

Advice for Students on Citation and Scholarship

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Grinnell College has sought in various ways to emphasize to its students the importance of academic honesty. This paper explains the importance of academic honesty and explores some of its mechanics. For fuller explanations, see any of the various style manuals. This essay is also available on the web at

<http://www.grinnell.edu/writinglab/CitationGuides/achondiscuss.html>

Attention Must Be Paid!

"Attention must be paid!" So says Linda Loman about her despairing husband Willie in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (56). Note that when I use this quotation "Attention must be paid!" I immediately identify it, telling you who said it and in what context. If I were addressing a group of dramatists, especially a group of Arthur Miller enthusiasts, I probably would need no explanation; I might merely say, "When Linda Loman says, 'Attention must be paid!' we understand her cry as a plea for respect and recognition." In either case, since I am using words originally created by someone else, I have specified the speaker and the situation: that is, I have attributed the quotation to its author. In addition, I have cited the source specifically: I note the page number on which you can find these words, and the list of "Works Cited" at the end of this document gives specific publication data.

This reference to the words of Linda Loman exemplifies *attribution*, which indicates that an idea comes from somewhere else, and its more specific cousin, *citation*, which specifies the location of that source. As this example reveals, neither is simple: how you attribute and cite, when you do so, and how much information you give about your sources are all intimately connected to your audience and purpose. I will shortly use Linda Loman's famous admonition -- that attention must be paid -- as a refrain as I explain the bad news, and the good, about citation and scholarship.

Penalties for violating the rules

First, the bad news. At Grinnell College, as at other colleges and universities, if you are caught violating the rules of academic honesty, you will face punishment, as the Student Handbook details (11- 14). These rules prohibit a wide range of less-than-honest behaviors, from copying from a source without crediting it, to faking lab results, to submitting the same paper in more than one course. The penalties range from failure in some portion of a course to dismissal from the college.

These rules are strict for good reasons: academic dishonesty violates the very purpose of scholarship. This purpose is to develop knowledge, which happens in a social process through which academics build it bit by bit. That is, one person makes a discovery and the next person adds to it -- correcting, expanding, modifying, and exploring it. For example, one scholar, finding some new documents relating to the outbreak of the War of 1812, may offer a new

interpretation of the causes. Other scholars, reading her argument, may then agree, disagree, or modify her view. They may deem her interpretation misguided, or the documents unpersuasive, or argue that another cause is more important than the one she defends. In such a way new knowledge is created, even about an event of long ago.

For this cooperative endeavor of scholarship to work, the scholarly community must be able to keep track of who said what; its members must trust that scholars indicate clearly and honestly what is theirs and what is others'. In the example above, those who disagree with or modify the original scholar's idea cite her as one of their sources and then go on to give their analysis. Since in college you are apprentice scholars, you too must carefully tell your reader where you have read the words and ideas on which your own depend.

Why Attribution and Citation are Important to Writing

Here is the good news. Paying attention to academic honesty will benefit you because doing so will help you improve your writing. Such attention requires heeding three important elements of the writing situation: the writer, the audience, and the text. When you write an academic essay, you position yourself among a great many voices and positions that make up particular academic discourses. When you attribute your sources, you indicate to your audience who among your sources said what; you can also advise that audience what you as the writer think about what those sources said. Your purpose is to give your audience as full an understanding as possible of what the source said about your topic, and of how your ideas combine with, link to, play off of, or contradict those of your sources. Thus, this process of attributing and citing is embedded in academic writing through the paraphrasing, conceding, and balancing of viewpoints that constitute this genre.

An academic writer puts ideas in perspective; she examines and discovers relationships among them. For example, note how the following sentences position ideas in different ways – as an undisputed claim, a contrast, or the object of evaluation:

Simple sentence: A said X.

Contrast: Although A said X, I believe Y.

Object of Evaluation: While A says X and C says Y, most convincing is F's view that the last half of X and the third quarter of Y are true.

In all these examples the writer, in the course of attributing ideas, relates them differently to her own. These skeleton sentences show how attributing ideas helps you convey complex thoughts precisely and persuasively. Through manipulating such sentences, you show your reader what someone else thinks and what you think about that.

In addition, when you attribute ideas, you indicate to your reader the reliability of the idea's source; such indications are especially needed now that the Internet, a medium allowing anyone to publish ideas, has become so important. In cyberspace, verifying reliability is often difficult. Therefore it becomes even more important that you attribute and evaluate the reliability of ideas for your readers because in doing so you help your audience evaluate what you say.

Clearly, attribution and citation are important in writing. Careful attribution helps you avoid unsophisticated repetition and offer instead sophisticated evaluation. For example, if you offer an unattributed claim such as "The president made a serious error," you give the reader no help in judging it. By attributing it, you offer more information: "According to his political opponents, the president made a serious error." From such an attributed claim, the reader may give less weight to the claim of error. Further, you might offer even more information by restructuring that attributed claim: "While the president's political opponents claim he made a serious error, the increase in housing stock that resulted from his action suggests that the policy was, at least in one important way, a success." In this case, you include with the attributed claim evidence disputing it. As these simple examples reveal, in talking about citation we are talking about writing: about believability, evidence, and persuasion. Citing sources is not an add-on to writing, but something as integral as diction, rhythm, or sequence.

Attribution also helps establish expert authority. When you as a writer say, "I have read A and B and C and D, who all say some form of X, and I'm going to adopt a position that includes some of X but with a new idea attached," you show the reader that you and your claims are grounded in the literature. As a writer you will often use sources to establish an authoritative voice, to move the audience by impressing them, and to render yourself believable. Citing sources fully and honestly helps you do that.

Examples of Citation

I now move from a generalized discussion of attribution to the specifics -- the paraphrase, the direct quotation, and the use of ideas.

For the basis of our citations, I will use a passage from *The Tower and the Bridge: The New Art of Structural Engineering* by David Billington. On page 230, in the chapter "Discipline and Play: New Vaults in Concrete," Billington presents the following paragraph as he discusses the relation between theory and practice in the work of Heinz Isler, who designs thin shell vaults to serve as the roofs of buildings:

As we have seen, the general mathematical theory of shells did little to stimulate design; rather, the construction of shells stimulated academics to study the theory. Isler found, as did Candela, that the theories were of little help; he had to turn to the physical world rather than the mathematical one. While use of the computer increased between 1955 and 1980, Isler found a method of physical analogies by which he could develop a scientific theory appropriate to structural art. His theory is as easy to state as it is difficult to practice: he found that the laws of nature could be put directly into the service of society by means of designs based upon the perhaps startling idea of play. His is a scientific theory of play, for all the laws of nature are obeyed. As rules, they are strict but they determine nothing; and it is through these rules, learned ever more thoroughly as he plays, that the player discovers moves that he never before dreamed of.

The Paraphrase

A paraphrase is a close approximation of what a source has said, without using the exact wording. I will demonstrate various versions of the paraphrase -- both well done and poorly done. In a good paraphrase, you seek to convey the essence of the original without repeating the wording or structure.

Version 1: A Good Paraphrase

Billington emphasizes the complexity of the process through which Isler designs, showing how this designer makes discoveries through the process of play. As Billington describes it, the design process seems unsystematic, almost random (230).

Note that here the wording moves away from that of the original. Note too, that since the paraphrase attributes the ideas to Billington, the citation at the end need include only the page number; where the name is not included in the sentence, the ending citation includes both the author's name and the page number. In the list of works cited at the end of the paper, sources are listed alphabetically by last names of their authors.

In contrast, a bad paraphrase uses words and phrases from the original without moving away from its phrasing:

Version 2: A Bad Paraphrase

When Isler designed shells, his scientific theory used physical analogies and applied them to structural art. He obeyed the laws of nature, but he learned better as he played; thus he discovered things he never before dreamed of (Billington 230).

Even though this passage is attributed properly (and note that, since Billington's name is not mentioned in the sentence, it is included in the citation), it is unsatisfactory as a paraphrase. It repeats words without quoting them directly; it follows the order and specifics of the passage; it says the exact same thing at the same level of generality as the source. Generally, to avoid too close a paraphrase, you should speak about the text at a different level of abstraction -- be more general or more specific, rise above or duck below the level at which the source speaks, change the order or the focus.

The Long Quotation

Next, I demonstrate how to use a long quotation from the same source. Note that when a quotation reaches a certain length (some sources say 22 words; others say four lines), you indent to indicate it is a quotation, rather than using quotation marks, as for shorter quotations:

Version 3: A Long Quotation

According to Billington, even if a designer like Isler knows the physical laws governing the world, he may still find the process of design unpredictable. Only play allows these designs to emerge:

[T]he laws of nature could be put directly into the service of society by means of designs based upon the perhaps startling idea of play. [Isler's] is a scientific theory of play, for all the laws of nature are obeyed. As rules, they are strict but they determine nothing; and it is through these rules, learned ever more thoroughly as he plays, that the player discovers moves that he never before dreamed of. (230)

Note that with a long quotation from a source, you indent the passage and use no quotation marks. Note, too, that for a block quotation in MLA format, the parenthetical citation appears after the period, followed by no other mark.

Short Quotations or Snippets

Sometimes you will use a series of short quotations, or snippets, to give the flavor of the cited passage:

Version 4: Snippets

Billington gives a strong sense of how Isler worked more from practice than from theory; he emphasizes how Isler used "the perhaps startling idea of play" to inform himself about the real world and how it operates as he designs shells. According to Billington, Isler used "a scientific theory of play" to "discover . . . moves that he never before dreamed of" (230).

Note here the use of ellipses -- three spaced periods -- to indicate an omission from the last snippet. Even though in this case only one letter is omitted, the ellipses are necessary because your reader understands quotation marks to indicate that what is within them appears exactly as in the source.

Using an Idea from a Source

Sometimes you may take something a source says and move beyond it, using someone else's idea as a springboard from which to jump into your own idea:

Version 5: Using an Idea

Billington's description of Isler's design process as based on science but using play (230) suggests a method of creation that may accurately describe the writing process. That is, a writer, knowing and following the rules of writing and the

traditions of structure and organization, may use playful experimentation to find surprising new ways to communicate.

Here the writer adds his or her own ideas to those from the source; the citation, since it occurs early in the first sentence, indicates the extent to which the later statements depend on the source; the rest may be assumed to be original.

How to List the Works You've Cited

At the end of the paper in which these attributions occur, the writer includes, generally on a separate page, a list of works cited. Here is how the entry for Billingham's book would occur in that alphabetized list.

Works cited

Billington, David P. *The Tower and the Bridge: The New Art of Structural Engineering*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.

In all these examples of citation I have used the MLA (Modern Language Association) format. In it, the name of the writer and the page number appear in the citation, and the reader turns to the list of works cited to find full information. Other styles of citation use slightly different formats.

You should neither make up a format nor use one inappropriate to the discipline your paper treats. The text by Fulwiler, Hayakawa, and Kupper, *The College Writer's Reference*, explains in detail the formats of the MLA (Modern Language Association), the APA (American Psychological Association), and the CMS (Chicago Manual of Style). In addition, it has shorter sections on the formats of the CBE (The Council of Biology Editors), the ACS (American Chemical Society) and the AIP (American Institute of Physics). With so many different formats and so many different kinds of sources to document, such as books, journal articles, government documents, portable databases, broadcast interviews, and personal interviews, do not depend on memory to get the format right. Look it up!

Some professors will insist you use one specific format, and correctly. Others will state merely that you should indicate your sources in some way. Whichever they say, pay close attention and remember the common thread: they all believe you must let your reader know when you use the words or ideas of others.

Other Instances of Academic Dishonesty

Paying attention to academic honesty does not involve merely avoiding errors in paraphrasing or citation. As other examples of possible problems, you must pay attention to honesty in reporting lab results: you cannot just add some contrived data points to make your graph more persuasive. Also, pay attention to following the limits individual professors set on collaboration: follow their directions, whether they say you can consult others or not. Finally, do not use the same paper to fulfill two different assignments without explicit permission from all the professors involved. Check your student handbook for further discussion of possible problems of academic dishonesty.

Advice

What should you do to ensure that you pay sufficient attention to academic honesty? I offer four pieces of advice:

1. **Take notes.** When you set out to write a paper, begin with note taking. Paraphrase your source, moving away from the exact original wording. If you do copy exact words, be sure to put them in quotation marks on your note cards. Whatever you do, don't skip the step of taking notes in your own words.
2. **Cite early.** Since, as we have discussed, attribution or citation is integral to writing, put citations into your first draft; don't leave them out and "go back and put them in later." It is often difficult later to remember exactly what specific words and thoughts need citation.
3. **Work ahead.** Avoid panic. Don't leave writing to the last minute; to document carefully, you need to write more than one draft. Also, don't sit at the computer surrounded by books. Both writing habits promote unintentional plagiarism.
4. **Ask questions.** Please take your questions to your professor or consult a member of the Writing Lab staff. In addition, read the information in Section 46, "Using Sources" in *The College Writer's Reference*; it offers advice about organizing sources, quoting accurately, paraphrasing effectively, summarizing concisely, and avoiding plagiarism (338 --347).

In conclusion, I reiterate Linda Loman's cry: "Attention must be paid!" Pay attention to the issue of academic honesty. Pay attention to your sources; when you are reading, pay attention to and learn from how academic writers cite and use sources. Pay attention to the process of writing and make attention to attribution and citation an integral part of that process. All this attention can help you avoid lapses in academic honesty. In addition, by focusing your attention on how academics use citation and attribution to position themselves in the midst of others' ideas, you will discover the joy of moving adeptly within the fascinating realms of academic inquiry.

Works Cited

Billington, David. P. *The Tower and the Bridge: The New Art of Structural Engineering*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Fulwiler, Toby, Alan R. Hayakawa, and Cheryl Kupper. *The College Writer's Reference*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996.

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman: Text and Criticism*. Gerald C. Weales, ed. New York: Penguin Books, 1981.