

To quote or to cite?

Anastásios Perdicoulis

Assistant Professor, ECT, UTAD (<http://www.tasso.utad.pt>)

Senior Researcher, CITTA, FEUP (<http://www.fe.up.pt/~tasso>)

Visiting Researcher, Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development, OBU, UK

Abstract

It should be interesting that two key operations of scientific writing, known as ‘quoting’ and ‘citing’, are also examples of misnomers.

1 Perspective

One *sine qua non* rule of scientific communication is the identification of the sources of information (Perdicoulis, 2012, 2013a) used as evidence or support to arguments. These sources are generally identified in full at the end of scientific documents, and constitute lists of ‘external references’ (Figure 1). The ‘internal references’ are in-text mentions of the sources at the place where they are needed — for instance, upon the introduction of new facts.

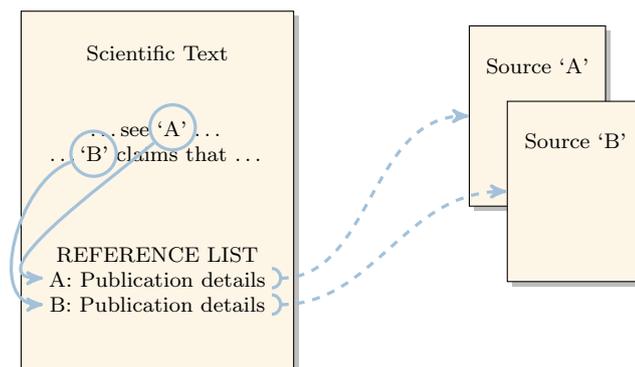


FIGURE 1 Internal (solid) and external (dashed) references

The list of sources is known as *references* if all items are mentioned in the text and *vice versa*. Should this list be intentionally more general, including sources that have been consulted but are not mentioned in the text, then it is called *bibliography*. Both the bibliography and reference lists follow strict rules of semantic formatting in one of many standard ways (UCD, 2011a,b).

2 Quoting and Citing

In the pre-press era of manuscript volumes (i.e. books and scrolls), marginal annotations were a common practice — for instance, the famous *glosses*¹ (γλώσσες [Gk]) used in medieval lectures (Perdicóulis, 2013b). Classic works such as those of Plato and Aristotle were often marked with numbers on the margins of manuscript copies in a way that readers and commentators could refer to passages quickly and unambiguously. Referring to these annotations was known as *quotare* [L], and this would be the modern-day equivalent of giving a reference by page or chapter.

Technically, though, invoking a bookmark or an annotation is a *citation* — *citare* [L], from *ciere/cire* [L], to call. In a bibliographic context, ‘citing’ creates in-text references to the sources of information, and these are usually of the *internal* type — i.e. pointers to the bibliography or list of references (Figure 1). Other contexts in which the verb ‘cite’ is used include the court of ecclesiastical law and the legal profession — e.g. summon someone to appear in court (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010).

SOURCE	MEANING	DERIVATIVES
<i>quot</i> (adj.) [L]	how many, of what number	aliquot ^a ; quote, quotation, quotient
<i>ciere/cire</i> (v.) [L]	to call, summon, muster; excite, rouse, stir up	cio [Pt] ^b ; cite, citation
<i>nota</i> (n.) [L]	mark	annotation, notebook

^aA sample — from *alius* [L], one of two + *quot* [L]

^bUrge, libido, cestros

TABLE 1 Tracing the origins

3 Exegesis

True to its original meaning, to *cite* (v.) [En] indicates making a ‘call’ to another document — as in the `\citep{}` command of L^AT_EX — and this is a suitable term for referring to sources of information — especially as internal references (Figure 1). Nonetheless, some discrepancy between modern use and the original (Latin) arises in romance languages such as French and Portuguese about the terms *citer* [F] and *citar* [Pt], which indicate *reproducing* a passage from a publication *verbatim*² — i.e. in exactly the same words as were used originally. This operation is known as *quoting* [En] — as in the `\blockquote{}` command of L^AT_EX (csquotes package) — but demonstrates yet another discrepancy between actual use and original meaning (Table 1); an option such as *excerpt* (v./n.) — from *ex-* [L], out of, and *carpere* [L], to pluck — seems to be a reasonable alternative to ‘quote’, albeit with a hint of metaphor. Thus, ‘quote’ could be reserved for a use closer to its original quantitative meaning, referring to page or chapter numbers — not quite a synonym of ‘cite’, but rather a complementary numerical specification.

(Author, year, pp.123 – 124)

Documentation

Aversa, A., and W. Whitaker (2008) *WORDS Latin Dictionary* — GPL

Oxford Dictionary of English, 3rd ed. (2010). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oxford Thesaurus of English, 2nd ed. (2006). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Perdicóúlis, A. (2013b) *Academic Life*. [Perdicoulis Publishing](#).

Perdicóúlis, A. (2013a) The scientific qualifier. *oestros*, **11**.

Perdicóúlis, A. (2012) Scientific writing. *oestros*, **5**.

UCD (2011b) *Harvard Referencing Style*. University College Dublin Library: [Guide 69](#).

UCD (2011a) *Chicago Referencing Style*. University College Dublin Library: [Guide 68](#).

Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913) — public domain

