and attention to detail.

Weaknesses

They may come across different weaknesses when it comes to applying Harvard referencing throughout the assignment. One of the challenges will be making sure to remember the formatting rules for different sources such as websites, reports, books, and journal articles. This is because each of these sources provides different information, which can be confusing when creating a reference list.

A key weakness is inconsistency in punctuation and formatting. For example, the student sometimes forgets to include certain information when quoting directly from a source, which are essential details. According to Colin Neville, paying attention to detail is important to avoid minor errors that can affect the accuracy and professionalism of the work, especially in academia.

The student, being a mature learner, also struggles with managing references and citations when working with multiple sources in one assignment. Due to this, and the demands of academic work, keeping track of different citations can be difficult. Mature students face various challenges, including academic skills such as referencing and citing. This can make mature students feel overwhelmed by the formal learning environment and the academic standards that are now required, which may be new to them and completely different from what they are used to.

Another limitation is the uncertainty about whether certain ideas require citations or can be perceived as common knowledge. The student has not got much experience when it comes to using different methods to organise their references and still lacks familiarity and confidence with them, even though the tools and methods are available. This can sometimes slow down their overall progress.

For the student to improve in referencing, they will need to be intentional in addressing these weaknesses and continue to practise. Things such as utilising support from their university for proofreading work can be transformative.

Opportunities

There are numerous opportunities available that can support the student to improve and strengthen their Harvard referencing skills. One key opportunity is the academic support services provided by the university. At UWTSD, many lecturers are open to providing draft presentation sessions, giving students an opportunity to receive corrections and feedback on their work under assessment criteria.

Additionally, another opportunity is online academic resources. Many universities publish detailed Harvard referencing tutorials; these are helpful for students who are unsure about referencing. Being able to access these resources will enable the student to check their citation formats and learn from the examples to confidently cite sources.

One useful opportunity is having supportive peers. Working with classmates on the same course allows students to review each other's work and identify referencing errors in each other's work that they might have overlooked. Learning in a group is effective as it motivates students. When students are working together towards achieving a common goal, while also working on their individual contributions, they are encouraged to perform better. Studies have shown that group learning is effective as students are able to interact and think more critically (Slavin, 2014). Stella Cottrell also emphasises that collaborative learning promotes strong academic skills through sharing feedback and discussion.

Furthermore, regular assignments allow continuous opportunities to practice and improve referencing, which is beneficial for academic writing skills. This is because students are required to complete assignments repeatedly, and in each one they are directly working on their referencing and learning to use appropriate sources. Each assignment also provides feedback from markers, allowing them to learn from constructive feedback and improve.

Taking advantage of these opportunities is important for helping the student to deepen their understanding of Harvard referencing and enhance the quality of their academic writing.

Threats

Although the student is presented with many opportunities for improvement, there are still several potential threats that may interfere with their progress in mastering Harvard Referencing. One major threat is time pressure caused by multiple academic deadlines. In situations where the student has several assignments due at the same time, they might rush the referencing process, increasing the chances of making mistakes. According to Giselle Allsopp, a lecturer in human psychology at

Deakin University, having many deadlines can place significant pressure on students. This pressure can lead them to rush their work, reducing its quality and making it harder to meet academic standards. Studies indicate that in these situations students are not only stressed by the workload but also by the challenges they encounter during the process (Allsopp, 2025).

Language barriers are also a major threat for students studying in a second language. Aspects such as understanding academic standards, paraphrasing sources, and applying citations correctly require strong language skills. Students who are not native English speakers may struggle with in-text citations and referencing, particularly if they have no prior experience with English academic writing. Research indicates that teaching can improve students' referencing and reduce plagiarism; however, this must be done more gradually for students with lower levels of English proficiency (AL Harrasi, 2023). Students who speak English as a foreign language may have difficulty referencing and citing their sources, highlighting the need for additional guidance and support (Alawad, 2026).

Technological challenges can also be a threat and affect mature students using digital referencing tools. Mature students may feel less confident and less familiar with technological tools. As a result, they may require additional support to effectively use these tools in their academic work. Research also indicates that mature learners benefit from extra university support to develop their digital referencing skills (Tufford, 2024).

Conclusion

Overall, the student shows good progress in Harvard Referencing, with clear strengths in understanding citations and using academic sources. However, some weaknesses remain, such as formatting errors and lack of confidence. By using available support such as tutors, resources, and peer learning, the student could improve these weaknesses and succeed academically.

REFERENCE LIST

Alawad, E.A. (2026) "Source integration practices and pedagogical implications in English academic writing: A case study of Omani undergraduates," *Reading & Writing*, 17(1), pp. e1–e7. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4102/rw.v17i1.614>.

Allsopp, G.L. *et al.* (2025) 'Optimizing assessment workload and student experience: a quantitative and qualitative analysis of an undergraduate subject restructure', *Advances in Physiology Education*, 49(1), pp. 154–162. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1152/advan.00095.2024>.

Allsopp, G.L. (n/d) *About me | Deakin University*. Available at: <https://www.deakin.edu.au>

AL Harrasi, K.T.S. (2023) "Developing a needs-based plagiarism management in second-language writing in a higher education institute: practice-oriented research," *Instructional science*, 51(6), pp. 1079–1115. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11251-023-09628-6>.

Bitesize Learning (n/d) *SWOT analysis explained: examples and templates*. Available at: <https://www.bitesizelearning.co.uk/resources/swot-analysis-explained-examples-templates>

Cottrell, S. (2019) *50 ways to succeed at university: Essential academic skills*. 4th edn. London: Red Globe Press.

Ivanova, I.N. (2020) 'Making sense of research: University students' difficulties in writing academic summaries', *Studies in Linguistics, Culture and FLT*, 8(1), pp. 16–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46687/SILC.2020.v08i01.002>.

Neville, C. (2010) *The complete guide to referencing and avoiding plagiarism*. 2nd edn. Maidenhead: Open University Press. Available at: <https://file.vnua.edu.vn/data/31/documents/2020/04/21/infolib/neville-colin-the-complete-guide-to-referencing-avoiding-plagiarism.pdf>

NOW Students (n/d) *Harvard referencing guide*. Available at: <https://nowstudents.co.uk/news/harvard-referencing-guide/>

Slavin, R.E. (2014) 'Cooperative learning and academic achievement: Why does groupwork work?', *Anales de Psicología*, 30(3), p. 785. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.6018/analesps.30.3.201201>.

Tufford, L. *et al.* (2024) "Undergrad and Over 30: Perceptions of Mature Students in a Canadian Bachelor of Social Work Program," *Journal of teaching in social work*, 44(1), pp. 30–48. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2023.2288268>.

Vardi, I. (2012) 'Developing students' referencing skills: a matter of plagiarism, punishment and morality or of learning to write critically?', *Higher Education Research and Development*, 31(6), pp. 921–930. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2012.673120>.

Waller, R. (2006) "'I don't feel like 'a student', I feel like 'me'!': the over-simplification of mature learners' experience(s)", *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 11(1), pp. 115–130. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13596740500508019>.

Willans, J. and Seary, K. (2011) "'I feel like I'm being hit from all directions": Enduring the bombardment as a mature-age learner returning to formal learning', *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, 51(1), pp. 119–142.

Williams, Emerson A, Larkin R, Norman C. (2014) 'Four activities to promote student engagement with referencing skills', *Psychology Teaching Review*, 20(1), pp. 90–95. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsptr.2014.20.1.90>.