

# Lecture 6: Ethical Writing

# Ethical Writing

- Scientists base future research on past research reports. Researchers who misrepresent results or tell outright lies in their reports can mislead other scientists for years.
- Therefore, a moral imperative exist for technical and scientific writers to write ethically.

# Guidelines to Write Ethically

1. Don't Hide or Suppress Unfavourable Data
2. Don't Exaggerate Favourable Data
3. Don't Make False Implications
4. Don't Plagiarize
5. Credit Your Sources
6. Construct Ethical Graphs
7. Don't Lie

# 1. Don't Hide or Suppress Unfavourable Data

- In proposals, the temptation is to hide material that would indicate your company is not suited for the work it proposes to do.
- In research report, the data might show that your theory is not as sound as you think. In both situations, the temptation is to hide or suppress the data.

# 1. Don't Hide or Suppress Unfavourable Data

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- Obviously, the people who read your report, whatever kind of reports they may be, put their implicit trust in your preparing honest, complete reports. To violate that trust would be to act immorally.

## 2. Don't Exaggerate Favourable Data

- Exaggerate Favourable Data is the reverse of suppressing unfavourable data. In writing a proposal, you might exaggerate the experience of your company's scientists, making them sound more expert than they really are.

## 2. Don't Exaggerate Favourable Data

- In a feasibility study or the analysis section of a research report, to support the decision or conclusion you want , you might give favourable data more weight than they deserve.
- You can emphasize on the strong points of your document but to be ethical such emphasis must not distort the facts.

### 3. Don't Make False Implications

- In document such as research report and feasibility study report, anything less than the relevant data, accompanied by objective analysis, would be unethical.



### 3. Don't Make False Implications

- In making a false implication, you are actually telling the truth but in a way that leads readers to the wrong conclusion.

#### For example :

imagine that you are writing a proposal for construction work in which safety on the job is of major importance:

## 3. Don't Make False Implications (Example)

- For eight years, your company had an enviable safety record, with an accident rate far below the industry average.
- In the last two years, because the company has not upgraded the equipment used by your employee, the accident rate has soared above the industry average.

### 3. Don't Make False Implications (Example)

- Even so the average rate for the past ten years is still slightly below the industry average.
- False implying (unethical statement):  
**Our average accident rate over the last ten years has been below the industry average**

## 4. Don't Plagiarize

- **To plagiarize** is to take the words or ideas of others and present them as your own. Much technical writing is based on research into other people's writing. It is legitimate to use other people's data and ideas, but you must give appropriate credit, as discussed in the next section. It is not legitimate to present the words and sentences of others as your own. You must quote, paraphrase, or summarize.

## 4. Don't Plagiarize

- Taking others' words and ideas is stealing
- You must seek for copyrighted materials and fair use standards correctly.
- Even when you have permission, you should credit your sources.

## 5. Credit Your Sources

- Most technical reports require documentation: the use of references to identify material you relied on in preparing the report.
- References credit your sources and allow your readers to find them, if they wish.

## 6. Construct Ethical Graphs

- Like words, graphs can lie, suppress, exaggerate, and tell half-truths.
- The basic rule for integrity in graphs is that the physical representation of the data must accurately reflect them.

## 6. Construct Ethical Graphs

Numbers that change in only one direction can misrepresent by changing the physical dimension of the graph in two dimensions.

**For example:**

in a bar graph, increasing the sizes of the bars both vertically and horizontally will increase the area of the bars out of proportion to the actual increases the data, thus greatly exaggeration them.



## 6. Construct Ethical Graphs

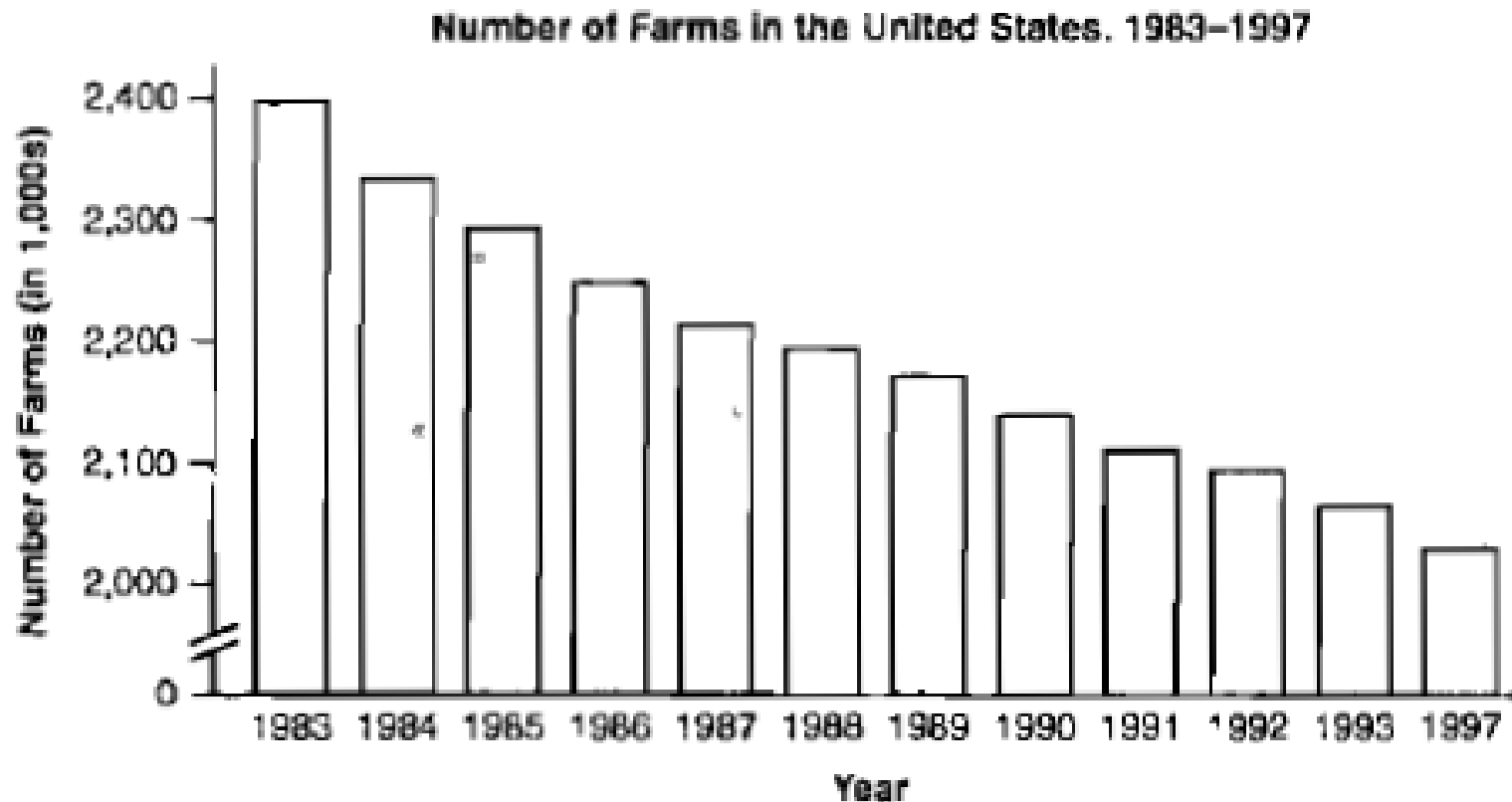
- Pictographs that portray physical objects, such as people and factories, often lack integrity because they increase in two or three dimensions while the underlying numbers increase in only one.

## 6. Construct Ethical Graphs

- Inexperienced graph readers can be easily misled by unethical graphs, experienced graph readers will spot graphs that misrepresent data and, therefore, mistrust the author of the report. You owe it to your self and your readers to graph ethically.

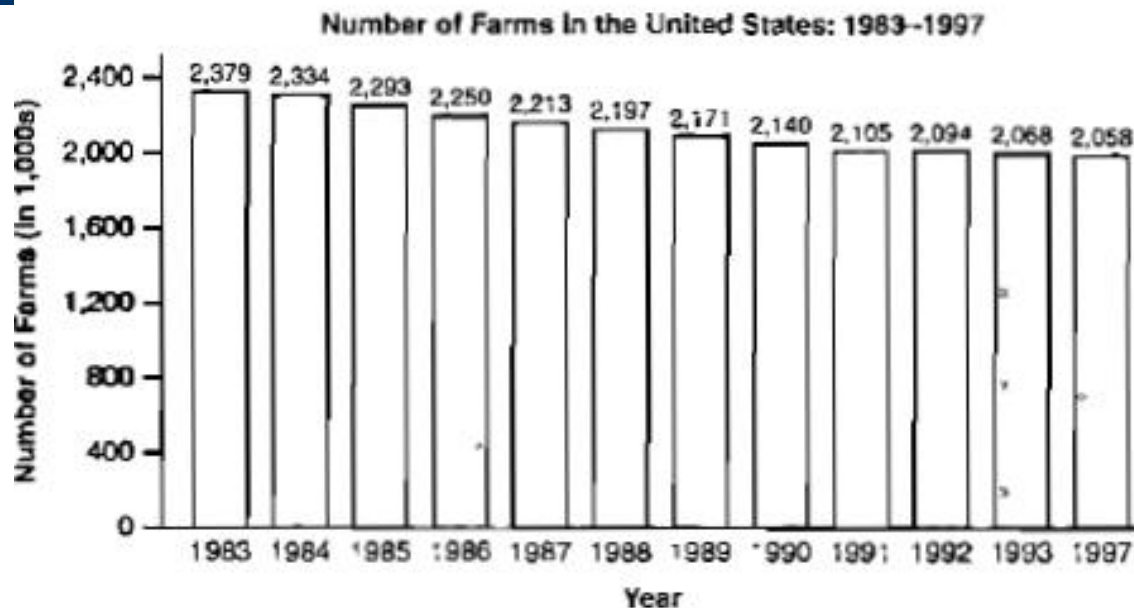
## 6. Construct Ethical Graphs

- A



## 6. Construct Ethical Graphs

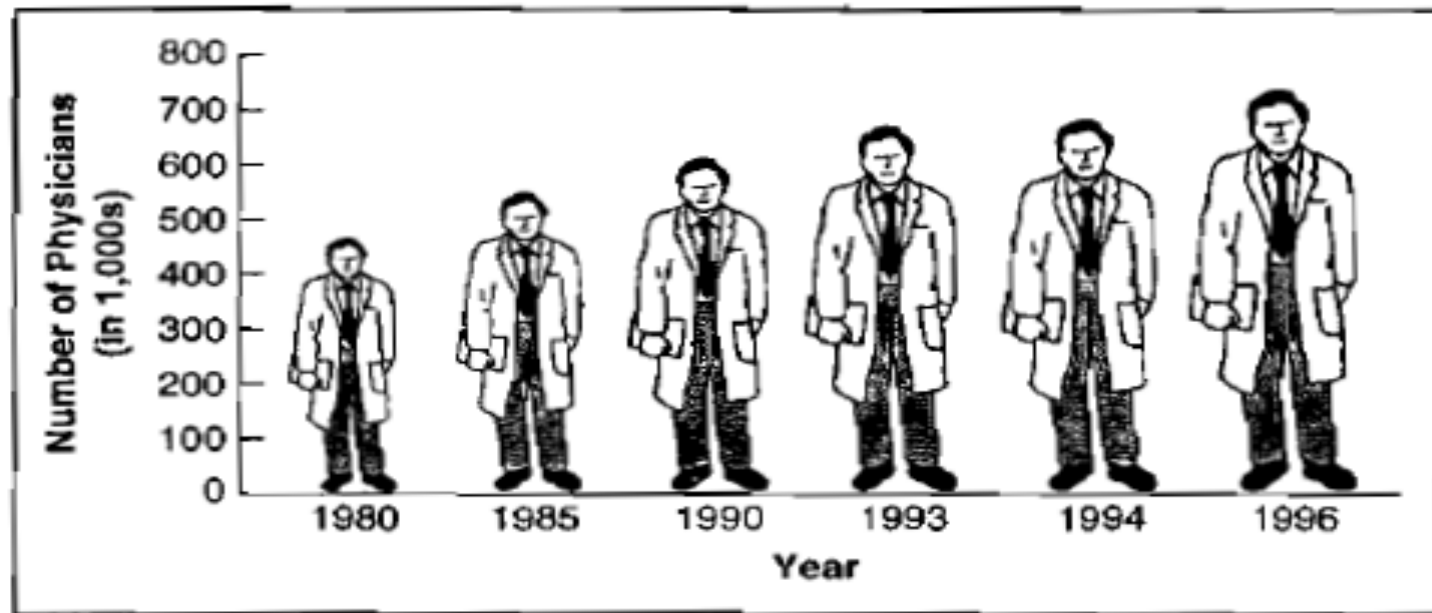
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**FIGURE 7.3 Vertical Misrepresentation of Data.** The *top* graph greatly exaggerates the decline in family farms for the years 1983 to 1997. The *bottom* graph represents the data accurately. Also in the bottom graph, labeling each bar with the appropriate number increases the integrity of the graph.

Source: Data from U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 118th ed. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1998), 670.

## 6. Construct Ethical Graphs



**FIGURE 7.4 Inaccurate Pictograph.** Because the “physician” figures in this pictograph grow in more than one dimension, they grow disproportionately to the underlying data. A well-constructed bar chart showing the same data would not be as dramatic but would represent the data accurately.

*Source:* Data from U.S. Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 118th ed. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1998), 129.

## 7. Don't Lie

- Many of the previous principles deal with unethically shading the truth. The final principle is all encompassing: do not lie. Scientists and technicians are overwhelmingly honest, but there are exceptions. A scientist has fabricated case histories to support his psychological theories.

## 7. Don't Lie

A few scientists have plagiarized the works of others. These few have been outright liars. Science and technology are built on trust. To violate that trust is to shake the very foundation on which science and technology are built.

# Plagiarism

is the act of stealing someone else's work and attempting to "pass it off" as your own. This can apply to anything, from term papers to photographs to songs, even ideas!



# Fair Use

is a statute under copyright law that allows for the use of limited portions of a work that has copyright without having to have permission from the original author.

It was created for the purposes of education and research. It's a little harder to pin down than plagiarism or copyright. **I mean, what qualifies as a "limited portion"?**

# Fair Use

**limited portion** states that there is no specific number of words, lines, or notes that may safely be taken without permission.

When using someone else's work, it's best to always give credit where credit's due, even if using only a small part. If you're unsure, then ask for permission.

# Types of Plagiarism: Copying

The most well-known and, sadly, the most common type of plagiarism is the simplest: **copying**. If you copy someone else's work and put your name on it, you have **plagiarized**.

# Copying: An Example

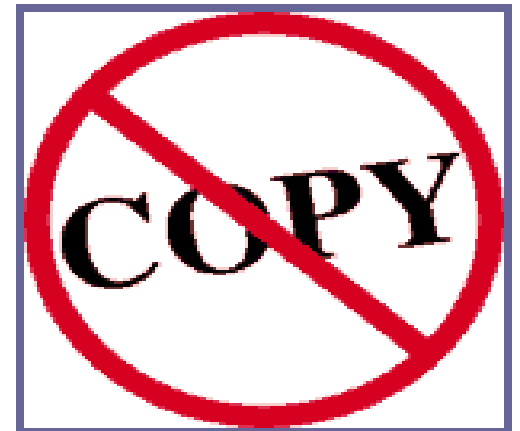
"Children are totally insensitive to their parents' shyness; it is the rare child who labels a parent shy [...] This is understandable, since parents are in positions of control and authority in their homes and may not reveal their shy side to their children. Also, since shyness is viewed as undesirable by many children, it may be threatening to think of parents in these terms. At this young age, the parent is still idealized as all-knowing and all-powerful - - not dumb, ugly, or weak."

## References:

**Zimbardo, Philip G. (1977). *Shyness: What it is, what to do about it*. Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus Books.**

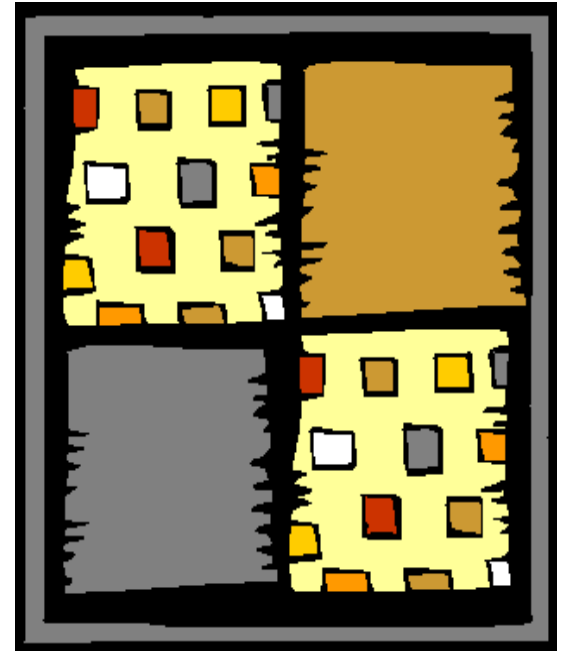
# Copying: An Example

This one is pretty straightforward. If a writer copies, word for word, the text from Dr. Zimbardo's book and does not acknowledge in any way that it was Dr. Zimbardo's work, the writer has committed plagiarism.



## 2. Patchwork Plagiarism

The second kind of plagiarism is similar to copying and is perhaps the second most common type of plagiarism: **patchwork plagiarism**. This occurs when the plagiarizer borrows the "phrases and clauses from the original source and weaves them into his own writing without putting the phrases in quotation marks or citing the author.



# Patchwork: An Example

With regard to children, *they are totally insensitive to their parents' shyness*. Rare is the child who labels a parent shy. It is easy to understand this, since the parents are in *positions of control and authority* in their own homes and may not necessarily show *their shy side to their children*. Moreover, since shyness is viewed as unfavorable by most children, *it may be threatening* for them to think of their parents in that light. During the formative years, the parent is *idealized as all-knowing and all-powerful -- not dumb, ugly, or weak*.

# Patchwork: An Example

Now, had the "author" of this passage put the colored phrases in quotation marks and added a citation after the quotation, like (Zimbardo 62), the "author" would have been safe. Without the quotation marks and the proper citation, the "author" has committed plagiarism.



### 3. Paraphrasing Plagiarism

The third type of plagiarism is called **paraphrasing plagiarism**. This occurs when the plagiarizer paraphrases or summarizes another's work without citing the source. Even changing the words a little or using synonyms but retaining the author's essential thoughts, sentence structure, and/or style without citing the source is still considered plagiarism.

# Paraphrasing: An Example

*Children are completely insensitive to their parents' shyness and rarely label their parents as shy. Because the parents are the authority and controlling figures in the home, they may not feel shy and therefore not show their shy side. Moreover, during the formative years, parents are seen as omnipotent and omniscient and not stupid, unattractive, or pathetic; it may be frightening for children to view their parents in terms of shyness.*

# Paraphrasing: An Example

Now, had the "author" of this paragraph used footnotes or parenthetical citations to acknowledge Dr. Zimbardo's work, he or she would have been in the clear. However, since the "author" acts like these ideas are his or her own, and does not acknowledge Dr. Zimbardo, **it's plagiarism.**

## 4. Unintentional

The fourth type of plagiarism is called **unintentional plagiarism** -- it occurs when the writer incorrectly quotes and/or incorrectly cites a source they are using. How is this plagiarism, if the author didn't mean to do it?

## 4. Unintentional

If a writer has incorrectly quoted or incorrectly cited a source, it could be misconstrued as dishonesty on the writer's part. The dishonest usage of another's work is most often considered plagiarism. Therefore, the incorrect usage of another's work, whether it's intentional or not, could be taken for "real" plagiarism.

# Avoiding Plagiarism

Avoiding plagiarism is quite simple. The best method for avoiding it is to **simply be honest**; when you've used a source in your paper, give credit where it's due. Acknowledge the author of the original work you've used.

# Avoiding Plagiarism

- Another way to avoid plagiarism is to **use your own work as often as possible**. Quoting and citing sources is usually required and inevitable when doing research -- that's how you "back up" your own work. But using someone else's work excessively can be construed as plagiarism.
- Another way to it is to **quote and/or cite your sources properly**.

# Proper Quotations

In order to properly quote your sources, you should consult the style manual that would be appropriate for the research. In most cases, your professor will tell you which style manual would be preferred. If your professor doesn't indicate which manual to use, be sure to ask.

The following examples are formatted in Modern Language Association (MLA), American Psychological Association (APA), and Chicago (Turabian is similar to Chicago) formats. The text is taken from the passage we saw earlier from Zimbardo.



# Modern Language Association (MLA) Quotations

- **Indirect**: Some researchers note that "children are totally insensitive to their parents' shyness" (Zimbardo 62).
- **Direct**: Zimbardo notes that "children are totally insensitive to their parents' shyness" (62).
- **Paraphrasing**: Some researchers have observed that children seem unaware that their parents are considered bashful (Zimbardo 62).

# American Psychological Association (APA) or Chicago Quotations

- **Indirect**: Some researchers note that "children are totally insensitive to their parents' shyness" (Zimbardo, 1977, p.62).
- **Direct**: Zimbardo (1977) notes that "Children are totally insensitive to their parents' shyness" (p. 62).
- **Paraphrasing**: Some researchers have observed that children seem oblivious to their parents' bashfulness (Zimbardo, 1977).