

EDITORIAL

Toward Multilingual and Responsible Citation Cultures

Marguerite Johnson^{1,*}

¹Classics and Ancient History, School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Australia

Correspondence: marguerite.johnson@uq.edu.au

A bibliography is more than a record of influence. It draws the boundary of a conversation. Work repeatedly cited becomes foundational; work omitted may become difficult to teach, fund, or even discover. These effects accumulate. When journals reward engagement with an established canon, authors rationally cite that canon, reviewers expect it, and databases interpret the resulting concentration as evidence of impact.

The problem is not solved by treating every omission as misconduct. No article can cite everything, and relevance must remain the governing criterion. The concern is structural: scholars often search within systems that favor English-language, well-indexed, and institutionally prominent publications. What appears to be a neutral literature search may therefore reproduce an already unequal geography of knowledge.

Research published in languages other than English is frequently positioned as local evidence, while English-language theory is positioned as general explanation. This division undervalues intellectual traditions developed through different historical and conceptual vocabularies. Translation can support engagement, but the absence of translation should not be interpreted as absence of scholarship.

Authors have different linguistic capacities, and responsible citation cannot require competence they do not possess. It can require transparency and effort. Scholars should state the linguistic scope of reviews when it affects conclusions. Research teams can include relevant language expertise, commission bibliographic assistance, use translated

abstracts carefully, or collaborate with regional specialists. Journals can allow titles in both original and translated form and support references using non-Latin scripts alongside transliteration.

The aim is not decorative diversity. A citation matters only when the cited work is actually read and its argument represented accurately. Adding names without engagement can turn inclusion into display. Responsible citation therefore combines discovery with interpretation.

Reviewers often request additional citations. Such requests can improve a manuscript, but they can also reinforce narrow networks when reviewers recommend themselves, their associates, or a familiar canon without explaining relevance. Journals should ask reviewers to justify citation requests in relation to the manuscript's argument. Editors should reject demands made only to increase counts or enforce intellectual allegiance.

Editorial guidance can also invite authors to reflect on the composition and scope of their sources without imposing quotas. Useful questions include: Which databases and languages were searched? Does the manuscript make a global claim from geographically narrow literature? Are communities discussed primarily through external observers? Have foundational concepts been traced to the contexts in which they emerged? These questions focus on the quality of knowledge rather than the identity of authors as a substitute for reading.

Citation habits begin in coursework. Students often learn formatting before they learn how bibliographies construct authority. Humanities programs should teach citation mapping: tracing which

works are repeatedly connected, which languages disappear, how edited collections and translations alter access, and how database coverage shapes results. This practice can make the politics of citation observable without reducing scholarship to accusation.

Reading lists deserve similar review. A syllabus cannot represent an entire field, but instructors can explain selection and change it in response to new scholarship. They can pair canonical texts with critiques, translations, or works from traditions that pose different questions. Such design does not weaken disciplinary foundations; it shows students that foundations are historically made.

Responsible citation can be summarized through four principles: **Relevance:** cite work because it materially informs the claim. **Accuracy:** represent the cited argument in context rather than using it as a token. **Scope:** disclose linguistic, geographic, and database limits when they shape conclusions. **Discovery:** search beyond familiar networks when the research question requires it.

These principles are modest, but their cumulative effect could be substantial. They ask scholars to understand bibliography as part of method.

Citation will never distribute recognition perfectly, nor should a reference list become a demographic scorecard. The more defensible goal is a culture in which scholars can explain how they found relevant work, why they selected it, and where their knowledge remains limited. Multilingual and responsible citation expands the questions a field can ask because it expands the conversations from which those questions emerge.