



Teaching with Writing (TWW) Tip
Teaching academic citation practices in U.S.
higher educational contexts

In the U.S. context, sources are considered intellectual property (Currie, 1998; Walvoord, 1986; Leki, 1992; Pennycook, 1996), and originality is highly valued. On the one hand, academic writing should make an original contribution; on the other, students need to place their ideas in dialogue with relevant scholarship, and cite those sources according to specific professional/disciplinary conventions. Novice college-level writers—and even advanced undergraduates and new graduate students—struggle to balance these apparently contradictory expectations. Learners benefit from explicit instruction (see sample activities below) about “why, when, what, where, and how” sources are cited in your disciplinary context.

Sample in-class activities

Purpose of activities: to provide explicit instruction about the “why, when, what, where, and how” of source attribution in academic writing.

- Activity one: Ask students to compose brief responses to each of the writing prompts listed below—two minutes per item. (Alternative method: use the prompts for a brainstorming discussion). This activity will be most useful in introductory/survey courses. Students who attended U.S. high schools are likely to know that they should cite sources, but often lack a deep understanding of the role that source attribution practices play in the construction of disciplinary knowledge; learners may also lack knowledge of the mechanics of source citation—especially citation styles other than MLA.
 - **Why** is it necessary to cite sources in academic writing? List as many reasons as you can think of in two minutes.
 - **When** is it necessary to cite sources in academic writing? [APA style, for instance, requires a source citation for every direct quote paraphrase, or summary of another’s words or ideas (APA, 2010)].
 - **What** are the necessary elements of a source citation in this field of study?
 - **Where** should I place the citation?
 - **How** can I make sure I’m meeting the expectations for source attribution?

- Activity two: show students samples of academic writing in your discipline to refine their answers to the questions in activity one. This activity is well-suited to 3xxx-level courses in which learners gain experience writing in the language of the discipline.

- o Distribute copies of a short peer-reviewed journal article--perhaps one they've already been assigned, and that they've already read—it will save class time (Reynolds, 2009). Ask students to form five small groups; assign each group one of the questions listed in activity one.
 - o Instruct each group to analyze three or four paragraphs: what information can they glean from the analysis to build on their answers?
- Activity three: [ask students to apply what they've learned to their own writing project](#). This activity can be used at all course levels.
 - Activity four: role model your own strategies for accurate source attribution.

Comment: Providing explicit instruction about disciplinary conventions for source citation—and providing low-stakes opportunities for practicing those skills—benefits students and instructors. Students benefit from learning both the form and function of citations, and instructors may be less likely to play the plagiarism police.

Rationale: Source attribution and citation practices are culturally-bound (Leki, 1992; Pennycook, 1996) and differ from discipline to discipline.

Resources:

- Council of Writing Program Administrators. (2003). [Defining and avoiding plagiarism: The WPA statement on best practices](#).
- Currie, P. (1998). [Staying out of trouble: Apparent plagiarism and academic survival](#). *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 7(1), 1-18.
- Indiana University School of Education. (2013). [How to recognize plagiarism](#) [interactive tutorial].
- Leki, I. (1992). *Understanding ESL writers: A guide for teachers*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.
- Levin, K.S. (n.d.) [What are you telling your readers?](#)
- McHarg, M. (n.d). [Celebrate citation: flipping the pedagogy of plagiarism in Qatar](#). *Journal of Pedagogic Development*, 3(2), n.p.
- Pennycook, A. (1996). [Borrowing others' words: Text, ownership, memory, and plagiarism](#). *TESOL Quarterly*, 30(2), 201-229.
- Reynolds, D.W. [One on one with second language writers: A guide for writing tutors, teachers, and consultants](#). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Walvoord, B.E.F. (1986). *Helping students write well: A guide for teachers in all disciplines*. 2nd ed. NY: MLA.

Further support: Visit us online <http://writing.umn.edu/tww>. To schedule a phone, email, or face-to-face teaching consultation, [click here](#).

Our purpose is to provide practical strategies for teaching with writing. Our goal: to offer timely and pragmatic support to faculty members and instructors who teach with writing in undergraduate and graduate courses in all disciplinary areas.