

# The Retweet of Academia

## Using Twitter to Improve Information Literacy Instruction

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### The state of citation and plagiarism instruction

Undergraduate students need more basic instruction on citation and plagiarism (Lee, 2013, p. 55).

Citation management systems such as EndNote Web, Zotero, and Mendeley are becoming increasingly robust and sophisticated, with libraries responding by integrating these software applications into their service offerings (Childress, 2011, p. 143).

Together, these two trends suggest an opportunity for libraries to shift the emphasis of their citation instruction. Rather than focusing on the specific mechanics of citation styles, libraries can emphasize instruction on the topics of plagiarism and citation more broadly.

### Why do students need additional instruction?

Students, particularly undergraduates, are unfamiliar with the conventions of academic writing (Thonny, 2011, p. 347).

As a result, students are unprepared to produce academic writing for their coursework. One of the primary conventions of scholarly communication is that “academic writers respond to what others have written about their topic” (Thonny, 2011, p. 349).

Because many students do not view their academic writing as a form of participation in a discourse, they do not necessarily view traditional citation instruction as relevant or meaningful.

### Why use Twitter?



Twitter and other social media tools are “platform[s] for social discourse” (Brook, 2012, p. 120). Twitter facilitates the sharing of content and ideas, as well as interaction between different users. Framing social media as platforms for discourse could enable libraries to leverage these tools in a variety of ways (Brook, 2012, p. 120).

Scholars are familiar with interfaces like Web of Knowledge, and understand that the creation of a scholarly work represents a form of participation in discourse.

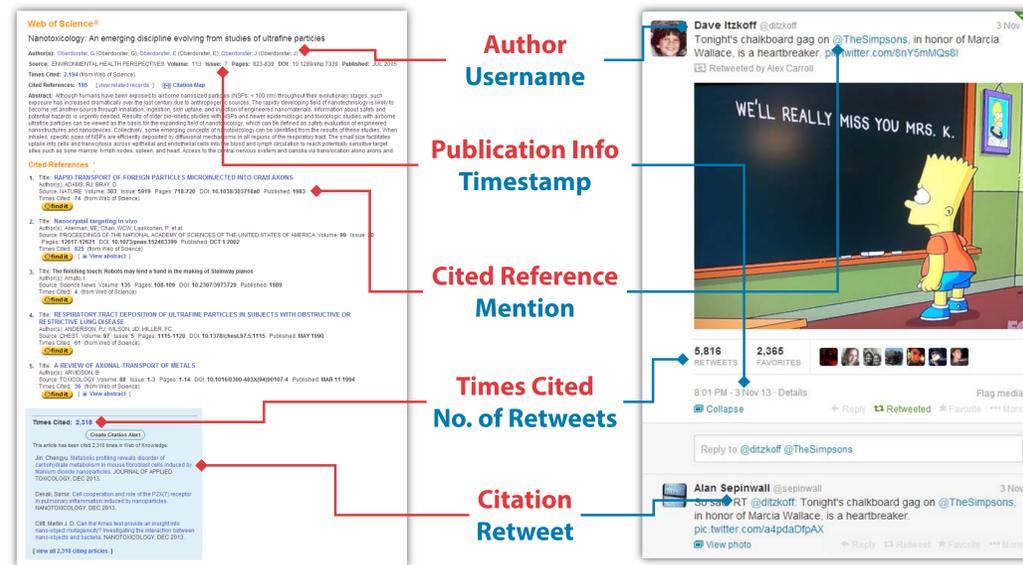
However, the common features of citations, bibliographies, and indexes are confusing to some students. Furthermore, the concept of “academic work as discourse” is foreign to most students, especially undergraduates. Web of Knowledge, with its ostensibly intimidating interface, is not an ideal tool for teaching these concepts to students.

Twitter, which displays discourse in a visual medium familiar to most students, presents a promising tool for offering instruction on why academics cite the works of others, as well as how creating an academic work represents a contribution to scholarly discourse.

## The Bottom Line

In both academia and Twitter, the original producers of content gain significant value from their work being properly attributed to them. This expression of why plagiarism is wrong can be conveyed to students at many academic levels. When creating citation and plagiarism instruction, educators should focus more of their teaching on how plagiarism affects others.

**When students, Twitter users, or scholars use the work of others without properly attributing the content to its original source, they are doing a grave disservice to the original content creator. Because of its similar features to academic discourse, Twitter is a promising model for conveying these concepts to students.**



**Twitter brings the human element back into issues of attribution. As a familiar platform for social interaction, with multiple avenues for giving credit and a shorter timescale, it illustrates contributing to a discourse better than the slow, rigid, unfamiliar pattern of citing scholarly work. Twitter puts plagiarism and research integrity into a real world context.**

### Twitter Terms

#### @reply / mention

Tweets that either respond to a previous Tweet or are directed at another user

#### favorite

Used to tell an original poster that a user liked a tweet or to save tweets for later

#### retweet (RT)

Reposting of another user's tweet via

Used to share content of another user while adding one's own thoughts



#### modified tweet (MT)

Used to share the content of another user's tweet while altering the wording



#### hat tip (HT, h/t)

Convention for crediting an original poster



### Plagiarism in real life

The Tumblr feed Borrowing Sam (<http://borrowingsam.tumblr.com/>) exposed a popular figure on Twitter as stealing jokes

- Twitter user @prodigalsam paraphrased content enough to avoid quick Google searches
- Additionally, @prodigalsam would wait several months before posting the plagiarized content
- Because Twitter records timestamps of when Tweets are initially submitted, such large scale plagiarism became blatant once the person behind Borrowing Sam thought to look for it.

While the concept of direct quote plagiarism is straightforward, students sometimes struggle to understand what exactly educators mean when they talk about paraphrase plagiarism. The images from the Borrowing Sam Tumblr feed visually demonstrate to students what paraphrase plagiarism looks like. In our experience, students understand that despite changing the order of the words slightly, @prodigalsam's Tweets are plagiarism.

### Paraphrase Plagiarism



### Self Plagiarism

Not only did @prodigalsam plagiarize the Tweets of other users, but he also plagiarized himself. Whether performed by highly respected scholars or by undergraduate students, self-plagiarism is always a hot button topic on college campuses. Twitter can be used to introduce this aspect of plagiarism as well.



#### Bibliography

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