

## Editorial: Standing on the shoulders of giants

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“Bernard of Chartres used to say that we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size.” (John of Salisbury, 1159). This is particularly true of the research that we carry out and then write about. It is most important that our readers know how we got to where we are now, what others have written about the topic and the gaps they have left that we are trying to fill.

Recognition is a key part of the scientific process. We make our results available to others as part of a collective endeavour to learn more about our world. The recognition of our contribution is just as important to us as is our salary. That recognition gives us our status and credibility as scientists. If we want to be part of the community then we should recognise and acknowledge the contributions made by others, and we do that by citing their work in our own. It can be argued that failing to do so is a form of theft.

This raises the questions of when a reference is appropriate. A reference is often more helpful if you explain why you are citing the work. It may be that the work provides some context or background to your argument. Perhaps you are extending the ideas in the earlier work. Your finding may support the earlier work – or may contradict it. Many years ago I was involved in an experiment carried out by the journal for which I was the assistant editor, where authors were required to explain the reason for every reference by qualifying the citation. The experiment did not work well and the idea was discontinued because the explanation broke up the flow of the writing and made the articles difficult to read. However, it is helpful to you, the author, to think why you are using the references. Making your paper longer by adding words, or making it appear more erudite are not good reasons!

A technique used by some reviewers is to look at the dates of the references on the grounds. They then criticise submissions where the majority of the references appear dated. This too, demonstrates laziness on their part. The author’s references should be appropriate and it may well be that the most appropriate reference is not recent. For example, I began this editorial with a reference that is over 850 years old. The phrase ‘Standing on the shoulders of giants’ is often mis-attributed to Isaac Newton who said in a letter to Robert Hooke dated 1676: “What Descartes did was a good step. You have added much several ways, and especially in taking the colours of thin plates into philosophical consideration. If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” Newton would have been a more recent reference - but not as appropriate. It is quite possible that John of Salisbury, who was known for adapting and refining the work of others, took this phrase from someone even earlier – but I cannot find a record of it!

There is a distressing tendency for young researchers to reach for Google Scholar or some other search engine and compile a list of papers that appear to be relevant to the subject, read the abstracts and then cite them as references in their section reviewing the

literature. While it may look impressive to a casual reader, the errors will soon be obvious to someone who knows the field well. Be sure your sin will find you out!

You may find it helpful to use a reference manager when you are researching your topic. This software enables you to link articles that you discover to parts of your own text. Reference managers usually include a set of standard referencing styles that you can use to ensure that the references in your paper conforms to the style required by your target journal (*Education & Self Development* requires APA style). Some, such as Endnote from Clarivate Analytics, cost money; others, for example Mendeley<sup>1</sup> developed by Elsevier, are free. As you become accustomed to it, a reference manager can soon become an essential part of your research and writing toolkit.

One aspect of referencing which is particular to *Education & Self Development* with our practice of publishing articles in Russian and English, is the requirement that references must be given in Roman script (transliterated from the Cyrillic if necessary). It may therefore necessary for some references to appear twice, once in each script! We would very much like to hear from any reader who has experience of using these reference managers with different languages.

## References

John of Salisbury, (1159), *Metalogicon*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mendeley.com/>