

UNDERSTANDING CITATION (PODCAST 5 TRANSCRIPT)

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Hi everyone. This is Kurtis Clements with another effective writing podcast. In this episode, I am going to talk about the purpose and importance of citations when using outside material in your own work. For many, citation is a hair-pulling matter, but it doesn't have to be, and it is my hope this podcast helps you understand citation a little bit better.

First off, let's talk a little bit about exactly what is meant by citation. Citation is a notation provided in a paper that identifies content borrowed from a source. Citations, in general, will be found throughout the body of a paper after borrowed content and at the end of the paper in a complete list.

The format of citations is dictated by the particular documentation style used—and there are many different styles such as MLA, APA, AP, Chicago, to name a few. You are probably thinking, why so many styles? Why not just ONE universal style? Well, while this makes sense on a certain level, the fact is different styles reflect different fields of study, and depending on the field some pieces of information are more or less important than other pieces of information. For example, APA style is used primarily in the social, behavioral, and applied sciences, and as science is a field in which new discoveries are made on an almost daily basis, the date of publication is critical, so it is included in all APA citations. By contrast, MLA, which is used in the Humanities, does not deal with content that changes on a daily basis and so the date of publication is less important and is not needed for citations within the text.

The bottom line: Documentation styles vary depending on the field of study.

So now that you have some background on what citation is, let's discuss when it is appropriate to cite.

In a nutshell, you cite any information that you borrow except common knowledge. What is common knowledge? Common knowledge is basic information that will be found in multiple sources and that most people know—the earth has one moon, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, California is on the West Coast, and so forth. You do not need to cite common knowledge.

You also do not need to cite well-known facts with a field if the audience for the paper is made up of people within that field. For example, if I were to write a paper on Shakespeare to an audience of Shakespearean scholars (and likely English majors), I wouldn't need to cite the fact that Shakespeare's father was a glove maker because this is a common fact.

Content that is not common knowledge would need to be cited, and such content includes words, images, graphics, ideas, art, music, and so on. When conducting research, you need to cite content that you borrow whether you summarize, paraphrase, or quote that information.

Why do we cite? We cite for a variety of reasons. First, it is important to give credit where credit is due. If you had an idea in the workplace, let's say, and you shared that idea with your boss who then implemented the idea, you would want credit for that idea, right? Of course! It's only fair. It's your



idea. The same is true when you borrow content from others and use it in a work of your own creation.

Another reason we cite is to avoid everyone's fear—plagiarism. If you borrow content from a source and neglect to give credit where credit is due, you could very well be guilty of plagiarism. Including citations lets readers know where that content comes from, so it is important to cite such content. You don't want to Milli Vanilli your paper.

We also cite to demonstrate the credibility of the sources. Citations let readers know that you are using content from authorities on the subject, people with recognized expertise or appropriate credentials. The citations let readers know that you are using respected publications and other respected sources such as unbiased organizational web sites.

Finally, we cite so that readers can locate those sources on their own. Sometimes the information that we include is such that others want to track down the full source and without citations one could not do that. I know that in my own research, when I encounter cited content that is related to my interests, I'll check the full citation and then track down the source. I've discovered important information this way and names of key experts in a field that will lead me to more content.

As you can see, citation plays an important role in documenting content borrowed from outside sources. When incorporating content that does not originate with you and is not common knowledge, you need to cite that content with a notation set up according to the specific documentation style required for your course. In future podcasts, I will look more specifically at APA documentation style.

Thanks so much for listening. Happy writing!

