

IN-TEXT CITATIONS: HOW TO USE THEM

Below are two readings (a journal article by O.F. Watts and a newspaper article by R. Marks) from which I quoted in a recent essay about the literacy levels of first-year university students. On the next page I have written the actual essay paragraph in which I have quoted from Watts and Marks. To help you identify my in-text citations and the original material to which these citations refer, I have colour-coded them—yellow, green, blue, pink, and grey. For example, the yellow-highlighted sentence in Watts’ article below is the original source for my yellow-highlighted citation in the paragraph on the next page. I would like you to do three things: **first**, read each of the two articles below to get an idea of their context. **Second**, read my essay paragraph on the next page to get an idea of its context. **Finally**, compare each set of coloured sections (yellow with yellow, green with green, blue with blue, pink with pink, and grey with grey) and note how I have cited the original detail that I read in the articles by Watts and Marks. In particular, you should note that when I quote the actual wording of Watts or Marks that I place those words within inverted commas (“...”). Such quotes are known as direct quotes and should **always** appear within inverted commas. The only exception to this is the block quote, an example of which appears in the final citation of my essay paragraph on the next page; it is coloured grey.

Recent reports into teacher education have indicated the need to increase the language competency of teachers. The Beazley Report (1984) in Western Australia recommended that the literacy standards of teachers be improved. The problem faced by tertiary lecturers in helping students overcome their difficulties with language is well illustrated in the many examples of poor syntax, grammatical and spelling errors, and inappropriate punctuation, that occur in the essays of their students. When the lecturer draws attention to these errors he is confronted by the almost total ignorance of the students. The correction of such common errors as those of noun/verb and noun/pronoun agreement does not proceed very far if the students do not know what a noun is.

What is so disturbing about the examples given is that they were taken from several classes of final year students less than three months from their appointment to their own classes. How can the community expect a raising of standards of literacy if the teachers who will be teaching the English curriculum cannot themselves manipulate the language? The problem then becomes circular. If the teachers graduate from their tertiary institutions with a paucity of language skills then they cannot be held responsible when the products of their teaching return equally deficient. Teacher education courses have notoriously low failure rates in most universities. Teacher educators have long held the belief that the qualities that go to constitute a good teacher should not be measured on scales that prevail in other areas of the university. The affective qualities might outweigh the cognitive, but is society willing to continue to accept that being a “good” teacher is sufficient to excuse being a poor spelling teacher or even a teacher who cannot spell? If teachers are to assist their pupils to develop language competencies, then they need to have those competencies themselves.

From: Watts, O.F. (1991). Who is teaching our children to spell? The literacy crisis in teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 16(1), p. 24.

Anybody who has taught undergraduate university humanities courses during the past decade knows the depth of Australia’s literary deficit.

For years, tutors and lecturers who grade written work by first-year students, have been shaking their heads at students’ inability to write.

I don’t mean an inability to build and sustain complex arguments through 5000-word essays, or an inability to critically analyse discursive constructs in order to identify dominant ideological frames.

What I mean is that a majority of 18-year-olds who enrol in most first-year humanities subjects are unable to reliably construct a simple sentence. Many genuinely struggle to make themselves understood in written form.

In reality, a substantial number of 18-year-olds beginning university degrees are functionally illiterate. In a knowledge economy which relies increasingly on technical know-how and information exchange, people who don’t have the ability to express themselves in written form are at an immense disadvantage.

After 12 years of structured education, widespread functional adult illiteracy suggests a major failing in school education. What are students doing at school if they’re not being taught how to structure sentences and paragraphs in such a way that they can be understood? And how are they winning places at universities?

The problem is deepening. As a society we undervalue teaching to the point that we allow it to be the default profession for university students who underperform in their respective degrees. And the scores a year-12 student needs to get into a teaching degree are not high. So then we consign the next generation of children to be taught by twenty-somethings whose own literacy skills are mediocre at best.

From: Marks, R. (2012, December 13). Time to declare war on illiteracy. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from www.smh.com/au/national/education/time-to-declare-war-on-illiteracy-20121213-2bbp1.html

[Below is the paragraph from my essay]

Concern about Literacy Levels

Concern about the literacy levels of some Australian teachers is not new. For example, in 1984 the Western Australian Beazley Report “recommended that the literacy standards of teachers be improved” (Watts, 1991, p. 24). Watts went on to say that the “problem ... becomes circular” because when graduate teachers have poor language skills “they cannot be held responsible when the products of their teaching return equally deficient” (p. 24). More recently, Dr Russell Marks (2012) of La Trobe University flagged the inability of many 18-year-olds in first-year humanities subjects “to reliably construct a simple sentence” (para. 4). He goes on to say that a significant number of these students are practically illiterate (para. 5).

Dr Marks also commented on the circular nature of the problem, saying that

[t]he problem is deepening.... And the scores a year-12 student needs to get into a teaching degree are not high. So then we consign the next generation of children to be taught by twenty-somethings whose own literacy skills are mediocre at best. (2012, para. 6)

Please note the following:

1. Whenever a citation includes a string of two or more words that are taken directly from the original source, those words are enclosed within inverted commas. The first three citations (yellow, green, blue) are examples of this. [Please note that the two-word term “Beazley Report” is a direct quote from the original source, but that it is not placed in inverted commas in my paragraph above. This is because the term is one that is generally known by persons who are familiar with the field of education, and therefore does not need to be placed in inverted commas. This is also the case with most proper nouns, such as Western Australia, London’s Tower Bridge, Martin Luther King, and similar terms which an educated person would be expected to know.]
 2. When a citation has been paraphrased (that is, it is written in the essay-writer’s own words, rather than the actual words of the source), then it does not appear within inverted commas. The fourth citation (pink) is an example of this, and therefore none of the words are within inverted commas. Also note how I have introduced this in-text citation by writing “He goes on to say....” Clearly, the term ‘he’ refers to Russell Marks.
 3. The final in-text citation (grey) is known as a block quotation. A block quotation is any direct quotation (that is, it uses the actual words from the original source) that is 40 words or longer. In this particular example, the quotation contains 42 words. Note that this quote has NOT been placed in inverted commas. Also note that the whole quote has been left-indented by the same amount (1.27cm) as the first line of the paragraph.
 4. Finally, note that I have inserted an ellipsis (...) in the second in-text citation (green) and in the final in-text citation (grey). If you carefully check these two in-text citations against the original sources on page 1, you will see why I have inserted the ellipsis on each occasion. [If you cannot see why, then please come and see me, or contact me by e-mail.]
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