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## DIX RAISONS POUR LESQUELLES LES PRATICIENS DANS LES BLOCS OPÉRATOIRES ET LE PERSONNEL INFIRMIER DE SALLE D'OPÉRATION NE VOUDRONT PEUT-ÊTRE PAS CITER CET ARTICLE

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La rédaction académique peut terroriser les étudiants avant et après leur inscription au programme. Les étudiants construisent souvent leurs travaux autour de passages reformulés à partir de leur matériel de référence. Cette pratique produit du travail de qualité inférieure, des mauvaises notes et de la frustration. Le but de cet article est d'informer les étudiants qui entreprennent des études supérieures sur ce qu'est la rédaction académique et, tout aussi important, ce qu'elle n'est pas.

### INTRODUCTION

Vous voyez-vous comme l'un des ses praticiens de blocs opératoires qui suivent ou considèrent suivre un programme d'études supérieures, mais qui préfèrent les demandes pratiques du rôle au fardeau académique? Si vous sondiez des praticiens en posant cette question, je soupçonne que la majorité d'entre-nous se retrouverait dans cette catégorie. La plupart d'entre nous ne sommes pas des académiques « naturels », alors nous entrons un monde qui nous est étrange et très loin de notre zone de confort. Il devient très difficile de nous exprimer avec assurance alors que nous sommes entourés de travaux merveilleusement écrits. La tendance est donc de construire le travail demandé autour de citations ou de reformulations fidèles au matériel de référence. Il y a, cependant, de très bonnes raisons pour lesquelles cette approche est peu judicieuse.

Traduction du résumé apparaissant dans le *Journal of Perioperative Practice*, volume 18, numéro 12, pp. 529-530. *Ten Reasons why Operating Department Practitioners and Theatre Nurses might not want to quote or cite from this article* de Bernard V Pennington. Copyright 2008, réimprimé avec la permission de l'Association for Perioperative Practice (AfPP).

## TEN REASONS WHY OPERATING DEPARTMENT PRACTITIONERS AND THEATRE NURSES MIGHT NOT WANT TO QUOTE OR CITE FROM THIS ARTICLE

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Academic writing can fill pre- and post-registration students with fear and dread. Students often construct written work around re-worded passages from their sources. This results in poor quality work, low marks and frustration. The aim of this article is to inform students embarking on courses in higher education about what academic writing is – and equally importantly what it is not.

### INTRODUCTION

Do you view yourself as one of those theatre practitioners on, or considering a higher education program, that enjoys the practical demands of the role much more than the academic burden? If you took a survey of practitioners asking this question I suspect you might find that most of us might fall into this category. Most of us are not 'natural' academics and so we enter a world that is strange to us and far-removed from our comfort zone. It becomes very difficult therefore to express ourselves with confidence whilst surrounded by beautiful written works. The tendency then is construct assignment work around quoted or closely paraphrased source material. There are some

## TOP TEN REASONS (cont.)

very good reasons why this approach is ill-advised however.

### 1. Quotes don't demonstrate understanding

Let's be more specific: quotes don't demonstrate your understanding. If you quote a line from this article it will say something about my knowledge and maybe my understanding but not a lot about yours. This is why you are better off writing in your own words where possible and then backing your words up with a reference. Worried that it doesn't look academic? A common mistake is to think that academic writing needs to look and sound like it is taken from a book or journal. What is academic writing? It is clear, concise writing that gets to the point and stays there. It does not need to be flowery or long-winded or contain big words. Just say it how it is and back up what you say with a reference or better still several references. When is a good time to use quotes? Definitions or statistics are usually better quoted because it is very difficult to claim them as your own work.

### 2. Paraphrasing can be a risky business

This is not strictly true but it is extremely risky if you don't understand paraphrasing. Paraphrasing is a legitimate form of writing. The trouble with paraphrasing is that a lot of students (and tutors) confuse it with reproduction. Changing a word or two in a sentence or joining two sentences or a list together with 'and' or 'also' is not paraphrasing. Paraphrasing involves taking an author's idea or concept and applying it to practice or an issue. This is not an easy skill and if you try to paraphrase single sentences or small paragraphs you will inevitably end up copying (usually muttering the words 'I couldn't write it any other way'). The point here is that copying or reproduction of any form will not gain you marks. You may well have enjoyed success with 'reproductive' writing techniques prior to entering higher education but in higher education we look for something more.

Take a look at the marking criteria for your university or college. There is unlikely to be

many marks awarded for quoting hard facts. Sure, you need something to base your discussion on, but the real marks are for 'analysis', 'reflection', 'synthesis' and 'evidence of wide reading'. These terms will not be the subject of discussion here. Except to note that in each case it is what you do with what you have learned from the literature rather than the actual words of the literature that influences the quality of your work. It sounds complex but look at this another way - does your assignment guidance advise you to copy a load of paragraphs from books and journals, change a few words and pretend it's your own?

### 3. This article has very little to do with theatre practice

This is a key point when you consider selection of literature. There is a temptation to carry out a literature search using key words such as 'operating department practitioners' or 'theatre nursing' and then include everything (nothing is wasted). This article would appear quite high on the resulting list of citations simply because it has ODP in the title. However, as you have gathered by now this article is about academic writing generally and could be applied to pretty much any discipline. Subsequently it is unlikely that anything stated here is of value to your assignment in terms of content. There is more discussion around the value of certain types of literature in the next section.

### 4. This article is opinion and is not backed up with a comprehensive reference list

Take a look at the reference list (citations) at the end of this article. Nothing there? What does this say about the quality of the content? It strongly suggests that this is an 'opinion' piece. So now you have to decide if my opinion is worth anything. This would be a bit easier if there was a reference list to show how my opinions were constructed and on which they were based. This is pure opinion however, so now you are left deciding if I am qualified to make these claims or whether to put this article down. This could open up a

## TOP TEN REASONS (cont.)

discussion around where opinion or 'expert opinion' sits in 'hierarchies of evidence' - but one step at a time. There is a question of credibility. Credibility, in literature terms, depends on a number of factors. The first question is the one discussed above - that is the issue of whether the person(s) writing the article is/are suitably qualified/experienced to be taken seriously. If the author is not identified, as can be the case when utilising internet sources, then (unless accessing a universally accepted website, ie, the Department of Health, not PatientUK or Wikipedia) you have to question whether the reference has any value and whether to include it in your essay.

So how about Wikipedia? The answer to this lies in the title. A 'wiki' is an online resource that can be created and edited by anybody at any time. So even when you have a really good entry that explains an issue or principle very well you would be ill

advised to use it. When your tutor comes to mark your work and looks at your reference list three weeks later he/she may take a look at the entry in Wikipedia that has been subsequently changed.

### 5. Look at the way this is written

One word describes this piece: 'journalistic'. I have tended to pose questions rather than answer them. This is a very discursive style. This is fine for a journal article or discussion board entry because the idea is to provoke debate and encourage questioning. This style will not gain many marks in an academic essay however. How many times have you been given feedback such as 'very descriptive', 'mainly narrative'? (There I go again - so many questions). It can be considered poor writing technique to pose questions - particularly if you then fail to answer them within an academic essay.



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## TOP TEN REASONS (cont.)

This goes back to the points made earlier. Get to the point, stick to the point. Just say it how it is. It also highlights why it is ill advised to look at a journal or book and try to 'reproduce' the glossy words in front of you. The purpose of your work is different, as is your audience. This brings us to a key point. The purpose of your work is to demonstrate that you have achieved some learning outcomes. It is unlikely that those outcomes include 'Demonstrate the ability to copy paragraphs from sources, change a few words and pretend it's your own'.


### 6. This article is misleading

Inaccurate would be a better word. There are actually only six reasons for not quoting this article listed here. In any literature there will be limitations or flaws. It does not matter whether (as in this case) they are deliberate or not. What matters is that you recognise the limitations or inaccuracies firstly in selecting which literature to cite and secondly in the way in which it is cited.

I recently read an interesting research article examining delay causes in an operating department. It was clear from early data that theatre personnel skilling was a minimal cause of delays in comparison to skill issues in the areas of surgery and anaesthesia (doctors) and yet the researcher then spent a considerable amount of time and effort 'proving' that significant improvements could be made by multi-skilling theatre personnel rather than addressing the real cause of delays. It was a beautifully written article, the researcher was sufficiently qualified and situated to claim expertise but unfortunately it was complete pants. I won't be citing that one in any of my essays. Whoops, I just did – but I've left it out of my reference list just to make my earlier point. Another inaccuracy? What is the point of this article if you can't cite from it? The aim here is to dispel the myth of 'academic writing' and reassure students that they are not competing with the literature. The literature is there to inform your opinion and then, when you are writing, to back you up. Students entering higher education are understandably nervous about

academic writing. Nobody wants to copy but equally it is difficult, at the start, to have confidence in your own writing. This is particularly true when you surround yourself with numerous glossy 'works' and your own efforts appear to pale in comparison. The temptation is then to 'reproduce' work from sources rather than creating original work. The key to beating this is to remember that your sources are there to back you up – not the other way round. If you find yourself moaning that '...it just can't be written any other way!', then you are probably looking at it from the wrong direction. ✱

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