



Panther Reference Verification User Guide

Developed by Darby Proctor, Ph.D.

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Overview

This tool is a Python-based APA and MLA style reference checker designed to assist instructors and researchers in verifying the accuracy of student-submitted references. It analyzes citation information (e.g., titles, authors, DOIs) and checks them against publicly available bibliographic databases to identify potential issues such as missing metadata, incorrect formatting, or unverifiable sources.

Important: Human Judgement Required!!

This tool is intended for instructional support, reference validation, and research and teaching assistance. It is not intended to replace instructor judgment or serve as an automated grading system.

Instructors must manually determine whether potentially problematic references are real/accurate, as not all journals are indexed in CrossRef or PubMed. Errors in references may result in false indicators of a reference being inaccurate (e.g., style errors, having a space within a DOI). Therefore, this is a tool to reduce the number of references which must be manually verified by instructors.

The tool has only been programmed to work with APA 7th and MLA style references. However, MLA references are often of non-academic sources so are more difficult for the program to verify. Additionally, MLA style permits a wide variety of styles to refer to references. Therefore, citation/reference matching can be poor for MLA style papers.

How the Tool Works

The user provides a local folder containing student papers. The program parses each reference locally on the user's machine. For verification purposes, the tool queries public bibliographic APIs to confirm that cited works exist and that their metadata is consistent.

The following public services may be queried:

- CrossRef API (journal articles and DOIs)
- PubMed API (journal articles and DOIs)
- Open Library API (books)
- Google Books API (books and book chapters)

All requests are read-only metadata lookups. No student information is included.

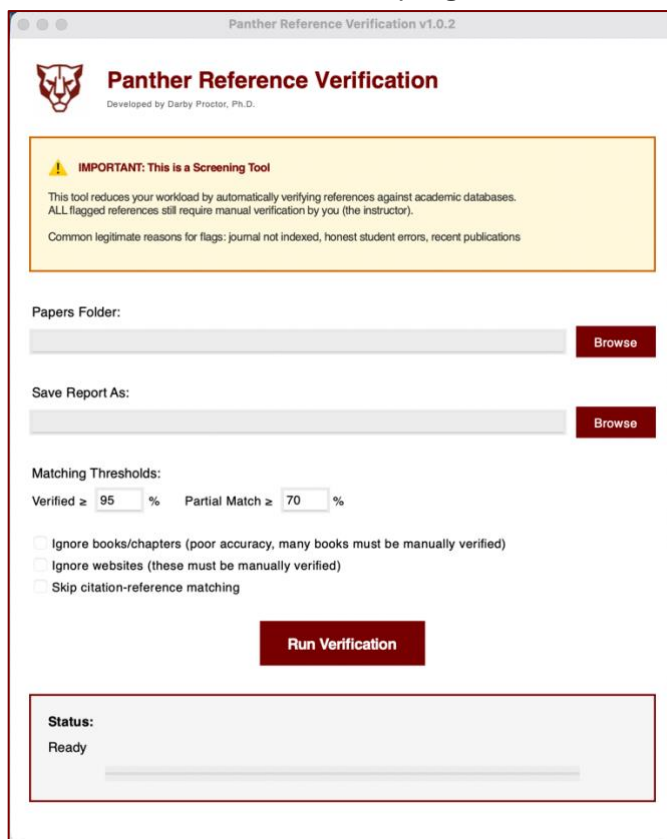
Book verification is generally poor as not all books are systematically indexed in the same way as academic papers.

Getting Started

Download the latest distribution for your computer from https://github.com/DarbyP/Panther_Reference_Verification

Using the program

Below is a screenshot of the program interface.



The screenshot shows the Panther Reference Verification v1.0.2 application window. At the top, there is a title bar with the text "Panther Reference Verification v1.0.2". Below the title bar is a header section with a panther logo and the text "Panther Reference Verification" and "Developed by Darby Proctor, Ph.D.". A yellow warning box contains the text: "IMPORTANT: This is a Screening Tool. This tool reduces your workload by automatically verifying references against academic databases. ALL flagged references still require manual verification by you (the instructor). Common legitimate reasons for flags: journal not indexed, honest student errors, recent publications". Below the warning box are two sections: "Papers Folder:" and "Save Report As:". Each section has a text input field and a "Browse" button. Below these are "Matching Thresholds:" with "Verified ≥ 95 %" and "Partial Match ≥ 70 %". There are three checkboxes: "Ignore books/chapters (poor accuracy, many books must be manually verified)", "Ignore websites (these must be manually verified)", and "Skip citation-reference matching". A "Run Verification" button is located below the checkboxes. At the bottom, there is a "Status:" section with a "Ready" label and a progress bar.

Papers Folder: Click the Browse button to select the folder containing the papers (with references) to be verified. Papers can either be in .docx or .pdf format (including pdfs downloaded through Turnitin).

Save Report As: Click the Browse button to choose a name and location for saving the report. This report will include each student and any references that were not verified so that instructors may more easily focus on those references.

Matching Thresholds: You may change the percentage matches required for citations to be considered verified and partially matched. Partial matches are classified as between the partial match percentage and the verified percentage.

Ignore Books/Chapter: Books/chapters are not indexed in a centralized repository. Therefore, book verification accuracy is poor. To aid in book verification, the report will include clickable links to search for books. However, if you do not want to verify book, you may select the checkbox to ignore references for books/chapters.

Ignore Websites: When a website is used as a reference, the website must be manually verified. Clicking this box will remove websites from the verification report.

Skip citation-reference matching: The program also will verify whether all in-text citations are found in the reference list and vice versa. Selecting this check-box will skip this step. Please note that citation-reference matching is poor for MLA style due to the variety of ways citations may appear in the text of a paper.

Citation-Reference Matching Feature

The tool can optionally check whether all in-text citations have corresponding reference entries, and whether all references are actually cited in the paper. This feature is enabled by default but can be disabled by checking the "Skip citation-reference matching" checkbox.

What It Checks

For each paper, the citation matcher analyzes:

- In-text citations – All citations that appear in the body of the paper (before the References section)
- Reference list entries – All entries in the References section

Citation Formats Supported

The tool recognizes all common APA citation formats. It also recognizes MLA citation formats but those have much more variety in them than APA citations so the accuracy for MLA is often poor. However, many of these errors can easily be detected by humans in the verification report.

Report Output

When enabled, each student's section in the report includes a "Citation-Reference Matching" section showing:

Summary:

- Number of unique in-text citations found
- Number of reference entries in the list
- Whether the paper was in APA or MLA style and the percentage confidence in the citation style.

Uncited References (⚠ Orange) – References that appear in the list but are never cited in the paper. This may indicate:

- References from earlier drafts that should be removed
- Formatting issues preventing proper matching
- References that were intended to be cited but forgotten
- References the program did not detect (occurs more frequently for MLA style)

Missing References (⚠ Red) – Citations in the text that have no matching reference entry. This may indicate:

- Missing reference entries that need to be added
- Typos in either the citation or reference
- References that were deleted but citations remain

Success message (✓ Green) – If all citations match their references perfectly

Matching Logic

The tool matches citations to references by:

- Extracting author names (last names only)
- Normalizing year information (2020a → 2020)
- Preserving author order (important for "et al." citations)
- Using first author matching for "et al.", "and colleagues", etc.

Example: The citation "Dommeyer et al. (2002)" will match the reference "Dommeyer, C. J., Baum, P., & Hanna, R. W. (2002)" because "Dommeyer" is the first author in both.

Important Notes

Author order matters: Citations like "Smith & Jones (2020)" will only match references where Smith is listed before Jones.

Organization names: The tool handles multi-word organization names like "American Psychological Association" or "National Institutes of Health".

Case insensitive: Matching is case-insensitive (Smith = smith = SMITH).

Accent mark sensitive: Names with accents will match only if the accent is correctly included in all locations the name is used (e.g., Cásé ≠ Case).

Year letters: Citations with year letters (2020a) will match references with base year (2020).

Not a style checker: The tool only verifies that citations and references correspond; it does not validate APA or MLA formatting compliance. Style errors may result in matching and verification errors.

Data Privacy and FERPA Compliance

What Data Is Sent Externally

The tool sends only non-personal bibliographic metadata to external services, such as:

- Article or book title
- DOI (if present)
- Author last name(s)

What Data Is Not Sent Externally

Student identifiers (e.g., names) are used locally for labeling output reports and are never included in API requests or URLs. In other words, no confidential student information is sent to the internet.

The only data transmitted externally consists of bibliographic metadata for published sources, which is not an education record under FERPA. From a FERPA perspective, the tool functions similarly to a web-based citation lookup performed manually by an instructor.

Data Security and Network Behavior

- No files are uploaded to the web
- No post requests are used
- No third-party analytics, telemetry, or tracking services are included
- No background data transmission occurs
- All external requests are initiated explicitly for citation verification

Disclaimer

Users are responsible for ensuring that use of this tool aligns with their institution's data governance policies. However, as designed, the tool does not transmit student information and complies with common institutional interpretations of FERPA.