

## THE USE OF SOURCE MATERIALS

(Revised, 1984, 1991, August 2010)<sup>1</sup>

The integrity and reliability of all work in any academic community begins and ends with honesty. Without shared expectations of and adherence to principles of academic honesty the educational process is corrupted, to the detriment of all. And while few individuals have trouble distinguishing what is permissible in the taking of an exam or a test, the fair and honest use of source materials in one's work—whether written or spoken—is more complicated; it is a habit known in principle but oftentimes only mastered in practice. The ready availability online of electronic information has only increased the need to emphasize and to clarify acceptable and unacceptable practices.

The scholarly process builds upon accumulated knowledge and values expertise. Accordingly, you will often want or be required to consult other sources—books, periodicals, journals, and online resources—as you prepare essays and term papers. From these sources you hope to acquire authoritative information, to recognize differing interpretations of information, to find precise and appropriate language, or to identify effective organizational patterns for your purposes.

As you develop and refine your thinking with the help of others, however, you are always responsible for distinguishing for your reader your own language, your own ideas, and your own organizational patterns from those you may have borrowed from others. Your reader has the right to assume that whatever appears in a paper—unless otherwise indicated—is either your own work or common knowledge (information or opinion readily found in almost any general source). But students are oftentimes not quite sure how to put this principle into effective practice.

The conventional system for documenting borrowings and for citing sources is to rely upon brief parenthetical citations within your text, followed by a listing of "Works Cited" at the end of your text. For example, the parenthetical documentation in the text of your essay "(Richardson 5)" indicates that your source is page 5 of a work by an author named Richardson, for whom a full bibliographical citation may be found in the "Works Cited" at the end of the essay. Occasionally you will incorporate part of your documentation in the text of the paper itself by introducing and attributing any borrowed material:

According to the distinguished biographer Robert D. Richardson's 2006 work, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism*, we should remember the eldest James brother for his contributions to the study of human consciousness, for his importance in the development of American philosophy, and for his insights into the nature and variety of religious experience (5).

The in-text attribution here not only identifies the particular source that is being used, but it also lends authority to that source—and thereby to your point—by explicitly identifying Richardson as a biographer, as a biographer of distinction, and as a biographer whose work is recent and therefore presumably current in its information and perspectives.

There is, however, one form of borrowing for which a parenthetical citation or in-text attribution is not sufficient. Whenever you have borrowed someone else's words—be it a paragraph, a

sentence, a phrase, or even a single striking word—you must indicate your indebtedness by using quotation marks to enclose the words you have borrowed or by indenting the quotation as a block of text if it is more than several lines long. Borrowed language must always be acknowledged with the use of quotation marks.

The above system of documentation and citation is conventional in the humanities. The system was first adopted by the Modern Language Association in 1984 and is constantly being revised and updated (most recently in the 2009 edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*) to encompass both print and an expanding variety of electronic resources. Your Great Works instructor will give you additional information about these matters and will guide you to manuals, style sheets, and writing texts that will answer your questions. Instructors in other disciplines will also provide guidance on the slightly different systems of documentation and citation (for instance, the APA style adopted by the American Psychological Association) that are conventional in the social sciences and the natural sciences.

Within the scope of this document it is impossible to answer all the questions you may have about his subject. The surest guide to the clear, acceptable, and effective use of source materials is practice: The more you experiment with ways of incorporating and acknowledging source materials, the more confident you will become in your ability to use research effectively and purposefully as a means of distinguishing, emphasizing, and strengthening the presentation of your own ideas. At the same time, the more practice you have, the less worry you will have about the improper and dishonest use of source material, the consequences of which can be very severe. **You should review pp. 26-28 of the Hanover College *Academic Catalog 2010-2011* for current definitions, policies, and penalties approved for the faculty for the handling of academic dishonesty in general and plagiarism in particular.**

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What follows are hypothetical examples of the proper and improper use of materials from Rebecca Skloot. Six of the examples concern a passage from her book *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, while the final example involves comments reported in an online article. (For the complete bibliographical information on these sources, see the "Works Cited" below.) Accompanying each passage is a brief discussion of its propriety or impropriety:

**The Original Passage, from page 58 of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*:**

Despite the spread of HeLa and the flurry of new research that followed, there were no news stories about the birth of the amazing HeLa cell line and how it might help stop cancer. In Gey's one appearance on television, he didn't mention Henrietta or her cells by name, so the general public knew nothing of HeLa. But even if they had known, they probably wouldn't have paid it much mind. For decades the press had been reporting that cell culture was going to save the world from disease and make man immortal, but by 1951 the general public had stopped buying it. Cell culture had become less a medical miracle than something out of a scary science-fiction movie.

***Exhibit 1***

In the early 1950s in America, cell culture had become less a medical miracle than something out of a scary science-fiction movie.

*This is the worst and most obvious form of plagiarism. The student has not documented her source, nor has she used quotation marks.*

### **Exhibit 2**

Despite much additional research, news items about this amazing cell line tapered off. Gey himself didn't speak of his work in any specific terms, so general knowledge of Henrietta or her cells was limited. But the public would have paid little interest to the subject anyway, for they had already heard for decades how cell culture was going to eradicate disease and lead to immortality. The topic of cell culture, once a seeming miracle, was now more like science fiction.

*This passage is also an instance of plagiarism. Although the student has changed the wording of the original source, he is obviously indebted to Skloot's passage for ideas and organization. However, he does not credit her as a source.*

### **Exhibit 3**

As Rebecca Skloot observes, by the 1950s the American public regarded cell culture as less a medical miracle than something out of a scary science-fiction movie (58).

*This, too, is plagiarism. The student acknowledges her source, but she does not indicate, through the use of quotation marks, that she is using the original language of the source.*

### **Exhibit 4**

Even with all of the new research that followed the discovery of HeLa cells, there were no news stories to speak of, not even from Gey. The general public remained ignorant; they were also probably indifferent after so many years of overly optimistic reporting on how cell culture discoveries were going to end disease. The public no longer bought it.

*This passage is like Exhibit #3, but somewhat more subtle in its plagiarism. The student has radically condensed and greatly changed the wording of the original passage. But note that his points, and his sequence of points, remain the same as in the unacknowledged original passage. Note also the use of "The public no longer bought it," which clearly derives from "the general public had stopped buying it."*

### **Exhibit 5**

In discussing the American public's waning interest in news about cell culture research, Skloot remarks that "For decades the press had been reporting that cell culture was going to save the world from disease and make man immortal, but by 1951 the general public had stopped buying it. Cell culture had become less a medical miracle than something out of a scary science-fiction movie" (58).

*This is an acceptable use of source materials. The student documents not only the quotation from Skloot but also a passage which she borrowed from that source but put into her own words.*

### **Exhibit 6**

Cancer research relying on cell culture experimentation expanded enormously, in the U. S. and abroad, beginning in the 1950s.

*This statement is not an instance of plagiarism because the information expressed here is widely known, familiar to most students of 20-century medical history in general and cancer research in particular. The information therefore qualifies as "common knowledge."*

### **Exhibit 7**

Commenting on what lessons scientists in particular might learn from her account of Henrietta Lacks and her family, Rebecca Skloot declares that they must remember that "there are human beings behind every biological sample used in the laboratory," that tissue specimens and cell cultures are not just "inanimate tools that are always there in the lab" (qtd. in Zielinski).

*This final example illustrates how a careful and honest writer acknowledges electronic sources in the same manner as print sources. Here the writer uses attribution, parenthetical documentation, and bibliographical citation (below, in the "Works Cited") to clarify what Skloot herself has been reported as saying about her book, in an article in an online version of a magazine. The writer of the passage above has used the electronic source fairly, clearly, and effectively.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>This statement is based on a document prepared by Professor Lewis Owen of the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Occidental College. With the permission of Professor Owen, the Hanover College English Department revised and adapted the statement for the use of Hanover students. At its meeting of May 6, 1968, the Hanover College faculty voted to adopt the revised document as a guideline for faculty and student use. This third document [not yet formally adopted by the faculty] is, in turn, a 2010 revision of the one which went into effect at Hanover in 1968.

## Works Cited

Jones, W. T. *A History of Western Philosophy*. New York: Harcourt, 1952.

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: MLA, 2009.

Richardson, Robert D. *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Skloot, Rebecca. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. New York: Crown, 2010.

Zielinski, Sarah. "Henrietta Lacks' 'Immortal' Cells." *Smithsonian.com* 22 January 2010. Web. 31 August 2010.