Automatic Reference Numbering in Word

This document explains how to add references to a Word document (i.e., create a bibliography) and have the citations to the references be numbered automatically within the document, so that if you add or delete a reference in the bibliography, the citation numbers within the document will update automatically. The instructions should work for Word 2007 through Word 2016.

As an example, you may have a set of references (bibliography) at the end of your document that has 100 references. Inside your document you have a statement such as this:

"Maxwell's equations describe the fundamental behavior of electric and magnetic fields [23]."

If you add or delete a reference from your list of 100 items at the end of your document, you would like the number 23 in the above sentence to update automatically, so you don't have to go through the entire document updating the reference numbers.

Instructions:

1) Create a list of references (bibliography) at the end of the document, using the feature in Word that allows you to create a numbered list. (This list of instructions here is an example of such a list.) This will ensure that each item in the list of references has a number that Word can recognize, and it also ensures that if you add or delete an item from the reference list, the numbers in the reference list will change automatically.

2) Place the cursor in the document where you want to add a citation to a reference (for example, you want to cite reference [2]).

3) Click on "Insert" and then "Cross-reference". For "Reference type" it should say "Numbered item". For "Insert reference to" it should say "Paragraph number".

4) Select the item that you wish to reference from the list that it shows you and then click on "Insert".

5) To update all of the citations (i.e., all of the fields), click on "Ctrl" and "A" (which selects the entire document). Then click on F9 which will update all of the fields. You can also right click on any one citation and select the option to update the field, if you only wish to update that one citation.

Document prepared by David R. Jackson, 2019.