

USE OF SECONDARY SOURCES AND  
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN PAPERS  
AT SIMMONS COLLEGE

*Acknowledgement of  
Indebtedness, Avoidance of  
Plagiarism, and  
Some Advice on  
Research Writing*



SOURCES

*Use of Secondary Sources  
and Collaborative  
Learning in Papers  
at Simmons College*

This booklet is based to a great extent on two other documents: *Sources: Their Use and Acknowledgment*, published by Dartmouth College (1962, Revised 1976), and "The Use of Sources for Papers in Expository Writing," a handout distributed to freshmen at Harvard University (1985).

# SOURCES

BY LOWRY PEI AND TOM HURLEY

*“Each student is responsible for presenting work of her/his own creation, and refraining from representing as her/his own work that which is not her/his.”*

**There’s an old and persistent myth, which says that a writer works alone.** According to this myth, whether writing is a struggle or comes easily, as if from some divine inspiration, it’s an activity each of us is supposed to accomplish without any assistance from others. Only when a writer is finished does she share her work with the rest of the world.

Anyone who has actually attempted to write realizes that there’s something wrong with this picture. The more one writes, in fact, the more one understands that writing is rarely a completely solitary act and that we regularly receive feedback from others during the process. And in academic writing, we regularly incorporate existing knowledge--the words and ideas of others--into our own essays.

Getting help on a paper and using others’ words and ideas, then, are accepted practices in college. There are, however, general ethical principals that guide these practices: one must acknowledge assistance on a paper, and one must acknowledge words and ideas that are not one’s own. To do otherwise is to commit intellectual theft, which is considered an offense against the academic community as a whole. The Simmons College Honor Code of Responsibility specifically states that “each student is responsible for presenting work of her/his own creation, and for not representing as her/his own work that which is not her/his.” The purpose of this booklet is to help you recognize--and properly acknowledge--the various forms of collaborative work and secondary sources you will encounter in the course of your academic research and writing.

## WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE LEARNING?

Collaborative learning--for example, working in small groups in a writing class--raises questions about the ownership of ideas and writing. Certainly a professor who sets up writing groups assumes that students will share not only ways of clarifying ideas but ideas them-

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selves. But because a student is expected to make use of this work with her peers, she does not need to state that she received help from her group; the professor will assume that collaboration is happening. Of course, if you have a question about the extent of your use of someone else's feedback, you should discuss the matter with your professor. You may want to give an informal citation indicating the extent of your borrowing, such as an acknowledgement at the beginning or a note at the end:

"I wish to thank the members of my writing group (list names) for helping me improve my argument by pointing out..."

The same sort of rule applies to work with a tutor. Writing tutors are trained to ask questions, not to give their own opinions. They know that they must refrain from giving information the student should be developing on her own. Professors often assume that students will work with tutors, and sometimes explicitly ask them to do so; therefore a student does not ordinarily need to indicate that she has received such help. If, however, a student has any doubt about the extent of a tutor's influence on the paper, she should discuss it with her professor or offer a general citation at the head of her paper. In short, when in doubt, it's better for a student to acknowledge that she has received help.

What about collaboration between a student and someone who is not officially involved in her classwork, such as a roommate? Again, common sense offers the best guide. Many ideas are born or refined in conversation, and we hope that students will get ideas every day from talking to each other; this kind of interaction is as important a part of college as classroom learning. But if you feel that a conversation has done more than stimulate or clarify your thoughts, and you sense that you've borrowed an idea you wouldn't have come up with on your own, then that indebtedness should be acknowledged just as you would acknowledge the source of an idea you found through

library research. A simple citation is as follows:

"The basic inspiration for this paper came from \_\_\_\_\_  
who suggested to me in conversation that..."

## SECONDARY SOURCES:

### WHAT NEEDS TO BE DOCUMENTED?

Writing in most college courses requires the presentation and analysis of words and ideas that are not one's own. Each of us grows as a thinker by learning what others have discovered, argued, interpreted, and synthesized. A paper in history requires research, as does a case study in psychology or sociology. A clinical report in nursing or nutrition will commonly call for a review of the literature on the subject, and a critical analysis of a novel or poem may involve considering what literary critics have said. Using these sources is expected; this is the way each author builds her knowledge. But because it's easy to make yourself look more learned than you are by presenting someone else's research as your own, and because the reader takes your argument seriously and may want to examine the sources you use, academic papers must include citations of secondary sources. This booklet will not attempt to cover the rules and technicalities of documentation, which can be found in any comprehensive writing handbook, such as those used in the Multidisciplinary Core Course 101 and 102. Instead we wish to explore basic principles relating to the use of sources.

**Direct quotations.** Any and all direct quotations must be put in quotation marks and a source must be indicated. (Methods of citing sources vary from discipline to discipline.)

**Ideas, concepts, and arguments, which are not your own.** The value of an academic paper derives from concepts, trains of thought, the way you make one idea relate to another: the way you frame, catego-

ribe, abstract, and explain the raw data you are using. It is crucial to maintain the distinction between your insights and someone else's and to document the sources of those which are not yours.

**Statements of fact other than common knowledge.** Whether or not one can plagiarize a fact is an arguable question; however, assertions of fact that are not taken for granted by your reader should be supported by attribution to some authoritative source.

The similarity of the phrases "common knowledge" and "common sense" suggests a way to decide what are generally known facts and what are not. As a rule of thumb, if you can't decide whether a certain piece of information is common knowledge or not, err on the side of caution and give a source for it.

Here are some examples of the kinds of things regarded as common knowledge:

#### **Basic historical facts**

The United States Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

#### **Well-known information about famous authors**

George Eliot was the pen name of British writer Mary Ann Evans.

#### **General scientific laws**

$f=ma$

#### **Basic scientific data**

The speed of light is 186,282 miles per second.

#### **Facts about recent local, national, and world events**

July 1, 1997, Hong Kong reverted from British to Chinese rule.

What can be defined as "common knowledge" varies with the context in which you are working. A course beyond the introductory level in any discipline will probably assume a great deal of information about the field, which may not be known to those who haven't taken the introductory course. You, too, should make these assumptions. In writing an English paper, for example, you don't need to cite a source to defend the assertion that *The Tempest* is the last play Shakespeare wrote. That knowledge is assumed within the context in which you are writing the paper.

#### **WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?**

Plagiarism, or presenting other people's words and ideas as if they were one's own, is a fundamental form of deception which undermines the sense of community in an environment where ideas and writing are crucial. Plagiarism is punished severely in colleges and universities because a counterfeiter undermines everyone's trust in the way society works. Similarly, if students had to wonder constantly whether others were gaining an unfair advantage by turning in work not their own, and if professors had to read every paper with suspicion of dishonesty on their minds, the process of education would be rendered adversarial and thereby soured for everyone. The following are some examples of plagiarized work:

- A paper copied, literally or with only slight alterations, from another author's work--generally, some published book or article, an Internet paper, another student's paper, laboratory report, or computer program. Having once had a teacher who accepted reports copied from the *World Book* does not count as a defense. Such work is not acceptable at Simmons.
- A paper containing many phrases or sentences lifted from some other source (books, periodicals, websites, other student papers, etc.) without any attempt at attribution. Often, these phrases are glued together with phrases and sentences of the

student's own writing. The plagiarism here lies in the fact that someone else's ideas are presented as the student's original work even though, in this case, the source has not been copied whole sale. This kind of plagiarism is known as a "mosaic"(a term originating in Harold C. Martin's book, *The Logic and Rhetoric of Exposition*).

- A paper in which material from another source has been thoroughly paraphrased and presented without acknowledgement, so that it appears in the student's own words as if it were the student's own train of thought, which it is not. This may happen inadvertently, up to a point, but a paper consisting mainly or entirely of paraphrased material with no acknowledgement of the original source deceives the reader. In essence, the writer claims authorship of another person's ideas by changing the way they are phrased, and the resulting paper is not the original work it appears to be.
- A paper that the student purchases and hands in as her own work: the student pays another student or professional to write her paper or uses an Internet "paper store" to choose and purchase a paper.
- A paper-- which the student hands in as her own work-- written by a friend, roommate, parent, or other acquaintance.
- While not plagiarism, per se, one paper submitted for two separate courses, without authorization from both professors, is dishonest and should be avoided.

The fundamental principle is that, *unless the instructor establishes otherwise*, all student papers are expected to be the student's own original work. That is what enables the student to receive credit for completing the assignment. Everyone knows that each person's work

depends to some extent on the thoughts of those who came before and on the ideas of teachers and peers. After those have been used and acknowledged, however, the value of a student's paper lies in her own ideas and her own argument.

### SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT INTERNET PLAGIARISM

Internet plagiarism can be very similar to hard copy plagiarism. Both involve copying sentences, paragraphs or whole sections of someone else's writing into your work without citing source material. However, it is faster to find a source on the Internet than to physically go to the library and search the stacks. It's also faster to cut and paste text into your own document than to manually copy out or paraphrase sentences. Whether you find it on paper or the Internet, no reason justifies or excuses plagiarism.

The internet does offer one new way to plagiarize, the paper store. It is possible to buy whole papers already written by other students, to commission an original paper by the page and nearness of deadline, and to pay a monthly fee for access to student papers that can be read, but not downloaded. Paper store sites are readily found on the Internet, and it is legal for these services to sell student writing they have already bought and copyrighted, as well as to sell commissioned writing services. However, *it is not ethical or allowable for a student to hand in as her own work any paper, or portion of a paper, that she bought from a paper store*. While it may be tempting to purchase a ready-made or custom-made paper from the Internet, students should know that professors are aware of the practice and can plug sections of suspect papers into a search engine and prove plagiarism.

Students can and should search the Internet when doing research for a writing assignment. There is much of value to be found. A whole new generation of academic e-journals has sprung up online in the last ten years, journals that will never exist on paper. Universities,

libraries, and governments around the world publish a wealth of information and scholarship on the Internet. No matter what can be found online, the same citation standards apply to Internet sources as apply to hard copy ones.

## SOME TYPICAL MISUSES OF SOURCES

**Direct Quotations.** Instructors at Simmons rarely encounter cases of plagiarism in which a student presents another's work as her own with a clear intent to deceive. It is fairly common, however, for papers to contain one or more unintentional misuses of secondary sources. When a paper consists of several passages that bear little resemblance to the rest of the student's work, for example, it is usually a sign that the writer carelessly incorporated someone else's words with her own. In an attempt to acknowledge the secondary sources used, the same writer may include a bibliography, or perhaps a few footnotes or parenthetical citations scattered throughout her paper. While these acknowledgements are necessary components of academic work and should follow each direct quotation, they are not sufficient without quotation marks indicating when a word-for-word idea is reprinted from a secondary source. Remember: When you fail to put quotation marks around direct quotations, you are unfairly claiming authorship of every word--including all unmarked material copied from another source--in your paper.

**Paraphrasing.** Some students believe that the above situation can be avoided if they alter the material from a secondary source by changing a few words in each sentence or by omitting a sentence or two from the original paragraph. This is generally thought of as paraphrasing, a process that negates the need for quotation marks around the interpreted material. In fact, paraphrasing involves much more than the minor alteration of several words or sentences; a true paraphrase occurs only when the student has grasped the essence of what the source material means by *restating the meaning entirely in her own*

*words*. Minor word changes only succeed in disfiguring the original material and place it somewhere between quotation and paraphrase, an unacceptable form in academic work.

**The Crucial Point.** The intellectual problem in papers like the ones described tends to be that they depend too much on secondary sources. Even once all the quotation marks are put in and all sources are properly cited according to conventional rules, an instructor may still feel that a student has relied too heavily on other people's ideas. This is a common flaw of research papers--the writer hasn't contributed enough of a discussion of the material she has pulled together. In most cases, though not all, instructors ask you to do research not simply to prove that you can look things up and take notes on them, but that you can use what you've found to make a more informed, more interesting, more complex argument of your own about the subject at hand.

## ADVICE

When taking notes from a source, always put quotation marks around anything you copy word for word. This will let you know later on what came from the text (as opposed to your own paraphrase of it, or thoughts about it). Always write down the bibliographic data on the source (author or editor, edition number, publisher, place, and date), and always put a page number after each quotation you write down. This may well save you a second trip to the library to verify your findings.

Copy significant passages word for word, not just key phrases. In writing a paper you will find it necessary to know exactly what the source said, for you may find later that there is more of interest in the passage than you realized when you first encountered it. Copy more than you think you absolutely need.

When you paraphrase something in your notes, put a page number

after it in parentheses as a signal that this has been paraphrased. The abbreviation "WTTE," meaning "words to that effect," is useful in these situations. A paraphrase could be followed by [p.24 -WTTE], meaning that on page 24 of the source there are words whose meaning you have intended to capture in your notes but which you have not copied exactly.

Use some indicator of your own, such as an arrow or a star, at the beginning of any passage of your own thoughts in your notes. This, too, will help you keep your ideas distinct from those of the source.

When using material from a secondary source in your paper, either quote it word for word (using "..." to indicate the places where you omitted parts of the passage) or completely restate the meaning in your own words, remembering to cite the source for this paraphrased material.

Do not mangle a passage from the source by changing a word here and a word there; the result will not help your train of thought or your paper.

When downloading and printing articles, brochures, reports, and other texts from Internet sources, always write down the bibliographic data on the source, perhaps in the header on the first page of your file or paper copy, to insure you'll have the information required for proper source referencing. In addition to recording the usual details (author, date, publication), record also the name of the organization that sponsors the Web site or database and the URLs for both the organization and the page you are using.

Remember that what matters in the end is what you have to say. What if you feel, after considerable reflection, that you don't have anything to say, especially after reading what others have already said? Confer with the professor. This is one of the crucial turning

points in a course. Perhaps you need to try a different topic, but perhaps all you need to do is modify or extend your existing ideas. Don't underestimate the originality of your point of view.

Keep digging. The more expert you become on a given subject, the more you are likely to realize that other so-called experts haven't been as thorough or have presented information that is just plain wrong.

## USE OF SOURCES AND COLLABORATION: A QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

- Place all direct quotations in quotation marks. Indicate omissions by use of ellipses; if you change a word or words in the quoted passage, put the changed words in brackets [ ].
- Give citations for sources of all quotations and for ideas, arguments, and insights that are not your own, even if you have restated them in your own words. See appropriate handbooks or research guides for the proper form of citation in your field of study.
- Document assertions of fact by citing an authoritative source.
- You do not need to document matters of common knowledge, including common knowledge in the course or discipline for which the paper is being written.
- Acknowledge indebtedness to members of writing groups, tutors, friends, roommates, etc., if you have borrowed ideas from them that you feel you would not have come up with on your own. If conversations have simply stimulated or clarified your thoughts, consider this an expected part of the process that does not need to be acknowledged.

- When taking notes from secondary sources, always put quotation marks around everything copied word-for-word from the source. Write down all bibliographic information on a source when you begin to take notes from it. Put a page number after anything you paraphrase from the source, to signify that this is not your own thought. Distinguish your own thoughts on the subject from the rest of your notes by starting with a mark such as an arrow or star.
- Either quote or paraphrase--don't get stuck in between. Your quotations should either be copied word-for-word or completely restated in your own words. Simply changing a word or two of the original quotation is not considered paraphrasing.
- Plagiarism is the act of presenting other people's words or ideas as if they were one's own. The Simmons College Honor Code of Responsibility says that "each student is responsible for presenting work of her/his own creation, and refraining from representing as her/his own work that which is not her/his."

**Plagiarism includes**

- Copying blocks of text from a source and presenting them as your own work.
- Lifting many phrases or sentences from a source and incorporating them into your paper without attribution.
- Presenting another person's ideas or argument without acknowledgement of indebtedness.

- Submitting as your own a paper that you purchased from an Internet "paper store."
- Submitting as your own a paper written by a friend, roommate, parent, or other acquaintance.
- Submitting the same paper for two courses without authorization from both professors is not plagiarism, per se, but is cheating.

*Remember that  
the strength of  
YOUR paper lies  
in the quality  
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and YOUR  
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