8

CITING SOURCES AND AVOIDING PLAGIARISM

In Chapter 7 we discussed how to choose sources and use them effectively. You also need to know why, where, and how to cite your sources. This means learning the conventions for citing sources within the text and constructing the list of references at the end. We cover these things in this chapter.

Why to Cite

Sociologists cite sources for many reasons. You are likely familiar with two: avoiding plagiarism and giving others credit for their work. But you probably haven't learned much about the equally important *intellectual and rhetorical* reasons for citing. Even if there were no legal or ethical issues involved, sociologists would still cite sources. Lots of them.

These other uses for citation involve rhetorical strategies—using sources in ways that develop our ideas and arguments clearly and effectively. Sociologists cite statistics from authoritative sources so readers will accept them. They cite research papers to justify their choice of methods or to show how their ideas or data add something new. And they cite because sociology, like all sciences, is a giant, slow-motion, crowd-sourcing activity. To have their work taken seriously, researchers must explain new findings in relation to what was done before.

Why to Cite

- *Legal:* To avoid committing plagiarism
- *Ethical:* To give credit where it's due
- Rhetorical:
  - To add credibility
  - To build on the work of others
  - To compare with the work of others

Where to Cite

Some kinds of writing, like magazine articles and newspaper reports, don't have lists of sources at the end. Authors of these genres must include any needed information about their sources within the text itself. In contrast, most academic papers and many types of professional writing include complete citations in a reference list at the end. For these kinds of writing authors include brief "in-text" citations within the paper pointing readers to specific sources in the reference list.

Novice writers often assume that the in-text stuff is the simple part. After all, reference lists have such detailed and varied requirements for punctuation, volume and issue numbers, editions, and so on. But experienced writers see it differently. Once you learn the mechanics, making a reference list is like doing a paint-by-numbers picture: you have to get some details right, but there's not much thinking involved. In contrast, there are many options for in-text citation. Do you put citations at the end of the referenced material or somewhere else? Do you include page numbers? The authors' names? The title of the paper or book? The name of the publication or organization? Some of these decisions are determined by the

citation style. Others follow conventions of the discipline. Yet others are rhetorical choices—decisions you make about which details will be relevant or compelling for readers at that moment. Given the number of options, it's not surprising that students are often confused about where to place in-text citations and what to include.

For sociology, the convention for *where* you put the in-text citation depends in part on *how* you are using the cited material. Sociologists typically place in-text references in one of two places: directly after the referenced material is announced (especially if the authors are explicitly invoked by name) or at the end of the cited material. Revisiting the categories in the "Ways to Use Sources" section of Chapter 7 (page #s) are useful here. Although there is certainly some randomness in practice, this is a typical pattern:

- If you are using the source as *Background*—place the citation information at the end of the cited material.
- If you are using a source as an *Argument*, *Theory*, or *Methods* source—refer to the authors directly in the text by name, placing the citation information just after the name(s).

Here are some examples.

Background Source (cite after material from that source):

> With increasing urbanization and industrialization, hiring decisions based on particularistic criteria (e.g., race) cannot be easily sustained, given the demands of a modern economy for highly skilled labor (**Hogan and Featherman 1977**).

Argument and Theory Source (cite with date directly after author names):

> My focus on racial differences in employment hardship is appropriate for at least two reasons. First, the unemployment rate has been criticized as a measure of labor force performance. . . For instance, in a study of four southern rural counties, **Rungeling et al. (1977)** found that unemployment rates were consistently very low (about 3 percent), while "subemployment" affected over 40 percent of the work force.' For the same period, **Levitan and Taggart (1973)** reported national levels of subemployment of about 11.5 percent. Clearly, the unemployment rate minimizes both the absolute and relative extent of all employment-related hardship in the nonmetropolitan South.

Methods Source (cite directly after author names):

> As described in the next section, **the Labor Utilization Framework (LUF) of Clogg and Sullivan (Clogg 1979; Clogg and Sullivan 1983; Sullivan 1978)** provides a useful analytical device for addressing several objectives on changing black employment-related. . .

The next example shows a combination of in-text citations typical for sociology research reports. Note also how the author combines summary, paraphrase and direct quotation.

> It is difficult to forecast future patterns of racial homophily. A well-documented literature on cross-race friendship dyads and networks among adolescents and the school-aged population **(Goodreau et al. 2009; Wimmer and Lewis 2010)** provides little hard evidence on temporal or life cycle changes in racial homophily. Racial differences

in homophily are nevertheless large. For example, **McPherson et al. (2001) showed** that whites have more racially homogeneous networks than do other racial and ethnic groups. **Smith (1999) similarly reported** that only 6 % of whites and 15 % of blacks had a close friend of another race . . .

Kao and Joyner (2006:972), in fact, provided evidence of "an overwhelming preference for same-ethnic peers over same-race (different-ethnic) and different-race peers." They also demonstrated that interracial friendships increase in number when opportunities . . .

ASA Tips for In-Text Citation

In the How to Cite section that follows, we describe the nuts and bolts of using the ASA (American Sociological Associations) style. But while we're on the topic of in-text citations, here are a few things to look out for when citing in ASA style.

If you name the author or publishing organization in the text, **don't** repeat it in the citation.

NOT THIS: **Rungeling et al. (Rungeling 1977)** found that unemployment rates were consistently very low . . .

BUT THIS: **Rungeling et al. (1977)** found that unemployment rates were consistently very low . . .

When giving an overview of research literature, you will sometimes include multiple citations in the same sentence. If you have different sources for each subtopic or factor, it's important for readers to know which material came from which source. Place each citation at the end of the material relevant to that source, **not** all piled up at the end.

NOT THIS: Moreover, drinking and dating portend the risks and rewards of the transition to adulthood. Early and frequent alcohol use, in particular, is a risk factor for many health and adjustment outcomes, including adult alcoholism, sexual risk-taking, depression, violence, and lowered educational attainment (**Bonomo et al. 2004; Hingson et al. 2003; Windle and Davies 1999; Felson, Teasdale, and Burchfield 2008; Staff et al. 2008**).

BUT THIS: Moreover, drinking and dating portend the risks and rewards of the transition to adulthood. Early and frequent alcohol use, in particular, is a risk factor for many health and adjustment outcomes, including adult alcoholism **(Bonomo et al. 2004),** sexual risk-taking **(Hingson et al. 2003),** depression **(Windle and Davies 1999),** violence (**Felson, Teasdale, and Burchfield 2008),** and lowered educational attainment **(Staff et al. 2008).**

If you reference two works by the same author in the same sentence, include the name only once.

NOT THIS: Drawing on social learning theory, network science, **Granovetter (1973) and Granovetter (1983),** we argue that romantic partners likely function as network bridges . . .

BUT THIS: Drawing on social learning theory, network science, and **Granovetter's** seminal work **(1973, 1983),** we argue that romantic partners likely function as network bridges . . .

For block quotes (longer passages identified by indentation rather than quotation marks) you can place the citation before or after the block. Here's an example of the former (note date and page number in parentheses):

> This is also exemplified in a conversation between three boys in an English class that was documented by **Morris (2008, 738):**
>
> > Kevin: "I don't want to put in a lot of extra effort like that. I'll just do the basic stuff and get a B." "I got an 87 in here," he says proudly. Warren chimes in, "Yeah, I hate these pussies who make like an A minus and then they whine about it." Kevin says, "Yeah it's like why do you care? Why does it have to be better? Nothin' wrong with a normal grade!"
>
> Although ethnographic studies have documented substantial within-gender diversity in the construction of gender identities, the evidence . . .

Another option is to include the source name and date before the block and put only the page number at the end of the quotation. This is a good choice if you want to make sure your readers are aware of the source as they read the quotation. In this example, the General Accounting Office would be considered an authoritative source, so the authors chose to invoke the organization by name prior to the quote to frame how readers would think about the quotation:

> Most organs transplanted in the United States come from cadaveric donors. A report from the **General Accounting Office (1993)** describes the process:
>
> > Organ donation is dependent on voluntarism and generosity as well as solicitation and decision-making at a time when family members are under the stress of bereavement. . . . If the family consents to donation, OPO staff coordinate the remainder of the procurement

> activities, including recovering and preserving the organs and arranging for their transport. **(pp. 17–18)**

Finally, if you do not mention the source explicitly before the block, place all citation information *within* the block at the end of the quote:

> A classic study of "class structure and conformity" is a paradigmatic example of how an individual's open-minded attitudes are the consequence of that same individual's education and occupational self-direction.
>
> > Members of different social classes, by virtue of enjoying (or suffering) different conditions of life, come to see the world differently—to develop different conceptions of social reality, different aspirations and hopes and fears, different 'conceptions of the desirable' **(Kohn 1969, p. 7)**.

How to Cite

To this point in the chapter we've discussed why and where to cite. Here we address the nuts and bolts of documenting sources, which basically involves making your citations look like they should.

The different ways of formatting citations are called "styles" (which is confusing because they're really more like formats). The most important (and perhaps most annoying) thing to know about citation styles is that different disciplines often use different styles. When you began your first year of college, you might have thought that MLA (Modern Language Association) style was *the* formatting style. After all, it's usually the only form taught in secondary schools—at least in the United States. But if you look at the tens of thousands of books and

articles published by scholars in all disciplines each year, most of them do *not* use MLA.

Tip: Don't Wait Until the Final Draft to List Your Sources

Students often think that citing sources is a trivial part of writing . . . just some tidying up to be done at the last minute. There are two problems with this. One is that you may be setting yourself up for accusations of plagiarism: "Yes, Professor, it is true that I paraphrased that part from one of my sources . . . But I was planning on citing it later. *Really* I was." The other is that it hides an important part of your work from those who are offering you guidance along the way. If your instructor (or someone else giving you feedback) cannot see the sources you are using, how can they tell you whether they are appropriate or compelling?

Although it's fine to hold off until near the end to properly format your citations, include at least placeholder citations as you go. One way to do this is to insert a unique identifier such as [Ref AAA] at the appropriate place within the text, and include a shorthand citation for that identifier at the end (a Web address is perfect if one exists), like this:

AAA: http://www.asanet.org/abcde/.pdf

The American Sociology Association, the official organization of sociologists in the United States, has its own style, called ASA. It's the style your sociology professors are most likely to require, so we cover it in some detail here. But be

aware that some sociology journals and publishers use other systems and your professors may prefer those. The journal *Social Forces* uses the Chicago style, while *Journal of Marriage and Family*, a multidisciplinary journal, uses a modified form of the APA style. Make sure you know what each of your professors expects. If your professor doesn't specify a style, choose one of the major social science styles and use it consistently. For social science assignments, don't use a humanities style (especially ones that use footnotes instead of reference lists and use Latin terms like "ibid" and "op. cit."), but APA or Chicago would work, too. Almost every college library now has online guides to the major styles.

Tip: Use a Citation Management System

Back when we were in college, we had to learn all of the details for every style we were required to use. But you have computer applications that can do this for you; they're called citation management systems. They can output your reference lists in any style you choose and get all of those italics and colons right. As we are writing this, some of the most popular systems are Zotero, RefWorks, Endnote, and Mendeley. Your library probably supports at least one. Be smart—ask a librarian to help you get started with one now, and you'll save yourself much time and hassle for the rest of your educational life.

A Brief Guide to ASA Style

Social science citation styles have two parts: (1) in-text citations—how you identify sources within the paper, and (2) a reference list at the end that includes all the sources you consulted. We'll explain both parts.

ASA In-Text Citation

Most of your citations will be articles or scholarly books. For ASA, you must include the last name of the authors and the year of publication. The following table tells you how to handle most citation situations.

The Situation	What to Do	Example
If the sentence doesn't otherwise include the authors' names . . .	put them in parentheses, along with the date.	The constraints of finances and available partners may lead lower income adults to marry later in the life course or not at all (Edin 2005).
If you have already mentioned the author by name . . .	the parentheses should only include the date.	In her theories regarding women's life choices, Gerson (1985) pointed out that choices are all made in the context of women's social conditions . . .
If there are **two** authors . . .	use "and" between the last names.	Identifying liaisons thus provides an attractive means of understanding how substance use behaviors may be transmitted within low-density or highly clustered friendship networks (Henry and Kobus 2007).

The Situation	What to Do	Example
If there are **three** authors . . .	the *first* time you cite this source, include each author's last name.	Scholars, however, have noted that having a child together often creates lasting ties between parents whether or not they remain romantically involved (Roy, Buckmiller, and McDowell 2008).
	After the first time, use the shorthand "et al." (for "and others").	Evidence also indicates, however, that fathers have a great social interest in their children (Roy et al. 2008).
If there are **four or more** authors . . .	use "et al." every time.	(as above)
If you are referencing more than one source at the same time . . .	separate the information for each source by a semicolon.	Explanations for behavioral similarity require disentangling effects of peer selection (i.e., homophily) from peer influence (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001; Valente et al. 2004).

The Situation	What to Do	Example
If you are quoting or discussing a specific page or set of pages . . .	include page numbers after the date with a colon in between (no spaces).	Regarding his baby daughter, one father said it was important to "be a part of her everyday living . . . at least for the first year or whatever" (Reed 2006:123).

ASA Reference List

Entries in ASA are listed alphabetically by author last name. For entries authored by individuals rather than organizations, include first and last names unless only initials are listed in the source. For the first or only author, put the last name first. For subsequent authors, keep the first name first. (Don't blame us. We didn't make this stuff up.)

Each type of source has its own format. Here are common cases, but see the ASA website or your school's library site for complete details.

The format for books:

> Author1 (last name inverted), Author2 (including full surname, last name is not inverted), and Author3. Year of publication. *Name of Publication* (italicized). Publisher's city and state (or name of country if a foreign publisher): Publisher's Name.

The format for journal articles:

> Author1 (Last name inverted), Author2 (including full surname, last name is not inverted), and Author3. Year of publication. "Title of Article." *Name of Publication* (italicized)

Volume Number (Issue Number): Page numbers of article.

Source Type	Reference List Example
book	Wilson, William J. 1990. *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
journal article/ periodical	Felson, Richard, Brent Teasdale, and Keri Burchfield. 2008. "The Influence of Being Under the Influence: Alcohol Effects on Adolescent Violence." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 45(2): 119–41.
authored by organizations	National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. 2001. *Network Variables Codebook*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.
website	US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics 2014. "Data Collection: National Crime Victimization Survey." Retrieved December 19, 2014 (http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4905).

We're sure that you will quickly run into a situation not covered here. Look on the Web for a solution. But if you follow even these basic rules, you'll produce a paper that will strike your professor as scholarly and serious. You don't want to be random about these practices because it looks careless.

Some Special Situations

At some point you will likely need to cite sources that don't fall into the categories we have reviewed. Here are answers to some common questions.

What If the Source Doesn't Have an Author?
This is often the case for publications produced by government or nonprofit agencies or corporations. In that case, the organization name takes the place of the authors' names.

Do I Need to Include Page Numbers?
Only if you are quoting or closely paraphrasing, or if you are discussing material from a specific part of the book. For the in-text citation, include the relevant pages number(s) directly after the date.

When Should I Use a Block Quotation?
For ASA, use blocks for any quotations more than four lines long. Single-space and indent the entire block. Do not use quotation marks, too! Quotes of four lines or less should be placed within the text using the regular margins, set off by quotation marks.

What if the information or idea came from someone I communicated with directly rather than a published source?

Acknowledge the source in a footnote like this:

> Personal communication with Yvonne Haddad, Professor of History and Islamic Studies at Georgetown University.

Citing Stuff From the Web

Until very recently, the material we cited was printed on physical paper—with pages . . . and page numbers. Citation formats still reflect that past, even though more and more paper documents are being digitized and newly published material often exists only on the Web. This can cause some confusion. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

In Print and Online
At this time, many books and most scholarly articles coexist in the paper and digital worlds. If a print version exists, it is

usually proper to use the print-version citation (with volume numbers, page numbers, and so on). Even though you most likely read a journal article online, we still think of the paper version as the *real* one. We generally cite such things just as if they were paper—except that we add information at the end of the citation stating where and when we accessed it online.

Web Pages as Sources

Non-scholarly sources increasingly exist only as websites. Standard citation elements such as titles, publishers, page numbers, and even authors either don't exist in the traditional sense or they aren't clearly indicated. Because citing Web pages is both common and a common source of confusion, let's take a closer look at how to do this in ASA. The basic principles are to make clear both what the hosting organization is and which specific Web page(s) you are referring to.

In-Text Citation

- ✓ **Don't** put the URL within the text, only in the reference list.
- ✓ **Do** cite the sources within the text just like a printed source: (author or organization name, date)

Reference List

- ✓ **Don't** use a URL in place of a citation in the reference list. The URL is only part of what is required.
- ✓ **Do** include the URL along with the date you looked at the page—
- ✓ following the other citation information, like this: Retrieved <date> (URL)
- ✓ **Don't** use *only* the name of the organization or only the title of the page as a citation.
- ✓ **Do** include the identity of the organization and the title of the specific page in the reference list.

Tip: Don't Include Names of Library Databases in Your Reference List

When students find an article using a library database, they often include the database name—Socindex, JSTOR, Web of Science, and so on—in the citation. Don't—at least don't when using ASA style. A library database is merely a tool for locating sources; it doesn't have any connection to the authors or play a role in the publishing process. Say you need to cite an article from *American Sociological Review*. You happened to find the article through a link from JSTOR, but you could just as well have gotten there via SAGE. Or a professor could have emailed you the citation or a link to the article. Your readers don't care how you found it. They just need the citation.

Avoiding Plagiarism

Why is our discussion of plagiarism in the Sources chapter? Because when students who *are not* intentionally cheating get into this sort of trouble, it is usually because they aren't using or citing sources appropriately.

Avoid Patchwriting

"Patchwriting" describes the kind of pseudo-writing in which big chunks of quoted or closely paraphrased text are "stitched" together with little bits of the student's own writing. Your professors recognize this for what it usually is: last-minute attempts to complete a paper using

sources students haven't truly understood—and possibly not really read. Patchwriting is not only poor writing; it can get you into trouble.

Here's why: When you use large chunks of other people's writing just to make your paper longer, you have two choices and they are both bad: One is to clearly cite all of that undigested material—showing your teacher that you really haven't done much writing (or thinking) of your own. The other is to cite minimally, being intentionally unclear about what came from the source and what is your own work; this deception could be interpreted as plagiarism, even if you include a few citations. The best way to avoid patchwriting is to start working well ahead of the deadline, take good notes, and build your paper around your own ideas. See the Style chapter for more about how to do this well.

Patchwriting

Besides outright cheating (and you know what that is), the most common cause of plagiarism trouble occurs when students do *patchwriting* (also called *patchwork writing*). Patchwriting gets its name from the way students "stitch" together chunks of text written by others—doing little of the actual writing themselves. This might show up in an assigned paper in a sociological theory course as unnecessarily long quotes from Durkheim, Marx, and Weber texts, or in a library research paper with long, strung-together passages from sociological research reports. Or it might manifest in taking large blocks of text from a source, changing a few words (sometimes including an in-text citation, sometimes not) and passing that off as adequate paraphrase (it's not). Whatever the specifics,

you're doing patchwriting if most of your paper consists of quotation and paraphrase of what other people have written with relatively few thoughts or ideas of your own.

Because patchwriting is so common, it's worth thinking about the reasons students do it. It may be that you don't believe you know enough to offer your own thoughts on the topic and therefore defer almost entirely to the experts. This is especially likely if you grew up in a culture with writing conventions or values that differ from Western academic norms. Or perhaps you haven't yet mastered the techniques of reusing other people's work—quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing—needed for successful sociological writing. (For the basics, see Chapter 7: Choosing and Using Sources.)

And there's another possibility: procrastination. Having put off writing that sociology paper for weeks, you are now short on time and you know too little about the material. So you scramble to find passages from your sources that seem at least relevant to the topic. The assignment requires a minimum of ten pages and you have barely two pages worth of ideas, so the longer the quotation or paraphrase the better—right? As a result, there's little of *you* in your paper. If you're accused of plagiarism for turning in such a paper, you might well deserve it. Even though you didn't turn in a paper literally written by someone else, it's not really your own writing either. (If you were judging a furniture design competition, would you accept a chair assembled from an Ikea kit?)

No one can write a good college-level paper of more than a page or so the night before it is due. Putting yourself in that situation can lead you to make really, really bad choices. Your school probably has an office of academic support. Those folks can help you do better in your classes in many ways, including time management. It's free. Use it. Really.

When Is Plagiarism Not Really Plagiarism?

You have likely figured out by now that academic writing is not one specific genre. Literature professors write different kinds of papers and assign different kinds of writing than do their colleagues in physics. Neither looks much like what your sociology professors publish or ask their students to produce. But here's something you might not know: There are also important differences in what counts as plagiarism.

Although it's a bit of an oversimplification, it's useful to think about kinds of scholarly writing as lying on a spectrum between "essays" and "reports." Essayists think of their writing as works of art as well as scholarship. They strive for originally in expression as well as in ideas, and they expect the same of their colleagues and students. When a humanities professor asks you to write an "essay," that's the world you're in. In contrast, those in the sciences—including sociology—generally see their writing mainly as a vehicle for communicating ideas and findings. They often refer to "reporting" or "writing up" their work. These scholars do care about their writing, with a focus on being as clear and concise as possible, but they don't have the same sense of writing as an artistic product. Because of this different attitude toward prose, writers of reports sometimes reuse small bits of previously publish material. This is called *text recycling.*

Text Recycling

Although essayists would scoff at the idea of reusing chunks of prose from their prior published work in a new essay, report writers often see the practice as a matter of sensible efficiency and useful consistency. For example, say the sampling procedure you used in your most recent research project is nearly identical to the procedure you used in a previous study. Why write an entirely new description of the procedure when you could easily adapt the one you wrote for the earlier work?

Here are some things you should know about *text recycling* for your sociology courses. First, sociology spans a wider range of research and writing practices than almost any other discipline. Some of your sociology assignments will require essay-like writing (e.g., ethnographies or experience essays); other assignments, especially in medical, business, or psychological subfields, may require something similar to reports in some medical journals. Regardless of whether recycling is permitted in the latter, it is very unlikely to be acceptable in the former.

Second, text recycling in sociology is acceptable in only a few specific situations. Here are the most common:

- From grant proposals to research reports: If research is funded through a grant, material written for the grant proposal will often be reused when reporting on the research once it has been conducted.
- In Introduction sections: An author writing a paper building on her own prior research might adapt material from a prior paper of her own (or by her research group) explaining the purpose of a study or reviewing the literature.
- In Methods sections: Technical descriptions of databases, sampling techniques, or statistical methods might be recycled from one's own previous papers or from organizations whose resources you are using, such as surveys or databases.

But even in the situations described here, verbatim recycling only makes sense if the language in question is the best possible choice for *your* context—which is different from the rhetorical context of the source. For example, the website for a database you are using may describe the sampling procedure in great detail, but this doesn't mean *your* readers need all that information or will understand the technical terms used in the original.

Especially in the school context, decisions about recycling should always be made carefully and judiciously. Although *text recycling* is accepted practice in some professional writing situations, it likely runs counter to your school's honor code and therefore could be construed as plagiarism. If you believe that recycling a particular passage is your best option as a writer, ask your instructor or mentor whether recycling that material is permissible and a good writerly choice.

If you choose to recycle material in a paper you are writing for a course, we strongly urge you to make it very clear to your instructor exactly which material in your paper is recycled. Here is a good procedure:

- Highlight all recycled passages in gray. (Gray shows up on printed copies.)
- For each passage, include a footnote (1) stating that the highlighted material has been reproduced from elsewhere and (2) citing the sources, including the page number.

Following this practice helps protect you from charges of plagiarism. It also provides an opportunity for your instructor to help you learn the nuances of recycling in their area of specialization.

Textual Gifts

There is one other way in which sociologists may legitimately use the language of others without attribution. And unlike text recycling, this one applies across academia. Almost everyone who writes professionally has learned the value of getting feedback from trusted colleagues. Before submitting an important piece of writing—whether grant proposal, research report, or book manuscript—most sociologists will ask others for honest and constructive feedback on their work.

Among the various issues mentioned in this feedback, some comments may suggest alternative wording for short phrases or even entire sentences. The suggested text might be more understandable than the writer's original prose or perhaps it avoids undesirable associations which the writer hadn't considered. We might call such freely offered material *textual gifts.*

Those who accept such textual gifts typically don't acknowledge the specific text in any way. The gifted material isn't put in quotation marks or cited. The one exception is if a particular bit of suggested prose ends up being important to the work in some way—perhaps as a key phrase or metaphor. In this case, the author may thank the colleague in a note of acknowledgment, but it has to be a very important contribution to deserve such special treatment. You are telling your reader that this word or phrase was an "ah-hah" way of thinking about the topic for you.

Depending on the aims of the assignment and your professors' own preferences, you might be encouraged to get feedback on drafts or be explicitly prohibited from doing so. If the latter—well, there you go, no gifts for you. If the former, check with your professor so you know what is and isn't allowed when getting feedback on your work in progress.