

## EZ Bibliographies

*Do Web sites that format citations for students negate the need to teach them how to create a proper source list?*

By JAMES M. LANG

ONE OF MY FAVORITE PARTS of writing a scholarly paper comes at the end: typing up and formatting the "Works Cited" list.

I realize that admission may leave a strange impression of me. However, once you start working on the details of the Works Cited list, it means that you are done with all of the intellectually challenging parts of the task: the research, the ideas, the drafting and revising. Preparing a source list is the scholarly equivalent of wiping off your tools and putting them away after glazing a window.

It's mostly mindless work; all you have to do is follow the directions in the *MLA Style Manual*. I can brew myself a cup of tea, throw some Wilco on the music player, and finish the task in an hour or two.

In the course of more than eight years of full-time teaching, I've discovered that most undergraduates don't share the same zest for the final task of writing a research paper. No matter how often I emphasize the importance of providing the reader with an easy and reliable means of tracking down one's sources, I find that few students do the detail work necessary to get their Works Cited list into the proper format.

Sometimes I get frustrated and tell students that, of all the skills they will learn in college, this one—taking a pool of information and putting it in some predetermined format—may be the one they will use most frequently in a job. After all, I say, when your boss asks you for the "TPS reports," and wants them to look the way TPS reports have always looked, you have to get those TPS reports in the proper format. (Only a handful of students these days understand the reference to the classic cubicle comedy film *Office Space*, but everyone gets the idea.)

Last week in my English-composition class, as I was waving my arms and pontificating about the importance of a properly formatted list of sources, a student hesitantly raised her hand. My heart-stopping lectures on this topic normally elicit little student interest, so I paused immediately. "Yes?"

"Ummmm . . .," the student said tentatively, as if she were unsure whether her comment was going to get her into trouble. "You know that EasyBib will just put it in the right format for you, right?"

"EZ what?"

"EasyBib.com. It's a Web site. You just type in the information about the source, and it formats it for you."

Another student raised her hand. "Yeah, and the most current version of Microsoft Word does the same thing now."

My first reaction? I wasn't surprised. Of course, I thought to myself, EasyBib.com was one of those Web sites sitting out there in space, waiting for the Internet to happen in order to come to fruition. My second reaction was a little falling in my heart as I wondered whether I would ever again taste the quiet joys of formulating my own Works Cited list.

In that classroom moment, I had to think quickly about whether to devise a policy for my students on using such a Web site, but it was a very short minute. The point of a Works Cited list is not to create busy work and

force students through a formatting obstacle course. The point is to ensure that writers and readers everywhere make the list the same way so that we can all find the information we need most easily. If EasyBib can help us achieve that goal, without much of the hassle, then we have no reason not to take advantage of it.

After class, I checked out both tools recommended by the students. I started with EasyBib.com, and found it to be exactly what the student had promised: a Web site that not only properly formats each entry of your Works Cited list but also allows you to export the entire list into a Microsoft Word document. It doesn't commit many of the sins my students frequently commit when they create a source list on their own: putting the

words "Works Cited" in bold, or blue, or humongous letters; numbering the entries; mixing double and single spacing; tabbing the first line and not the second or third lines of an entry.

For the absolutely laziest students, you can even enter the ISBN number of a book into a field entitled "Auto-Cite," and it will format everything for you. I put my most recent book in there and the citation came out perfectly.

Most students begin their research on the Internet now, so I thought I would check out whether EasyBib created a proper citation for a Web site as well. My students are writing an essay on affirmative action in college admissions, so I typed "affirmative action" into Google. Among other links I found a historical overview from the Web site of the National Organization for Women; I inserted information from the Web page into EasyBib and, lo and behold, out came the citation, once again in perfect format.

For comparison's sake, I tried Microsoft Word's version (you'll find it under the "References" tab in the most recent version of Word), with much the same results. Everything formatted perfectly, in my choice of MLA, APA, Chicago, and a handful of other styles I had never even heard of. I found it harder to get Word to spit out the entire page of sources in the proper format, but students are better at that kind of thing than I am, so I'm guessing it's equally possible.

I stepped back afterward to think about all of this. For many years now, high-school teachers and college faculty members have been drumming lessons about bibliographic formats into our students' heads. With these new Web tools, can we stop covering this specialized skill? Fortunately or unfortunately, depending upon your perspective, the answer is no. We may not have to spend as much time talking about where the period goes or what spacing to use in a properly formatted list, but the students will continue to need plenty of help in gathering the right information for the kinds of sources they use. After I recommended that my students go ahead and use EasyBib for their papers, I still had numerous questions from them about where to find the information they needed, and about sorting through situations in which they either did not have enough information or had too much.

When a book has been printed and republished numerous times, they wanted to know, which date should they enter? When multiple cities are listed for a publisher, which one is the correct one? What about books with two different publishers listed? One student had trouble picking out the name of the publisher from the

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### On Course

## The Fund Raiser

### Moving On in Turbulent Times

After 18 years in campus development, a fund raiser tries out the consulting world

By MARK J. DROZDOWSKI

**T**IMING, I'VE HEARD, is everything. After three years of trials and triumphs, I recently decided to leave my job as executive director of a college foundation. For a host of reasons I won't enumerate here, I concluded it was time to go. My decision, surprisingly, was easy, though my next one isn't exactly shaping up that way.

You may have noticed that our economy is about as stable as a Flying Wallenda in a hurricane. Banks are teetering. Wall Street needs repaving, and the federal government is busy scooping water from the bilge. At least gas prices are dropping (for now).

So I've left the comfy confines of academe smack dab in the midst of what experts are calling the most dramatic economic slide since the Great Depression. It's enough to make a guy, well, depressed. But I have some plans up my sweatshirt sleeve.

One involves the hope that colleges are still in the hiring mood. During the last decade or so, fund raising has been a hot field in academe. New positions were popping up everywhere, fund raisers were hopping from one job to the next in search of more money—uh, responsibility, and vacancies abounded. Likewise, donors remained generous, prompting institutions to invest even more in the development enterprise.

Well, a receding tide sinks all boats. Some experts are predicting not just a slowdown in growth, but an absolute decline in giving to higher education, which has happened a grand total of twice in the last 25 years. If donors stop saying yes, will colleges stop hiring those of us who ask? At a minimum, I assume institutions won't be in any hurry to create new positions in development, even if they are filling vacancies.

But imagine a more dire scenario: Say that colleges begin laying off fund

raisers as the economy continues to sour, and charitable giving declines precipitously, in relative terms. Fewer jobs and more people on the prowl equal a seller's market, which drives salaries down. Not exactly a rosy picture, especially if you're on the outside looking in.

I'll hold off on the doomsday prophecy for now, though. I still see jobs out there, and I'm cautiously pursuing a few opportunities. I assume I'm not alone. Geography factors into the equa-

adjust your yearly goal accordingly. It's quite another to sit on the precipice of a campaign, watching the stock market tank as you plan to boldly announce your multimillion (or billion) dollar goal to a skeptical but sympathetic audience. My colleagues and I try to reassure clients that campaigns are long-term phenomena that can withstand economic uncertainties, and that the wealthiest donors—the ones who make or break a campaign—are the ones least fazed by downturns. People who

lawn on a Wednesday. My commute has gone from half an hour to half a minute—the time it takes me to slither out of bed, grab my gorilla slippers, and walk into the family room.

But yes, I might just trade it in for the right job in higher education. Corny as it may seem, I do miss the camaraderie, the relationships, the vibrancy of campus life, the pace of work, and the social and political issues that keep our industry so fascinating. Some things, naturally, I don't miss: bureaucratic quagmires, personality conflicts, managerial headaches, interminable meetings, parking nightmares and, of course, cranky donors.

It'll have to be the right position at the right place. It's not that I'm finicky, but rather that I'm at a point in my career where I'm eager for new challenges and not so willing to relive a *déjà vu* job situation. Maybe that's why I find consulting so intriguing—you get to serve a wide variety of clients with a range of problems to solve. The challenges never get old. If a new opportunity affords me the time to consult and teach on the side, even better. I can always write.

In any event, I'll always consider higher education my intellectual and emotional home. If I stick with consulting, I'll continue to help colleges and universities tell their stories and raise money. If I don't, well, it's probably because I've returned to administration or taken the plunge into full-time teaching and research.

Either way, I won't let a little thing like a recession stop me.

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Some experts are predicting not just a slowdown in growth but an absolute decline in giving to higher education.

tion for the simple reason that selling one's house these days is about as easy as making the playoffs with your MVP quarterback on the shelf (shameless self-pity, I know, from a Patriots fan). Within my corner of the map, development jobs continue to crop up, if perhaps at a slower pace.

Meanwhile, I've been doing some consulting for colleges and universities, along with a range of other nonprofits. I'm working for a national firm with a great reputation, and I might indeed remain on this path despite its somewhat unpredictable nature.

For the most part, I'm helping organizations plan and execute capital campaigns. My specific role is to translate hopes and dreams into written documents suitable for donor consumption—not unlike what I've been doing in campus development offices for the past 18 years.

Clients, understandably, are cautious. It's one thing to run an annual fund, expect a slight decline in giving, and

can afford to give you \$1-million may find that sum now represents a larger percentage of their portfolio than it did before, but they can still afford to give it. Still, some clients swallow that logic as if it were a quart of ipsecac.

I'm also teaching. A college close to my hometown just started an online-only program in higher-education administration. I've taught before, but never online; I haven't even taken an online course. Here again, I assume I'm not alone in that regard. So far, it's been more challenging and rewarding than I would have imagined. Before this experience I was a bit of a skeptic. Consider me a convert.

So here I am today: writing, consulting, and teaching, cobbling together a nice living and truly enjoying the freedom this lifestyle provides. I get to spend more time with my kids—ages 8, 6, and 5—and participate in school and community activities that I might otherwise have missed. I can hit the gym anytime I want, and I can mow my

mass of confusing information she saw on the copyright and title pages.

Citing Web sites properly is even more challenging. The site I used to test these Web tools had a clearly identifiable author at the top of the page, as well as the date, but many won't. And what's the difference on EasyBib between the "site title" and the "institution," both of which are entry fields for a Web citation?

I'm guessing that students will continue to need guidance through the bibliographic process. Perhaps the job will be a little easier, though, thanks to EasyBib and Microsoft Word, and, I would imagine, to the rival sites that already exist or are out there waiting to spring to life. I will definitely recommend such sites from here on out,

but I'll also make sure that we review in class how to gather the information students need to use those programs.

This shift in emphasis—from learning precise formatting details to gathering and evaluating information for some computer program to format—must be happening in the outside world as well. The hapless cubicle dwellers in *Office Space* would no doubt have discovered, by now, a program to format those TPS reports. So I don't think we are sacrificing anything important by turning over part of the responsibility for this task to technology.

All of which means that, unhappily, I'm still going to have to wave my arms and pontificate in my freshmen-composition courses about the importance of properly

formatted source lists. On the flip side, happily, I will still be able to savor the quiet joys of mindless data entry when it comes time to compile the Works Cited lists for my own writing.

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