

# Reading, variant

'Variant' is originally an adjective, from Old French *variant*, from Latin *variantem*, participle of *variare* "to change".

A variant in a [witness](#) (manuscript, edition...) is a [reading](#) which is different from other readings in other witnesses to the same text on the same [variant location](#).

**Example:** A D G : B C F, where (in the [reference text](#) and in 3 manuscripts) and (in 3 other manuscripts) are two variants.

The purpose of [collation](#) is to collect (all) variant readings in (all) witnesses. If virtually every word or even every character in a text can be subject to variation, in reality only a (smaller or larger) number of places in a text will: those places are called 'variant locations'

The term 'variant' is neutral, it does not imply any decision about the direction of the variation. In the [common errors method](#), however, only [significant secondary readings](#) (also called [errors](#)) can be used for the classification of the witnesses, often resulting into a [stemma](#).

On the basis of that classification, the editor will choose the variants that will find their place in the reconstructed text ([critical edition](#)), the alternative variants will find their way to the [critical apparatus](#). However, if all variants must be noted in the collation, not all will necessarily be recorded in the apparatus, depending on what the editor wants to be reflected in it: the critical decisions only (in that case only significant readings will be reported), the geographical / regional variations of the textual tradition (in that case even some orthographic variants may be recorded), etc. See also the distinction between analysis of (significant) variants and [analysis of forms](#).

In many statistical methods, variants are used without inferring anything about the direction of variation ([polarisation](#)). Even if the result of that kind of classification may be displayed as a [tree](#), the witnesses grouped on the basis of their similarities form [groups](#) rather than [families](#).

## References

- Colwell, Ernest C., and Ernest W. Tune. 1964. "Variant Readings: Classification and Use." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (3): 253–261.
- Irigoin, Jean. 1979. "Sélections et utilisations des variantes." in Jean Irigoin, and Gian Zatti, eds. 1979. *La pratique des ordinateurs dans la critique des textes. Paris 29–31 mars 1978*. Paris: Éditions du CNRS: 265-271.
- Love, Harold. 1984. "The Ranking of Variants in the Analysis of Moderately Contaminated Manuscript Traditions." *Studies in Bibliography* 37: 39-57.

## In other languages

GE: alternative Lesart, Variante  
FR: (leçon) variante  
IT: lezione alternativa, variante

[CM](#)