

# “THE PATHS WE WERE TOLD TO FOLLOW”: A CITATIONAL PRACTICE WORKSHEET FOR STUDENTS

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This teaching resource is a worksheet I designed as part of a collaborative activity that gets students to look closely at the bibliography of an academic article. The first set of questions asks the students to think in general terms about what types of sources are traditionally thought of as “academic,” as well as the types of people included in this category. With the second set of questions, students go through a specific bibliography together and identify the different types of sources included. The worksheet asks students to pay special attention to citations of sources that may not seem traditionally “academic.” Finally, the third section calls for a reflection on the bibliography as a whole, and for students to consider the ideological work of citation. Sara Ahmed (2016) writes, “Citation is feminist memory. Citation is how we acknowledge our debt to those who came before; those who helped us find our way when the way was obscured because we deviated from the paths we were told to follow” (p. 15). The questions on this worksheet challenge students to consider what “paths” a bibliography may follow, whether they reinscribe certain forms of knowledge or deviate from them. And in the process of looking closely at one academic bibliography, students may reflect on their own citational practices and the paths they want to follow.

I designed this teaching resource with an undergraduate writing course in mind, although the worksheet could be tailored to any humanities course that has a writing component. I have taught a version of this worksheet once before, in a Spring 2021 section of “University Writing,” a seminar-style (14 students per class) required first-year composition course in Columbia University’s Core Curriculum. My section of University Writing is a “themed” class with readings and assignments that focus on racism and antiracism in America. In the third unit of this class, students complete a research project, and it was during this unit that I had my students complete the citational practice worksheet.

Before I presented the worksheet to my students, we had a discussion about sources of knowledge and the differences between academic and nonacademic sources. I then asked students to look over a sample bibliography that cites mostly academic sources and established scholars. Over

the course of our discussion, my students and I determined that sources traditionally deemed “academic” are those that are published by peer-reviewed, academically recognized presses, available in print or online, and usually written by tenured faculty. I gave my students a version of the worksheet that I had tailored to one of our class readings, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s (2012) “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” which calls for more concerted efforts to dismantle settler colonialism in the academy. The worksheet questions were targeted towards Tuck & Yang’s own citation practices in their bibliography, and I asked students to look for sources that did not seem to be traditionally academic, or sources by authors who do not seem to be established scholars. The students then worked in pairs to answer the questions on the worksheet, which ended by asking students to reflect on whether or not Tuck and Yang’s bibliography aligns with the purpose of their project to resist institutional reproductions of white settler colonialism.

After my students completed the worksheet in pairs, we regrouped to discuss their findings, and we had a fruitful conversation about “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor” and the reproduction of knowledge in scholarship. Several students identified non-scholarly sources in the bibliography and citations of graduate student work, which led to a thoughtful class-wide exchange about the limitations and affordances of academic institutions as sites of knowledge production. Students were also able to describe how the bibliography may also indicate possible gaps or inconsistencies in Tuck and Yang’s theorizations, which led to an engaging conversation about the article itself. For example, a couple students questioned Tuck and Yang’s inclusion of POC into the “settler” category, arguing that many POC are forced inheritors of settler colonialism. This led to a lively discussion on both the limits and affordances of citation as an anti-settler colonialist practice. Overall, the activity seemed to help students think critically about academic bibliographies, and many students expressed that Tuck and Yang’s citational practices inspired them to expand their own understandings of what makes a source legitimate and citable.

The reflective component of this activity is especially important: my goal is to help students think about their own citational practices and the kinds of work they want to reproduce as legitimate in their own research projects. When I teach University Writing again in Fall 2021, I plan to implement a tailored version of this exercise that concludes with a more directed individual reflection on students’ own citational practices, in order to expand the potential for metacognition and learning transfer. The exercise I have in mind is

a short focused free-write with two questions asking students to describe their burgeoning bibliography and identify changes they might make to this bibliography and/or to their research methods, having completed this exercise of analyzing the political and ethical implications of citational practices. I also plan to continue refining the worksheet questions to help students think about what kinds of ideological work a bibliography does, or what becomes possible through the practice of citation.

Particularly when paired with the bibliography for “Decolonization Is a Metaphor,” this worksheet draws students’ attention to how scholarship traditionally centers and reproduces a hierarchy of knowledge that privileges the often white, often male, established scholars at academic institutions. Tuck and Yang’s bibliography also models possible methods for resisting such hierarchies, as it includes many nonacademic sources as well as citing people—especially women—of color, and it also cites graduate students, whose work is not commonly acknowledged in standard citational practices. At the same time, I believe the worksheet also helps students identify possible limitations to trying to undo such hierarchies from within the institution of academia; identifying these limitations can in turn lead to thoughtful discussions about whether academic scholarship is inherently a reproduction of white patriarchal power. The goals of this worksheet are for students to come away with a more critical eye toward the scholarly citations they encounter, an ability to identify modes of resistance, and a sense of responsibility for their own citational practices. These goals draw inspiration from Eugenia Zuroski’s (2020) classroom exercise [“Where do you know from?”](#). Zuroski writes, “Academic intellectual authority—what we think it looks, sounds, and feels like; where we think it *comes from*—is precisely the problem, the structure that perpetuates imperialism in our spaces of learning and intellectual engagement.” The purpose of Zuroski’s assignment informs the purpose of my own: to help students identify what we think academic intellectual authority is and “where we think it *comes from*” and then develop a sense of what it means to “know from” sources that do not fit this narrow conception of intellectual authority.

This teaching resource requires a lot of scaffolding in its current state. When I workshopped the worksheet in the Spring 2021 Learning Community “Citational Practice as Critical Feminist Pedagogy,” Emily FitzGerald and Sandra Chiritescu rightfully pointed out that students—especially first-year undergraduates—may not know the differences between scholarly and nonacademic sources. They suggested implementing in-class discussions about what kinds of sources may appear in a more traditional academic paper, as well

as showing students an example of such a bibliography. I also realize that the questions on the worksheet work best when paired with an assigned course reading, especially one that cites a diverse range of sources, which may not be possible in courses that have specific required readings with more traditional bibliographies. In addition, I welcome user feedback on how to continue to refine the questions to promote student reflection on the institutionalization of knowledge, and how to use this worksheet to prompt students towards implementing a more equitable citational method in their own papers.

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## TEACHING RESOURCE

### Student-facing Instructions

Before looking at the bibliography page, take a few minutes to answer the following questions together.

- What are some types of sources you might expect to see in an academic bibliography?
- What are some types of sources you might *not* expect to see in an academic bibliography?
- What kinds of individuals might you expect to be cited in an academic bibliography?
- What kinds of individuals might you *not* expect to be cited in an academic bibliography?

**Directions:** Take some time to look over the bibliography page with your partner. Together, highlight any citations that seem different from the kinds of sources we are used to encountering in academic bibliographies. Notice what makes them seem unexpected.

1. What are some of the different types of sources the author(s) cite in the bibliography?

2. Does the bibliography cite any types of sources that seem unexpected in an academic bibliography? If so, list them here.

3. Does the bibliography cite any scholarly sources that are not from well-established researchers—do the author(s) cite graduate student work, for example? If so, note them here.

Take a few minutes to answer the following questions with your partner.

- According to what is cited in the bibliography, what are some legitimate sources of knowledge?
- What types of sources do not appear in this bibliography?
- What do you think the bibliography tells us about the paper/project as a whole? What kinds of knowledge are they interested in reproducing? Where are they situating their work?

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