

Referencing Flemish, Dutch and German authors in English

Students and colleagues often ask me, especially when using the Harvard System: ‘How should I reference your name when quoting one of your papers?’ There is some confusion about referring to Germanic names with particles, especially since Flemish, Dutch and German speakers use them differently from each other, and emigrants from these countries to English-speaking countries use references to such names differently again.

German names

German names are sometimes preceded by the particle ‘von’ or occasionally ‘van’ (in a family of Dutch descent), for example the World War I general Paul von Beneckendorff und von Hindenburg (better known as Paul van Hindenburg) or the composer Ludwig van Beethoven. “As a rule, when the surname is cited alone in English, the particle is dropped” (Trask 2002: 135). So one reads about Hindenburg’s victory or Beethoven’s Sixth symphony. Under the Harvard System these particles follow the author’s initials (Bett 1953: 17), although it is perhaps clearer to an English-language audience to keep the family name and particle together (see Box 1).

Dutch and Belgium names

Dutch names can have a range of different particles, the most common one is ‘van’. Also possible are, for example: ‘de’, ‘van der’, ‘van den’, ‘van het’, ‘op het’, or their abbreviated forms such as: ‘van ‘t’, ‘op ‘t’ or ‘v/d’. In the Netherlands, the particles take no capital letter, for example: Ruud van Nistelrooij. According to Trask (2002: 106) in Flemish-speaking Belgium (and South Africa) it is more usual to capitalize particles, for example: Paul Van Look. In contrast to German, Dutch particles are always included when the name is used in the text. So, for example, Vincent van Gogh is referred to as van Gogh. Unless the name is at the beginning of the sentence, for example, two Dutch football players: ‘Van Nistelrooij and van der Vaart celebrated the second goal ..’ or ‘Van der Vaart and van Nistelrooij celebrated ..’ However, similarly to German, “particles are ignored when placing names in alphabetical order” (Trask 2002: 106).

Surnames of immigrants in English-speaking countries

Family names of Dutch emigrants to English-speaking countries are often changed to suit the local style. So in the US we find medical sociologist Ray DeVries as well as Dick Van Dyke and Gloria Vanderbilt. American names would be listed under the particle. So alphabetically Van Dyck is listed after Vanderbuilt.

Box 1. Examples of referencing Flemish, Dutch and German authors in English

German names	- Beethoven, L. van (1817) etc.
	- Beethoven van, L. (1817) etc.
Dutch / Belgium names	- Gogh, Vincent, van (1891) etc. etc.
	- Look, Paul, Van (2002) etc.
	Or keeping the family name and particle together:
	- Gogh van, Vincent (1891) etc.
	- Look Van, Paul (2002) etc.
American names	- Vanderbuilt, G. (1998), etc.
	- Van Dyck, D. (1968) etc.

However, if you are writing a journal article, check the journal style. Often journals will list all names in alphabetical order of the particle, in the same way that the UK telephone directory does. Thus van Teijlingen is listed under 'V'.

I am sure there is similar confusion around referencing of names from languages derived from Latin, such as d'Silva, La Rochefoucauld, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean de la Fontaine, or María Eva Duarte de Perón. Hopefully someone else will help clarify these for Medical Sociology News.

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References:

Bett, W.R., (1953), The preparation and writing of medical papers for publication, London: Menley & James

Trask, R.L. 2002, Mind the Gaffe: The Penguin Guide to Common Errors in English, London: Penguin.