

SHORT COMMUNICATION

A Beginner's Guide to Academic Writing for Healthcare Professionals: Citation and Referencing

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ABSTRACT

A significant amount of research has been found to have inaccurate references, reflecting the need to learn how to cite and reference effectively at the early stage of an academic writing career for junior healthcare professionals. Hence, this short communication serves as a beginner's guide to referencing by addressing key aspects, including relevant terminologies, reference styles, tools that facilitate the referencing process, and citation accuracy. Learning referencing skills can be a good start if a junior researcher does not know where to start in publishing.

INTRODUCTION

One of the important skills in academic writing is the ability to cite articles appropriately, i.e., referencing. Referencing includes detailed information on all sources consulted, both within the text and at the end of the work (Crawford, 2020). The purpose of referencing includes: (1) acknowledging the work of others which essentially avoids the problem of plagiarism; (2) facilitating the readers to identify the origin of the information; (3) substantiating arguments and ideas; and (4) providing an objective measurement of the impact of an article.

There are two important aspects of referencing: (1) using the correct format and (2) citing the content accurately. As much as 54% of studies were found to have problems with citation accuracy (Rivkin, 2020). The

implication of misquotation can mislead the readers significantly. Hence, it is prudent for a junior researcher in any healthcare profession to grasp the concept of referencing in the early stage of their academic career. This article aims to provide a beginner's guide on referencing.

Important Terminologies

There are two steps during referencing, i.e., citing them within the text and listing down all the references at a specific location in the text. Citations are paraphrased or summarised sentences that acknowledge other peoples' ideas in the paper. On the other hand, a quotation extracts another author's phrases, sentences, or paragraphs.

Footnotes and endnotes are extra texts that provide information for citations. The only difference is the placement, i.e., footnotes are placed at the bottom of each page, and endnotes are placed at the end of the paper. The advantages of using a footnote include the ease of locating and providing a detailed discussion, although it may disrupt the reading flow. Reference lists or bibliographies are a form of endnote (Warling, 1992). The reference list contains all the sources that have been cited directly in the paper. At the same time, the bibliography refers to the list of all the sources that help prepare the writing regardless of their citation. Endnotes make the paperless cluttered by concentrating all references in a single location, but the readers need to navigate constantly to get further information. Endnote in the form of reference is mandatory in all journals.

Style of Journal Referencing

There are numerous styles of journal referencing (Pears and Shields, 2019), including the American Psychological Association (APA) (Bopp et al., 2009), American Medical Association (AMA), Vancouver, Harvard, Oxford, etc. The styles are either named after the place of the conception of the style during

an international meeting or the organisation that drafted it. New editions may be available from time to time. To complicate the matter, different academic institutions may create their own referencing styles for their students.

Despite the minor differences in punctuations and writing style, references are generally based on author-date (i.e., last name of the author(s) followed by the date) or numeric format. Before a manuscript is considered for review, conformity to the journal's referencing style is a prerequisite, and initial screening will be done by the system administrator or the journal's editor. Hence, the first job of academic writing is to ensure the referencing style adheres to the journal's prescription, which can usually be accessed in the guideline provided for authors by the journal. Numerous guides are available online to assist junior researchers with the most updated format prescribed by the respective organisations.

Tools in Referencing

With technological advancement, the process of referencing has been significantly simplified. There are two types of reference management software (RMS): web-based and application-based. The examples include Endnote™, Mendeley™, CiteULike™, RefWorks™, Zotero™ and etc (Gilmour and Cobus-Kuo, 2011). Although different RMS may offer different features that smoothen the process of academic writing, most RMS share the core feature of reference list generation with auto-formatting based on the list of built-in styles. For example, this article is prepared with the help of EasyBib™ as an add-on to Google Docs™. Other features include citation on the go, i.e., as a plug-in in a word document. These features can significantly improve writing speed as reference formatting is time-consuming.

A critical consideration of which RMS to choose is the balance of functionality and affordability. Some RMS have a basic version that is free to use, including Mendeley™

(Fenner, 2008). Most academic institutions do subscribe to specific RMS, and it is always helpful to find out from the respective libraries (Hensley, 2011). With an active subscription to RMS, training workshops on the use of RMS may be conducted by the library.

Accuracy of Referencing

Types of errors in referencing can include factual (i.e., the assertion that differs from the source) or source errors (citing the wrong article), with varying degrees of impact (Mogull, 2017). While the abstract provides an overview and the most significant findings of a research, more in-depth information is only accessible in the main text of an article. Thus, junior researchers are encouraged to avoid shortcuts but read the full text to prevent information from being taken out of context. An inaccurate assertion of reference may also arise during paraphrasing, which is an essential step to avoid plagiarism unless it is a direct quote—the responsibility for the accuracy of referencing lies on both authors and peer-reviewers.

Tips for Junior Researchers

The process of referencing can begin as soon as the literature review starts. The optimal use of RMS can help a junior researcher collect useful articles that will be readily incorporated into the reference list according to the intended format. With the advancement of online resources, videos on the use of RMS are easily accessible, including YouTube™.

CONCLUSION

A good understanding of how to cite and produce a reference list at the early stage of an academic writing career helps in time management. Attaining referencing skills can be a good start for a junior researcher looking to begin writing their first research paper.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no competing interests in publishing this article.

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