A 'HEROES & VILLAINS' handout

FOUR KEY CONSIDERATIONS TO WIPE-OUT *UNINTENDED* PLAGIARISM

Here we examine four key considerations we can apply to ensure we substantially reduce *any prospect of our inadvertently plagiarising*. A welcome by-product is that it should also help us to substantially improve the quality of our work.

> 1. Care we can take at the ***note-making / information-gathering*** stage;
>
> 2. Care we can take when <u>writing-up</u>, ***with regard to our referencing***;
>
> 3. Care we can take when <u>writing-up</u>, with due regard to the ***effective in-text signposting of our use of others' ideas***.

Finally, *and in an overarching sense*:

> 4. it will be argued that *it is important to <u>contextualise</u> **WHY we are referencing**, that is: to **build <u>our</u> argument** through the effective and appropriately credited use of the ideas of others*.

We'll deal with each of these four areas in turn.

1. At note-making / information-gathering stages

It is important to be *thorough* and *focused* with our research note-making:

- We should always record **the key source authorship and publication details at the top of the first** page of notes we derive from any source; check out these helpful '**referencing templates**' on the **StudyHub**: http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/epacks/studyhub/pdfs/ref_and_notemaking_templates.pdf We can use these to make sure we get all the necessary information from any source, for both our references and our bibliography, while researching for our assignments.

- We should always record **page number information** by the side of every piece of information we record – *whether we are quoting directly or summarising in our own words*;

- For any paragraphs, sentences or even phrases that we do record – for possible quotation in your work – we need to **remember to place the *word-for-word* information in our notes in quotation marks ' '**; sloppiness with use of quotation marks, whether while information-gathering or writing-up our assignments, is a sure-fire route to risk of plagiarism;

- Always **record where the idea originates <u>and</u> highlight/indicate clearly where any thoughts we are recording are our own, so that we can differentiate at a later stage between *their ideas* and *our thoughts***.

Finally, it is also important to remember that we are ultimately amassing arguments and information which we think we might be able to utilise *to develop arguments of our own*.

More on this later.

2. At the writing-up stages – referencing

Remember, **in-text referencing** is all about being **completely transparent with where we are obtaining source information, at point of use**:

- Consistent, thorough and honest referencing constitutes our primary means of conveying where we are obtaining material to *build our argument* – and of avoiding accidental plagiarism. Whether the information we are intending to utilise is *factual* or (typically the most useful type of evidence for us) *someone's analysis/interpretation*, we need to get a reference in to indicate our source.

- Get in the habit of **inserting references early**:

  o i.e., from our **first-draft onwards**, or …

  o … if this disrupts our flow of writing, that is, getting information down on the page while it's still 'fresh-in-the-head': inserting our references immediately after writing our first draft, cross-referencing with our notes;

- We can update our references in a similar way with each subsequent redraft;

- We should be (i) **thorough**, (ii) **methodical** & (iii) **consistent** with our referencing:

  o Many students under-use referencing: there's nothing wrong with multiple references to multiple sources on a single page of our script;

  o By contrast, there may be something suspicious if there are only ever 1 or 2 references to source evidence per page (unless of course that section of our assignment is presenting primary research evidence that we have generated ourselves).

  o Remember, we must not only reference '**direct quotes**' (where we are using the exact words of others, in quotation marks) … but also **reference the source *when we summarise the ideas of others in our own words***.

3. At the writing-up stage – 'in-text signposting'

Referencing is not the only means by which we can be clear and transparent about our use of evidence from other sources:

- We can also augment this with **selected in-text attributions**, or '**signposting of authorship**', where it is helpful for the 'readability' of the work to do so. Indeed, effective 'signposting' is essential to good academic writing.

Here are some examples:

> **James Watson suggests that consumers need the media for various reasons. He defines these in terms of diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance (2003: 62). …**

> **Chesterman (2000: 9), another highly influential translation studies theorist, has argued that** **'the equivalence supermeme is the big bugbear of translation theory, more argued about than any other single idea.'**

> **Peirce, who is commonly regarded as the founder of the American tradition of semiotics, explained his model simply: 'a sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign...' (Zeman 1977: 55)**

- If we confine our information about authorship to our references, we don't get to convey anything to the reader as to *why we think it relevant and useful* to bring in any piece of information into our work. Take the second and third example here: in both instances, through '**in-text signposting of authorship**' (**text highlighted in red**), the student is able to *convey to the reader that Chesterman and Pierce are both very respectable sources* (and therefore that their arguments are clearly relevant).

- The first example (Watson) is also fine: it may be enough with academic sources to cite the source by name in-text; however: *when we use sources that are not academic* we do need to say something about the nature of the source/authorship (in order to justify the use of this non-academic source). For example: '**Briggs, a respected industry insider, has argued** …'.

- Thinking how we might introduce evidence in this way *compels us to think more* about the *nature* and *relative value* of any potential evidence. This is a good thing, as it can help us to make sure that we *only use information we can justify as meaningfully contributing to our discussion*. This is addressed more fully below.

4. Remembering *WHY we are referencing*: to *build OUR argument* through *effective and fully-credited use of the ideas of others*

Now we arrive at the overarching, *conceptual framework* under which we can more easily reflect on *the way we gather information* and *make decisions about <u>where</u>, <u>when</u>* (indeed, *<u>if</u>*!) *and <u>how</u> we bring in evidence* from our chosen sources.

- Let's think about the concept '*building <u>our</u> argument*'. It means **critical engagement** with the evidence that is 'out there' (primarily published information, from sources we deem to be *legitimate*: which usually means prioritising academic sources, though may include non-academic sources that we deem *meaningful* – having sufficient *weight* and *merit* – for our discussion).

- It means careful thinking on our part, in terms of identifying information that is of use to us, in so far as it allows for our *developing of our argument*.

- It means careful *evaluation*: asking questions *as we gather and record potentially useful information*, in order to establish *what we think about the quality of the ideas and arguments presented*. Questions such as: '**How do these arguments apply to the specific issue I am examining?**' '**Whose argument is best?**'

- These are the kind of questions we need to be asking while gathering and *making sense* of information for our assignment, something that will be explored in much more detail in the section of **Heroes & Villains** on Building Our Argument.

<u>CHECKLIST!</u> Here are some justifiable reasons as to why we might decide to incorporate any evidence into our work. Does it:

1. **provide *useful background information* to allow me to introduce a point?**

2. **allow me to *present / debate an argument, explanation* or *view*?**

3. **allow me *to reinforce or illustrate a point* I've made?**

4. **allow *me challenge or limit a point* I've presented?**

5. **allow me to *form a connection between points*?**

6. **help me to *'wrap up' my discussion* ... and move on?**

This list isn't exhaustive, but it does demonstrate the importance of our being '*in control*' of the evidence, of *only bringing in external information because it achieves a specific purpose* we've identified. And, ultimately, that specific purpose is to '**build our argument**', whether it's because it helps us to *get to the point*, contributes to our *debating the point*, to our *challenging a point* or assists us in *moving on to the next point we want to make*.

If any information doesn't help us to do any of the above, then *maybe* (unless we can think of another good reason for including it) *it just isn't worth bringing it into our work*?

We should also think carefully about *the way in which we bring in information* from our sources. For various reasons, many students end up relying too heavily on direct ('word-for-word') quotations from their chosen source materials: giant chunks of quote, often with minimal linking information written by the student.

- This approach typically results in low-levels of analysis (and almost no evaluation) of the student's own. Indeed, such work often appears *driven by the next quote*, with *no clear sense that the student is in control of their structure* or nay sense that the student is in any way attempting to *build his or her argument* **through effective use of the ideas of others**.

Such quote-heavy work may technically be well-referenced and, thus, one might think that it would not be candidate for a plagiarism charge.

- However – *think about it* – this type of work has next to nothing of the writer in it, with information lifted largely *uncritically* from other sources. That it acknowledges those sources means that it might be referred to as '**Legitimised Plagiarism**': a '*grey area*' of '**virtual plagiarism**' that may not *technically* constitute full-blown plagiarism, but in which the student is virtually absent from their writing. Yet, *one will never get good grades for uncritically lifting others' views*, no matter how accurate and thorough the referencing.

Therefore:

- If you are thinking of using evidence from any source, think carefully about the *purpose* of using it, i.e., what the information can contribute to '**your argument**'. You will need to think carefully about the *focus* and *structure* of your assignment to be able to do this. The **Heroes & Villains** website will explore various strategies to assist in this process, including visual-mapping.

- When introducing ideas from your chosen evidence, always make sure that you sufficiently '**fill out**' the point, that is, properly explain and explore fully any point you introduce.

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- Avoid over-large quotations: 'chunky quotes' should be an exception rather than the rule, reserved for especially important or particularly quotable information.

- Instead, practice summarising the essence of points or arguments *mostly in your own words*. Much of your presentation of others' ideas might best involve this (however, you must always still reference the source of your information). Try '**flitting in and out of quotation**': using *a combination of your words* and – where we simply can't improve on a term or passage – '*their words, in more selected quotation*'. This combination can be seen in the example below:

> **What might seem an attractively simple starting point for approaching voice in narrative texts is to ask ourselves the question posed by Genette in the early 1970s; 'who speaks?'(**1980: 186)**. Although Genette has subsequently been criticised for not fully clarifying 'the *connection* between voice and focalization'** (Fludernik 1993: 326 emphasis in the original)**, for our current purposes we will retain his question in its most literal dimension.**

- See how this student *ensures effective written flow* and *builds her argument* by combining *her own words* (**highlighted here in green**) with *selectively quotation* (**highlighted in brown**).

- This approach is far superior to the overuse of 'chunky quotes', as it offers a better chance of your *making the evidence work for our own purposes (while remaining true to its meaning)* – that is, it allows us '**to *build OUR argument* through effective and fully-credited use of the ideas of others**'.

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