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**ENVR E-106**  
**Envisioning a Sustainable Future:**  
**Managing and Protecting the Environment**  
Spring Semester 2017

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## **Some Comments on Research and Writing about** *Envisioning a Sustainable Future*

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There are many forms of writing, but for the purposes of **ENVR E-106**, the expectation is that your final paper will take the form of what is known generally as a “research report.” That is to say, this will not be a piece of fiction writing, nor will it be a journal of personal discovery, nor will it be essay or extended editorial in which you express a personal opinion. Instead, your paper is expected to be a report on the research you have undertaken with primary source material on a particular aspect of envisioning a sustainable future.

What can “count” as a primary source actually differs from project to project, depending upon what constitutes the focus and emphasis of the research topic. For example, if you are investigating a particular type of environmental change occurring along coastal estuaries in a given region over a specified time period, it would be necessary to consult the scientific journals that contain articles with the relevant data that have been published by professional researchers in peer-reviewed journals. Citing this material correctly and in an appropriate form will be a major component of your research report.

If, on the other hand, your research topic is, say, “*people’s changing attitudes to the seashore*,” then a “primary source” for your research paper could be a newspaper article, an editorial or a transcript of a town zoning board meeting that reflects the outrage of citizens whose beach access has just been altered radically by a new government ordinance or substantially altered by a coastal storm.

In short, since the focus of each paper differs in the above two cases, the nature of what constitutes a “primary source” also differs. In general, for discussing environmental issues you will need to focus upon original articles written by researchers and writers in peer-reviewed professional journals. But, when it comes to approaching the whole realm of “envisioning a sustainable future” you may well need to include properly sourced material available only from other sources including news outlets, interviews, letters-to-the-editor, published brochures, published minutes of meetings, websites, etc.

In either case, these source materials need to be cited in an appropriate manner that will allow the reader to get access to the material you are referencing. The basic purpose of citation in a research report is to enable the reader to replicate access to what you have discovered in publically accessible sources. Your role as writer is to be regarded as a credible “information broker” to the most reliable information you feel your readers should know about the topic you are discussing.

**NOTA BENE:** Your paper may, in fact, include both kinds primary source material, *but* you will need to make it clear to the reader when you are presenting the one kind of material and when you shift to another type of source material for the purposes of the point you wish to make in the paper. It is not acceptable to cite newspapers as a legitimate source of scientific

data, for example; nor is it appropriate to cite a scientific journal article as an example of citizen outrage. It is perfectly acceptable, however, to contrast scientific findings on any topic with public perceptions of a problem by citing the appropriate primary material for each source of data. It is vital in cases like these that your research report makes clear the different character of the primary sources cited. The reader should not be left confused about the nature of the source material for each of these kinds of statements.

The proper form and scope of citation is, in principle, straight-forward and includes three key elements. Citations should include 1) the person or institution that is the origin of the observation, comment, etc., 2) the date of the publication and 3) the source from which the material can be retrieved by the reader. Citation formats differ, but for ENVR E-106 we would expect you to follow the American Psychological Association (APA) citation conventions. You can find further information on the appropriate citation forms from [Writing with Internet Sources: A Guide for Harvard Students](#) or the most current website: [Harvard Guide to Using Sources](#)

One quick way to learn about the APA citation form is to see how it is used in published scientific literature. For example, you can conduct a preliminary search for subject material relating to your research in the online publication "[ScienceDaily.](#)" From their web pages that come back from a search you conduct you can learn what you need to know about the proper citation of science articles in the APA format. [See the demonstration of this in the section and class sessions.]

In all of your writing it is essential to include proper citation in order to avoid the problem of plagiarism. This is not something that Harvard takes lightly. You do not want in any way to be suspected of plagiarism because the consequences are devastating for this course and for any future academic work. For this reason you should become thoroughly familiar with Harvard's policies on plagiarism and review in detail the published statement entitled [Avoiding Plagiarism](#). It is important to note that plagiarism is not limited to the non-citation or mis-representation of precise phrases or quotes. The definition of plagiarism extends as well to the failure to source judgments, conclusions, concepts or ideas in a proper manner.



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