

## CITING AND REFERENCING IN RESEARCH PAPERS

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### INTRODUCTION

Citations can be for any forms of expression, but the term is mostly applied to a passage, idea, table, figure, photograph or even a video in a scientific paper. *References* are more technical way to indicate the bibliographic data (i.e. authors, journals, volume number and page, etc.). It is mostly used to give credit to others' work, to discuss the research findings in a meaningful context, and to help others to refer related literature while critically evaluating the study findings and conclusions derived. The most important rule while referencing is that the cited entries should be *accurate, complete* and *consistent*. *Bibliography* is a list of all sources of information used during a research. It includes material that may or may not be directly cited in the text, and appears after the references. It is usually not included in research papers published in journals.

### WHAT TO CITE?

Any information, fact or idea which is not the *author's own*, needs citation. It is always desirable to cite the *original source* from which it is taken, which can be a scientific paper, book chapter, a webpage or even a newspaper. Usually, when something is cited, it implies that the author has actually *read* the original source. One of the common mistakes by novice authors is to use someone else's citations and quote the original reference as mentioned in that paper. If something has been wrongly cited in the first paper, it gets propagated in subsequent ones. Therefore, if for some reason the original source could not be

accessed, and one has to cite a secondary source, then it needs to be mentioned as such (e.g. XX 2010, as cited in YY 2014).

If an exact line or phrase is used from another source, it should be mentioned within quotation marks (“xxxx yyyy....”) and appropriately cited. Such direct quotations should be sparingly used in a research paper, and are usually resorted to if one quotes definitions, explanations or examples given by another author. It would be more appropriate to modify or paraphrase the information or idea that one wants to quote — i.e., write the same information in one's own words and reference the source of the idea — so as to avoid charges of plagiarism. Another situation when one needs to cite is when an idea or concept developed by another person is used.

Sometimes there may be multiple references for one piece of information. In such situations, cite the one which has the highest level of evidence (e.g. meta-analysis, rather than a single study), or the one which is more recently published, or which is highly accessible and published in a reputed journal (one with high impact factor, which suggests wider circulation of the journal). Also give preference to any papers published in the journal to which you are submitting, as it gives an impression to the editor that you value the journal and have been reading the works it published.

In certain situations, you need not include references for facts you expect are well known to the readers. What is “well known” depends on the intended readers, though. For example, a mention that approximately 1% of the population have

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schizophrenia needs no reference if the paper is being submitted to a psychiatry journal, but may do so if the submission is to a medicine journal.

## BIBLIOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS

Basic *bibliographic elements* in a research paper are names of author/s, title of paper, journal title, year of publication, volume number, issue number and page numbers. In a book or chapter, they include chapter author/s, title of chapter, editor/s, name of book, edition, publisher name, city of publication, year of publication and page numbers. In web sources, they include author/s, title of webpage, year, web link and date of access, and sometimes even the publisher, city of publication, date of last update, etc. too.

Commonly used citation styles include the Vancouver style and the Harvard style. Almost all referencing styles are variations of these two types. Some rules are common to both styles. For example, names of authors are separated by commas. Usually only the first six authors are mentioned (some journals restrict to three), and ‘et al.’ is used to indicate that there are more names. For unpublished works, no reference is necessary — but the findings or ideas can be cited as ‘personal communication’ within the text.

## VANCOUVER STYLE

In *Vancouver style*, also known as *Citation-Sequence system*, references are numbered in the order they appear first time in the text. The numbers are mentioned in line with the text within brackets as [1] or (1), or sometimes as superscript with or without brackets,<sup>1</sup> as per the requirement of the journal. An example would be: “Mirtazapine has been found to be effective for antipsychotic-induced acute akathisia as shown in a systematic review [1].” To cite more than one work at the same point in the text, [1-3, 5, 8] or [1-3,5,8] can be used for references numbered 1, 2, 3, 5, and 8 (Spaces may or may not be needed between the numbers, depending on journal style). Sometimes, the name of author may

also be used while citing, e.g. Praharaj et al. [1]. The full reference then appears in the end, numbered:

[1] Praharaj SK, Kongasseri S, Behere RV, Sharma PS. Mirtazapine for antipsychotic-induced acute akathisia: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized placebo-controlled trials. *Ther Adv Psychopharmacol* 2015; 5: 307-13.

In Vancouver system the journal names are usually abbreviated, and may be in italics or bold (depending on journal style). If you do not know the abbreviation of title of a journal you are citing, you may find it in the National Library of Medicine (NLM) Catalog (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nlmcatalog/journals).

For those not indexed in NLM, other sources can be looked up (e.g. Web of Science or Scopus). If it is not available in these databases too, the full name can be written.

After the journal name, the year of publication, a semicolon, the volume number and a colon follows. (The issue number is usually not required as most the journals have continuous pagination, but is included if the journal demands.) Finally comes the page numbers, in a shortened way (Notice that, in the example given above, 307-313 is written as 307-13).

For citing chapters in books, specifically when different authors have written different chapters, it is the author(s) of the chapter who should be cited within the text, not the editor(s). Then in the reference section, the following bibliographic elements are included in this order:

- Names of authors
- Chapter name
- Names of editors
- Name of the book
- Name of publishers and the city of publication (this information is usually available on the second page of books)
- Page numbers (of the whole chapter that is quoted)

Here is an example:

[2] Praharaj SK, Behere RV, Sharma PS. Newer somatic treatments: Indian experience. In: Malhotra S, Chakrabarti S. (eds.) *Development of Psychiatry in India: Clinical, Research and Policy Perspectives*. New Delhi: Springer India; 2015. p. 547-57.

## HARVARD SYSTEM

*Harvard system* of references citation is the most common method of citation in natural and social sciences. This system is often referred to as the 'Author-Date' (or 'Name-Year') system, *Parenthetical referencing* or as APA (American Psychological Association) style. While in Vancouver system a cited article is indicated in the text with a numeral, in Harvard system the author's name and the year of publication are used for this purpose. Example: "Mirtazapine has been found to be effective for antipsychotic-induced acute akathisia as shown in a systematic review (Praharaj et al., 2015)". It can also be written as, "Praharaj et al. (2015) in a systematic review mirtazapine has been found to be effective for antipsychotic-induced acute akathisia." For two authors, (xxx and xxx, 2015) or (xxx & xxx, 2015) is used, depending on the journal style. If there are two or more publications with same author and year, alphabets are used after the year of publication, e.g. (xxx, 2015a) and (xxx, 2015b). For two or more publications by same author but different year, the author name is not repeated, e.g. (xxx, 2014; 2015). In the references section, the entries are *alphabetized* (can be sorted using A to Z function of word processor) and a *hanging indent* is used to make it easier to skim the names of authors. The full reference for a journal article will appear as below:

Praharaj, S.K., Kongasseri, S., Behere, R.V., & Sharma, P.S. (2015). Mirtazapine for antipsychotic-induced acute akathisia: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized placebo-controlled trials. *Therapeutic Advances in Psychopharmacology*, 5(5), 307-313.

The author names have punctuation marks within: 'Praharaj SK' of Vancouver system becomes 'Praharaj, S.K.' in Harvard system (or sometimes 'Praharaj, S. K.' depending on journal style). The

year of publication appears after the names of authors, usually within round brackets, followed by full stop (or sometimes by colon). The journal name appears in full. The issue number appears within round brackets after the volume number, e.g. 5(5), followed by page numbers, e.g. 307-313. Here the page numbers are not shortened as in Vancouver system.

The chapter in a book has similar bibliographic elements as that of Vancouver system:

Praharaj, S.K., Behere, R.V., & Sharma P.S. (2015). Newer somatic treatments: Indian experience. In: Malhotra, S., Chakrabarti, S. (editors). *Development of Psychiatry in India: Clinical, Research and Policy Perspectives*. New Delhi: Springer India. pp. 547-557.

## WHICH STYLE TO CHOOSE?

All journals follow either of the two basic styles or a variant thereof. The exact style of referencing can be found in the 'instruction to authors' section of the journal. That section usually features examples for citation of research paper, books, chapter in a book, web pages, conference presentations, theses/dissertations, etc. Any work which is accepted for publication but has not been in print (even if an 'online early' version has been published), 'in press' is used for the year of publication, e.g. Praharaj et al. (in press).

## ELECTRONIC RESOURCE IDENTIFIERS

When an online source needs citation, a *uniform resource locator* (URL) or *digital object identifier* (DOI) has to be added in the references section. This enables the reader to locate the Internet source easily. A typical URL will appear as <http://www.xxxxxx.org>. An URL, however, may move to a different section of web and may sometimes disappear altogether. Hence it is usually accompanied by the *date of access* (accessed on xx.xx.xxxx).

A DOI is a unique name which is permanent and is assigned to a specific journal article or book. DOIs are assigned by a registration agency, e.g. CrossRef, DataCite etc., to enable consistent cross-publisher

citation linking. DOIs are searchable through [www.crossref.org](http://www.crossref.org). DOIs are preferable to URLs, but their usage will vary depending on journal styles.

#### SOME COMMON ERRORS

All references in a manuscript have to be uniform and as per the requirements of the journal. Journals usually follow either Harvard or Vancouver style or a modification of either. It is not uncommon to see a mixture of different systems in submitted manuscripts, which should be avoided. And at times people copy the text from “cite this article as” or “how to cite this article” box included with manuscripts they cite, without any modification. This too may result in a style incongruent to that demanded by the submitting journal.

Punctuation marks and blank spaces are important. It is not uncommon to see ‘Praharaj S.K.’ becoming ‘Praharaj.SK’ in submitted manuscripts. Similarly, ‘et al.’ is sometimes wrongly written as ‘etal.’ or ‘et. al.’. If the title of the cited article ends with ‘?’ or ‘!’, there is no need to add a full stop after that mark. In some journals, the pattern of citing abbreviated names of journals includes punctuation marks (e.g. ‘Ther Adv Psychopharmacol.’ or ‘Ther. Adv. Psychopharmacol.’). Also, in some journals the spacing after the year of publication and volume number is required (e.g. xxxx; x: xx-xx), whereas, in others it is contiguous (e.g. xxxx;x:xx-xx). The style of reference may call for alterations in commas, full stops, semicolons and colons as per the requirement.

In submitted manuscripts, the authors at times forget to list the references which are cited in the text, or sometimes extra references are added in the list which is not linked to the text, i.e. *hanging references*. This problem can be avoided by taking a print out of document and cross checking the citations in the text with the list of references. The same can also be done on computers using the ‘split view’ function of word processor.

#### PROBLEM WITH ‘INITIALS’ IN KERALITE NAMES

If you don’t write your own name in the proper way in your manuscripts, it may confuse those who cite your article. For example, ‘Samir Kumar Praharaj’ would be written in the references as ‘Praharaj S.K.’ (surname and abbreviation of first and middle names). If there are more than two parts in first and middle names, initials of only the first two parts are mentioned in the published manuscript (although this varies across journals).

However, names such as ‘Sreejayan K.’, in which the surname is abbreviated while submitting a manuscript, may become ‘K.S.’ when you abbreviate the first name for the purpose of referencing, leading to confusion. One solution would be to spell the initials in full, i.e. ‘Sreejayan Kongasseri’, which would then become ‘Kongasseri S.’ in the reference. Also, if you want your name to appear in the references as ‘Sreejayan K.’, what you should do is write your name as ‘K. Sreejayan’ in your manuscript so that it becomes ‘Sreejayan K.’ in the reference. It is always advisable to maintain a single format for your name, which may be decided at the beginning of the publishing career, which is then consistently used, so as to avoid having more than one name in databases.

#### REFERENCE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Organizing references manually can be time consuming, especially when there are hundreds of references for a manuscript or when a researcher submits for publication frequently. One way to overcome this is to use ‘reference management software’ (also called ‘citation management software’ or ‘bibliographic software’ or ‘personal bibliographic file managers’). It allows one to organize, store, and download references of any type including published research papers, books, web pages, etc. These programs allow automatic importing of references from easily accessible databases such as PubMed. The references that are added to a ‘citation manager’, which is part of the software, can be easily inserted into the research

paper. It is also possible to create a new style as per the requirements of a particular journal, and the imported references would get automatically converted to this new style.

Various functions are available in common word processor programs as plug-ins. They can help to connect the word processor to the reference management software, and to format the citations and references in a paper from the interface of the word processor itself, utilizing the styles available in the reference management software.

Some reference management software are free or available at low cost (e.g. Mendeley, BiblioExpress), while others are paid ones (e.g. EndNote, Papers, RefWorks).

#### DOUBLE-CHECK BEFORE YOU SUBMIT!

References that are incorrect, with missing bibliographic elements or not in the style prescribed by the journal, annoy reviewers and editors. Some journals would simply return the manuscript, stating 'technical reasons', with a direction to revise the references. If the references are not meticulously

written, it casts a shadow on the whole text, however well written. One needs to also remember that, though reference management software are useful, they may not be fool proof. Specifically, if the references mentioned in PubMed are wrong, these programs simply import them. Therefore, it is a good idea to check the accuracy of references manually before submitting the paper.

#### SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Cals JW, Kotz D. Effective writing and publishing scientific papers, part VIII: references. *J Clin Epidemiol* 2013; 66:1198.
2. Masic I. The importance of proper citation of references in biomedical articles. *Acta Inform Med* 2013; 21:148-55.
3. Rabinowitz H, Vogel S. *The manual of scientific style. A guide for authors, editors and researchers.* New York: Elsevier; 2009.
4. Lipson C. *Cite right. A quick guide to citation styles – MLA, APA, Chicago, the sciences, professions and more.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press; 2006.

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