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## WRITING FROM SOURCES

### *Other Handouts:*

- Avoiding Plagiarism
- Paraphrasing & Referencing
- Quoting & Referencing

Writing essays and reports at university involves researching, reading, writing and thinking about other people's work, this is what is meant by, 'writing from sources'. Your sources are either a primary source (when you directly observe and collect data through, for example questionnaires or experiments) or a secondary source when you refer to data collected and interpreted by other people who have then published their ideas about the world. It may seem that we are simply repeating what other people have said when we write essays and assignments and that there is 'nothing original under the sun'. However, by thinking about the ideas in the readings and summarising and analysing those ideas we can come to our own understanding and interpretation of the material.

### ***Tip!***

*Keep a careful and accurate record of your sources at the research and reading stage. This will make it easy to check you have not inadvertently plagiarised at the writing stage. Remember, plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of another person's work, usually by copying or paraphrasing without appropriate referencing and is treated as a serious academic misconduct by the university.*

### **Steps in the process: researching-reading-thinking-writing**

It is your responsibility as a student to do appropriate levels of research on a given topic. This means finding and reading material by authorities in the field. Appropriate research is relevant, credible and current source material. It is important to be selective about finding good research sources. Your lecturers and tutors will guide you; otherwise consult library databases and bibliographies of quality books, journals and papers. Note what other writers/researchers say about other authorities. Once you have chosen useful sources, skim and scan them for appropriate material. Read in depth as necessary. It is also acceptable to speak with others, for example in a peer study group. Ultimately, however, your work must be your own.

## Steps in the process: **reading**-thinking-writing-researching

A good way to separate your own thoughts from the writer's ideas is to keep '3-column' reading notes (Cornell system). The first column is the page number; the second is a summary of content, and the third contains brief comments of your own, as a response to what you have read. This way you can briefly note important ideas from the text, and add your own thoughts or questions ('This is what s/he says, and this is what I think about that'). If you keep all your reading notes in an A4 binder, you can look back on them at a later date. They make a portable record of all the work you have done.

## Steps in the process: **writing**-thinking-researching-reading

When we read and listen at university, we are gaining entry to a professional/academic 'conversation' on a topic that is going on in our society. Michel Foucault has called this cultural conversation 'discourse'. It is a growing and changing body of conservative, moderate and radical opinion that represents what a society thinks, believes and values about something at a given point in time. We cannot take part in a conversation without becoming aware of other people's contributions, and without getting an idea of how those contributions are thought about and how much importance they are given by those around us – especially those in positions of power. Foucault also coined the term 'power-knowledge' to show that a group's knowledge is not simply neutral data but comes with heavy doses of approval or disapproval. For example, once the western world knew that the world was flat; now we know it is round. If you are ignorant of society's discourses, then you are unlikely to be a powerful operator in that field. Accessing the discourses is part of the aim of university study – we *receive* what is being said and thought; we *learn* how to respond in acceptable ways; and then we *contribute* as respected professionals. Reading, writing and speaking at university, then, teaches us to access the relevant discourses.

### ***Tip!***

*Learning takes time and learning the language of academic discourse takes time too. Don't be discouraged if you feel confused. Do trust yourself and the effort you are making, it will all make sense in the end.*

### **Reference:**

Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge* ; translated from the French by A. M. Sheridan Smith. London: Tavistock.