Citing Sources Correctly

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The definitions and rules associated with plagiarism and copyright infringement can be difficult to interpret. In fact, it is possible to plagiarize or commit copyright infringement unknowingly simply because an author does not understand how to properly cite another person’s original idea or credit someone’s photograph. Authors can avoid these critical writing pitfalls by familiarizing themselves with some basic but essential rules concerning plagiarism, proper citation, and copyright law. This article introduces important rules of citation and copyright, but is not a comprehensive guide.

Plagiarism

“Plagiarism” is interpreted differently by different people. Essentially, plagiarism can be defined as the act of using another person’s words or ideas without giving credit to that person. It also can be considered copying another’s work or borrowing another’s idea. Accidental plagiarism can occur when authors do not understand how to document and cite their work. For example, cutting and pasting material from the Internet can lead to accidental plagiarism. Intentional plagiarism, on the other hand, is the act of knowingly copying another person’s work or material and presenting it as the author’s own work.

Although not a crime, plagiarism is frowned upon and often considered a moral offense, which may evoke liability for copyright infringement. Plagiarism also can be considered fraud; in addition to presenting another’s work as one’s own, examples of fraudulent acts include making up data, documenting facts that do not exist, or manipulating statistics to portray a specific result. Committing plagiarism either by accident or by choice in the literary world is viewed as dishonest and could lead to manuscript rejection and even litigation. Claiming ignorance will not be accepted as a valid reason. Thus, authors must accurately document and cite their material when:

- Using another person’s idea, opinion, or theory.
- Using charts, statistics, graphs, or facts that are not common knowledge and display another person’s data.
- Using someone else’s diagrams, illustrations, and pictures to clarify his or her ideas or thoughts.
- Quoting another person’s spoken or written words.
- Paraphrasing a person’s spoken or written words, even if the author has summarized them in his or her own words.

Many online software tools can help authors avoid plagiarism as well as check grammar and style. Some of these services are free but may have limitations, and others offer enhanced functionality with associated costs. However, the key to avoiding plagiarism is not the use of software, but rather understanding authorship and its principles.
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Box 1

Sample In-text Citation and Corresponding Reference List

Excerpt from journal article
…caring is a primary role of the professional nuclear medicine technologist.8,9 As part of that role, technologists are in a unique position to encourage and empower their patients by acting as an enabler, someone who facilitates another’s “passage through life transitions and unfamiliar events.”

Excerpt from references


Citing Sources

Citations create a record of the sources referenced during an author’s research and included in his or her work. Authors must cite everything they use that is not their original work, whether the sources are journal articles, books, websites, photographs, media clips, statistics, experimental results, ideas, definitions, e-mails, or conversations. By citing all sources used and assigning credit to the original authors, authors not only avoid the act of plagiarism, but they also demonstrate that they researched thoroughly, are knowledgeable about their field, and their work is credible. In addition, their reference list will serve as a valuable resource for readers, who might wish to retrieve source material to conduct further research or learn more.

Different publishers use different formats for citing in-text sources and documenting them in the bibliography, or reference list, which appears at the end of the article. Authors should select their citation format based on the subject of their work as well as on the requirements of the organization to which they are submitting their work. Many scientific journals follow the American Medical Association’s *AMA Manual of Style*. Although the American Society of Radiologic Technologist’s *Radiologic Technology* and *Radiation Therapist* journals follow most AMA guidelines, some exceptions and modifications are made to aid our readers.

The *AMA Manual of Style*

In 1978, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors developed *Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals*. The purpose of the document was to help authors prepare manuscripts for publication by imposing uniformity of technical requirements. First published in 1979, the document includes a format for bibliographic references developed by the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM) that is currently followed by the editors of more than 500 journals.

The editors of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* use a modified version of the NLM format. The *AMA Manual of Style* has evolved over the years from an in-house style guide for AMA editors to a manual for all scientific authors and editors. It has been expanded and modernized, and it is available both as a printed book and online.

In-text Source Citations

AMA style requires that authors cite each reference in consecutive numerical order — in the order they appear in the article — using superscript Arabic numerals. This includes citing references in the text as well as in any tables and figures. If the names of authors are mentioned in the text, only their surnames should be used. When more than 2 authors are mentioned, list only the surnames of the first author, followed by “et al.”

When more than 1 source is used for a sentence or section of text, nonconsecutive superscript numerals should be separated by commas (see Box 1). If more than 2 consecutive-numbered sources are being cited at the same location, list only the lowest and highest numerals separated by a hyphen. Multiple citations from the same source require only 1 entry in the bibliography. If the source contains chapters authored by different people, a separate entry for each chapter...
citation should be created in the reference list, along with the chapter’s inclusive page numbers.’

Reference Lists

The *AMA Manual of Style* includes guidelines and examples of virtually all types of references. Only the more common types of references are discussed here.

AMA style requires that the names of all authors of a cited work be identified in the reference unless there are more than 6, in which case only the first 3 names are listed, followed by “et al.” There is no punctuation between the author’s surname and initials, and author names are separated by a comma, with no use of “&” or “and.”

AMA style for documenting sources in the reference list depends on the type of work being cited (see Box 2). Titles of journal articles and book chapters, for example, have specific capitalization rules (eg, only the first letter of the first word and proper nouns should be capitalized). These titles should not be italicized, underlined, or placed in quotation marks. When citing a journal article, the authors’ names come first, followed by the title of the article. These details should be followed by the title of the journal, which should be italicized and abbreviated according to the NLM Catalog. Next come the year of publication; volume number; issue number, part, or supplement number in parentheses; and the inclusive page numbers. In reference entries for print periodicals that are not academic journals, the periodical title should be italicized but not abbreviated.

Reference entries for books, government or agency print bulletins, or pamphlets should begin with the author name or names, if known, followed by the document’s title in italics. The first letter of each major word in a title should be capitalized. The place of publication and the name of the issuing bureau, agency, or department should be listed after the document’s title, followed by the date of publication.

When referring to a specific chapter in a book, the chapter author name or names and the chapter title should be listed first, followed by “In:” and the names of the book’s authors or editors, and title of the book. The edition number also must be indicated, unless it is a first edition. The city and state (or country) of publication should be indicated next, followed by the publisher’s name, copyright year, and inclusive page numbers of the chapter.

Unpublished sources also must be cited. Material accepted for publication must be documented in the reference list by the author’s name, title, and the words “in press.” Material presented at meetings (eg, abstracts, posters, and lectures) but not yet published should be documented in the reference list beginning with the author’s name, followed by the title of the presentation, and where and when the meeting took place. If material has been submitted for publication but has not yet been accepted, it should not be placed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Material</th>
<th>Sample Reference</th>
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Sources. Authors should check the website to see if any updates were made to the site and include the date the site was last updated in the reference entry. Authors also should list the URL that leads directly to the sourced material — rather than the publisher's home page — and the date it was last accessed via the URL. Sometimes it is not possible to provide all of the required details for a reference; for example, the author's name or publication date might be missing. Authors should provide as much information about the borrowed work as is available to them, per AMA's style instructions.

Copyright Protection

Copyright is the exclusive legal right to reproduce, publish, sell, or distribute the matter and form of a work (e.g., literary, musical, or artistic work). It is unlikely that 2 people would independently create the same work; thus, creative work often is used in the context of copyright law and is part of property rights. The United States Supreme Court states that an original work of authorship is one that is not copied from another source and has some form of creativity.

A copyright, which also may be considered intellectual property, protects the original authors of both published and unpublished work and, in particular, protects the form of expression rather than the subject matter of the writing. Copyright protects original works of authorship the moment they are created.
Authors can register their work directly or a service can file the copyright on the author’s behalf for a fee. Title 17 of the U.S. Code delineates copyright law in the United States, and the U.S. Copyright Office handles all copyright registrations.

Some people interpret “public domain” to mean free and available. They also believe that creative works such as music, software, articles, and pictures located on the Internet are acceptable to use because they are in a public domain. Works classified as or considered public domain are not copyrighted; however, they must still be cited.

Whether creating original work or borrowing the work of others, authors should keep the following in mind:

- If someone owns a copyright for a work, he or she can perform, copy, or sell the work. For example, if someone creates original artwork for a prominent peer-reviewed imaging journal, he or she owns the copyright and can sell the work to the journal. Transferring the ownership does not transfer the copyright, although the 2 parties could agree upon this provision if desired.
- An author’s work is protected as soon as he or she produces it in a tangible form. It is not necessary to register the work with the copyright office because the author has copyright protection immediately. Authors should register their work with the copyright office if they are planning legal action against an entity for copyright infringement. There is no requirement to document one’s work as copyrighted, but many people do so as a reminder to others that their work is protected. (Although some protection is offered automatically when the work is created, in order to file for copyright infringement the work must be registered with the copyright office.)
- Copyright infringement is possible if an author uses another’s work in any way — whether it is reproduced, distributed, or presented as his or her own — without the permission of the copyright owner. Just because it does not have a copyright notice does not mean it is not copyrighted. In fact, in the United States, almost all work created after April 1, 1989, is copyrighted and protected.

- It is a safe practice to approach all work as copyrighted material.

**Trademarks**

A trademark, also known as a brand name, is a design, word, phrase, or symbol that identifies the source and differentiates it from another. Benefits of filing for federal trademark include serving as a public notice of ownership, giving the author the ability to file an action in federal court, and providing a listing for the author’s work in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office computer database. Because similar registered trademarks may already exist, authors should do their research before filing. There also are many services or attorneys who will handle an author’s filing for a fee.

Authors do not have to register their trademark; they can obtain rights to a trademark based on use of the mark. Applying a trademark symbol (TM) indicates an unregistered trademark; a registered trademark is indicated with a ® symbol.

**Patents**

A patent is a limited property right; it provides rights to an invention for a limited duration. In the United States, patents are enforced through civil lawsuit. For a limited period, the inventor of intellectual property has the right to exclude others from making, using, offering for sale, or selling the invention. Having a patent does not give the legal right to use the invention.

**Conclusion**

Before submitting one’s work to a publisher, the author should inspect it carefully for grammar, spelling, formatting, and unwitting plagiarism. Everything that is not the author’s own idea must have an in-text citation and corresponding entry in the reference list. Nonoriginal work may be included in the text only if it is a direct quote, placed in quotation marks, and cited the same way as paraphrased work. Authors must acquire permission from the creator to “borrow” creative work, including images from the Internet, before submitting his or her work for publication. In addition, the author should be prepared to present documentation of the acquired permission to the publisher. Finally, to avoid editing delays, the author should check that the required
writing and bibliographic style has been applied throughout his or her work.

Playwright Wilson Mizner stated, “If you steal from one author it’s plagiarism; if you steal from many, it’s research.” Every writer can appreciate the humor in this quotation, but, especially in scientific academia, plagiarism is a serious offense that can lead to serious consequences. Authors can seek writing assistance by referring to articles such as this one, and by asking libraries and writing centers for guidance. Also, the editorial review board members of some professional journals may be willing to mentor inexperienced writers.

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References