AGCJ 404: Communicating Agricultural Information to the Public

Week #1: Ethical Standards in Writing

Quote Student’s Report

“Pesticide usage rates have increased steadily from 1964 to 1993. In 1989, agriculture accounted for more than one billion pounds of pesticides used annually in the United States. This number will rise as the demand for food production increases with increasing population.”

Objectives

- Understand the role of ethical considerations in the writing process
- Recognize unethical communication in the writing process

Why Do We Need to Solve This Problem?

- Definitions of Academic Misconduct
  - [http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor/Student%20Rules/definitions.html](http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor/Student%20Rules/definitions.html)
- Academic Sanctions
  - [http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor/Student%20Rules/sanctions.html](http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor/Student%20Rules/sanctions.html)
  - Usual penalty for an initial violation shall be an “F” in the course.
  - More severe penalties (including separation from the University) may be imposed by the Honor Council if the facts and circumstances as determined by the Honor Council warrant such penalties.

Why Might We Write Unethically?

- Our interests or the interests of our organization are at stake
- May not be recognizing the consequences of what you have written

Example:

- You may be writing a proposal for your research laboratory to do a significant and costly piece of research for a large government agency. The use of exaggerations of the expertise of the scientists or using imprecise language to cover up deficiencies is unethical writing.
Ethics in Writing

- Personal standards of right and wrong action; Standards of conduct adopted by professionals.

Source:

Maintaining Ethical Standards

- Written standards (law)
- Commonly accepted standards
  - Research
  - Business
  - Education

Unethical Communication

- Plagiarism
- Imprecise or ambiguous language
- False implications
- Manipulating data
- Misleading visuals

Imprecise or Ambiguous Language

- You have given a survey to 100 people. Twenty five people actually fill it out and give it back to you. Of these twenty five, fifteen support planting flowers outside the building. In your report you state the majority of the people surveyed support planting flowers. Only 25% actually handed in the survey in the first place.

False Implications

- Be truthful and honest in your writings.
- Using false implications can lead to disaster when questioned.
- Example:
  - "Our voltage generator is designed to operate from the heat of Saudi Arabian deserts to the frozen tundra of Greenland." It may be true it was designed that way, but if it only operates between Atlanta and Toronto the writer has made a false implication without telling an outright lie.
Manipulating Data

- Trimming: smoothing irregularities to make the data look extremely accurate and precise
- Cooking: retaining only those results that fit the theory and discarding others
- Forging: inventing some or all of the research data that are reported, even reporting experiments to obtain the data that were never performed

Example of Manipulating Data

- Your company is performing an inventory cruise on a tract of land. You decide to go to the state fair instead of working that week. Now you sit in your office and make up some tree measurements about the cruise that you never performed and report them in the inventory report to your boss.

Misleading Visuals

- When using visual aids to emphasize a certain point, make sure the data accurately depicts the correct data.
- Be consistent in scales used in visuals

Avoiding Plagiarism

- You may quote or paraphrase words and ideas of others if you document the source.

Plagiarism

- Using someone else’s exact words without quotation marks and appropriate credit.
- Using unique ideas of someone else without acknowledgment.


Example of Plagiarism

- Make sure that even your acknowledged paraphrases and summaries do not track the originals so closely that they border on stealing other’s words
  - Original...Riparian buffer zones are important when ensuring clean water.
  - Plagiarism...When ensuring clean water, riparian buffer zones are important.
Paraphrasing

- Rewriting information to state the essential ideas in your own words without distorting them.
- Documentation of the source required with exception of “common knowledge” information.

What Is “Common Knowledge”?

- Major historical dates and events
- Key ideas of scientific or philosophical movements
- Any type of information readily available in:
  - Handbooks
  - Manuals
  - Atlases

Always Cite Sources When Using.....

- Information recently discovered or collected
- Viewpoints adopted from others
- Plans, procedures, or strategies of others

Copyright

- The right of exclusive ownership by an author of the benefits resulting from the creation of his/her work.

Source:

“Fair Use”

- Copyright law provision that allows teachers, librarians, reviewers and others to reproduce a limited portion of copyrighted materials for educational and certain other purposes without compensation to the copyright owners.

Assignment

- Use accepted rules of citation (see textbook-APA Style Manual) in all writing.