

Responsible Authorship

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To a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Likewise, authors imagine themselves in a world of a particular kind of reader. Their self-world image powerfully shapes what they hope will happen to the readers they envision. While there are countless possible self-world images, we can organize them under two quite different types of authors—the self-absorbed and the responsible.

Two Types of Authors

Self-absorbed authors imagine readers who will benefit them. Those who hope for money imagine a world of consumers. Those who hope for praise imagine a world of admirers. Those who hope to excite readers imagine a world where excitement is among the better things of life. Those who hope mainly for good grades imagine a world where education credentials can advance their careers.

In contrast, responsible authors imagine readers who are concerned about what is truly so and what is truly good. These authors imagine the best writings as contributions to the common good. Whether in fiction or nonfiction, their scope is not whatever pays off personally but whatever is objectively true to life or better. They respect other responsible authors because they understand how hard effective writing is. From personal experience they know the difficulty of formulating a sentence that is clear, concise, and compelling. When they discover a passage they had written just to show off, they rewrite it. In informative reports, interpretive analyses, and essays on debatable issues, they imagine themselves contributing to an ongoing conversation among many writers about important matters, with sincere respect for the ideas, the words, and the hard work of others. Their writing is honest, in the sense that you know which words are their own and which are clearly attributed to other authors.

This is why a school that aims to graduate responsible authors insists that in their papers students clearly indicate what they glean from others and what is their own work. Typically, it downgrades credit where a student inadvertently failed to make this clear; where the failure seems deliberate, it withholds all credit for the paper; for failures that recur and are done deliberately, it withholds a passing grade for the entire course.

Schools concerned about responsible authorship follow standard procedures for documenting one's sources. Some procedures regard *what* should be documented and others regard the *style* of documentation.

What should be documented

1. Direct quotations

In any sort of writing, responsible authorship involves presenting your ideas in your own words. Whenever there is no source cited, it is assumed that the words and ideas are yours. The standard practice is to use a direct quote not to make your point but to support it, or provide an example, or provide a memorable quotation. Your quotations should be an integral part of your discussion. Avoid using direct quotes to thicken a thin argument or to impress your teacher.

For direct quotes within a paragraph, enclose the quoted material in quotation marks. For longer quotations you may use an indented paragraph without quotation marks, provided that you make it clear that it is a direct quotation. Ilene Dover says this well:

Poaching a well-crafted sentence without attribution is a sign of a devious and lazy mind. (Dover, 1973:4)

Use quotation marks and a source-citation when you use another writer's exact words even when using only a short phrase:

Jones (2002:33) described Medicare as "horrendously stupid."

2. Paraphrases & Summaries

Paraphrasing is the rewriting of an author's idea in your own words. Paraphrase rather than quote when you want to present an author's idea but not the author's exact language. But even when you paraphrase, you must cite the source. You also must fully rewrite the original language and original sentence structure. A common mistake is partial paraphrasing. Do not use the author's exact wording or even the same sentence structure. For example:

Original text:

Descartes introduces the possibility that the world is controlled by a malicious demon who has employed all his energies to deceive him (Lu 24).

Incorrect paraphrase:

Descartes suggests that the world is controlled by an evil demon who may be using his energies to deceive (Lu 24).

What's wrong this paraphrase? Even though the citation is provided, the sentence still has much of the *exact wording* as the original.

Correct paraphrase:

Descartes suggests that he has been misled by an evil power who rules the world (Lu 24).

Why is this better? The language is fully the author's creation, and a citation is provided.

3. *Borrowed Ideas / Materials*

Acknowledge sources of your ideas even when you don't directly quote the text. Borrowed materials come in many forms. Include a citation when you use:

Another author's tables, maps, or graphs

Another author's data, even if using the data for a different purpose

The organization or logic of another author's argument

Reference materials (encyclopedia articles, study aids)

"Plagiarism"?

The failure to acknowledge resources in academic writing has been called *plagiarism*, from the Latin for *kidnap*.¹ But the term is unlike the theft of a child and more like a theft of honor and even potential income—no small ethical infraction. Also the term is unclear, unnecessarily negative, and often regarded as an accusation by police. The reality is that writing ought to present certain new ideas within the context of what others have already said. This is why a focus on *responsible authorship* may clarify the issue more clearly to students.

Documentation Style

Different disciplines use styles of documentation that best serve what their readers want to know. If a non-standard documentation format is used but the source can be found, the error is not usually considered serious. If the source cannot be found, errors are considered insufficient and in need of correction. Neither is considered plagiarism.

Two styles focus on the *author* because readers want to know *who* says this. Readers naturally wonder about whoever may be the source of opinions, creative viewpoints, or scholarship (biography, cultural study, historical accounts).

- **MLA.** For arts and humanities. The Modern Language Association supports parenthetical citation with author and page number (Flynn 41). Requires a list of references.

- **CMS.** For philosophy, history, cultural studies, and some business and communications materials. The Chicago Manual of Style (University of Chicago Press) prefers footnotes or endnotes rather than parenthetical citations. It is simpler and more concise than MLA. It may not be necessary to attach a list of references list if complete information is given in the notes.

Another two styles focus on the *date* because readers want to know *when* some material was first discovered or proposed. Readers of scientific studies want to know the date, since discoveries and theories are constantly changing.

- **APA.** For behavioral and social sciences. The American Psychological Association supports author, date, and page (Lugar 1997: 156) when referring to a specific point in a text; they recommend citing the author and date when referring to an entire text (Lugar 1997). Requires a list of references.
- **CSE.** For the natural sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, etc.). The Council of Science Editors supports using one of two possible styles: (1) parenthetical citation with author and year of publication (Beck 1999) and a References list in *alphabetical* order; (2) a superscript number in the text and a list of references in *citation* order.

For course assignments, confirm with your instructor whether you must use a specific documentation style or may use one you prefer. If you're writing for publication, ask your editor which style is preferred and where you can obtain a style sheet.

- Tad Dunne

¹ Siena Heights University defines plagiarism as "failure to give credit for the use of material from outside sources, including the Internet. It includes, but is not limited to, verbatim use of a quote without quotation marks and adequate documentation, submission of a paper prepared by another person as one's own work, using the ideas, facts, words, or data of someone else and claiming them as your own, or not documenting ideas, facts, words, or data gathered during research." See *plagiarism* in the index of the *Siena Heights University Undergraduate Catalog*.