

## Accurate References Add to the Credibility

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While planning a clinical research and subsequently writing the manuscript, scientific papers on the related subject are often retrieved and articles in their reference lists are sought to search more relevant literature. Occasionally it is very difficult to trace some of these articles and almost impossible to access certain internet citations due to various errors in citations by the authors. Many studies have been conducted to assess the extent of this problem, and a variable frequency of errors in writing the references has been reported [1-5]. Importance of accuracy of citations and references in research publications cannot be overstressed, given their role in leading the reader to the relevant literature.

Every researcher who wishes to carry out and publish authentic material needs to *a)* look for pre-existing literature on subject; *b)* review and analyze the studies in the context of the proposed research; *c)* evaluate, compare and/or contrast existing information against the findings of his own results and explain the differences; *d)* prepare a suitable manuscript for the target audience; and *e)* acknowledge all sources of information, which have been utilized in the preceding steps [6].

### WHAT ARE REFERENCES?

The term 'References' is used for the list of sources that have been accessed by the author and cited in the manuscript. This could include journal articles, books or book chapters, monographs, internet sites and other sources. On the other hand, the term bibliography is the term commonly used for a list of sources of information (e.g. books, articles, and internet sources) used to prepare the manuscript, and it includes all the sources accessed even if they have not been referred to in the manuscript.

Reference list is placed after the text of the manuscript starting on a fresh page, whereas bibliography is not provided with majority of journal articles.

### WHY REFERENCES?

The author needs to introduce the research question in

view of the available literature on the subject, for which pre-existing literature is the cornerstone of the argument. Moreover, methodology used to carry out the research would include procedures and other tools described previously by other authors, and would need to be cited. Finally, results of the research need to be evaluated, interpreted, and discussed in relation to the previously conducted studies. These steps in preparation of the manuscript need literature search, which when cited, become the part of the Reference-list of the manuscript.

Apart from giving due credit to previous researchers, the reference-list allows the readers to verify the methodology from the original source. Moreover, the reader can evaluate the results in the context of the cited literature and verify whether the authors have interpreted and cited earlier studies correctly.

A complete reference list also makes it convenient for the editorial board of the target journal to select and invite reviewers for the manuscript as they refer to the reference list for scientists with work in the relevant field. It may also help the editors and reviewers to check for possible plagiarism from the cited sources of information.

### WHERE AND HOW MANY?

As a rule of thumb, literature should be cited wherever the author has used the idea, methodology, data, figures or diagrams from a previously published source. This could be in the Introduction, Methodology, Tables, Figures, and Discussion of the manuscript. It is essential to include key references relevant to the study. Ignoring to cite consulted literature may amount to plagiarism. Abstract and Results sections usually do not have any references.

Number of references to be cited should be in accordance with the Author Guidelines issued by the target journal. Many journals do not prescribe any limit of references for the research or review papers but do have limits for certain sections like Case reports, Correspondence and Images. Due to paucity of print space

available, it is advisable to use only the most relevant and recent references. Very old references should be avoided as they may not be available to reviewers and readers to access and read. It is not necessary to reach the maximum limit if authors can convey the message with lesser number of references.

*When to organize the reference list:* It has been suggested that the authors should organize the reference list when the manuscript is being organized [7]. This allows the author to: identify which previously published article can be best cited in the manuscript; rationalize the selection of the adequate references and avoid bias towards one kind of viewpoint; and limit the number of references to meet the requirements of the target journal.

### STYLES OF REFERENCES

Most medical literature uses two formats of references *i.e.* Harvard style and the Vancouver style. Harvard style is used by many journals of basic sciences and details on Harvard Style can be accessed elsewhere [8]. Vancouver style [9] is followed by most medical journals, including *Indian Pediatrics*. Basic differences in two styles are summarized in **Box 1**.

#### *Vancouver Style*

There are two components of citation: In-text citation and the Reference list.

#### **In-text citation**

- All references are cited and numbered sequentially as they are referred to in the text. If the reference is cited in Table or figure, the citation number should be given consecutive to that in the preceding text.
- If a source has been cited and identified by a number, same should be used consecutively throughout the manuscript if the same source is cited again.
- Numbers may be placed in parentheses or superscript

#### **Box 1** DIFFERENCES IN VANCOUVER STYLE AND HARVARD STYLE

##### *Vancouver style*

- Sequential in-text citation; identified by an Arabic number (in parentheses or superscript).
- Reference list: Numbered sequential list in order of citation in text.

##### *Harvard style*

- In-text citation by authors name and year of publication. Page numbers may be included for being more specific.
- Reference list: Alphabetical order without numbering

in accordance with the Journal policy.

- Identifying numbers are placed after punctuation marks like full stops or commas, and before colons and semi-colons [9]. However variations can be there in different journals.
- If two or more sources are cited simultaneously, they should be identified in chronological order according to their date of publication by numbers separated by a comma. They should be mentioned in chronological order with date of publications
- If several consecutively numbered sources are cited, hyphen should be used instead of comma; e.g. [3-6] instead of [3,4,5,6] .

### Reference list

Aim of the reference list is to provide complete information for access of the cited source.

- The list is prepared in sequentially numbered order in which the source has been cited in the text. Citation number in the text and the list should match.
- Last name of the authors are written first followed by the initials. If there are six or fewer authors, names of all the authors are included. In case there are more than six authors, names of first six authors are listed followed by *et al.*
- Abbreviated names of the most medical journals are available in Pubmed's Journal Database available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nlmcatalog/journals>. In case of a non-medical Journal or that which is not available on PubMed, other data bases or journal website can be looked.
- First letter of each author's last name and initials should be in capital letters without any intervening full stops. Capital letters should also be used for the first letter of the publication title, and all first letters of a place name and publisher.

Method of citing common sources of information in the Reference list has been shown in **Box 2**. Detailed information on citing various sources of information is available on National Library of Medicine [10] and is recommended by International Committee of Medical Journal Editors [11]. There are minor variations from the basic format as some journals expect full names of the journals, name of the journal in italics, volume number in bold letters etc. Therefore, it is necessary for authors to check the author guidelines and give due attention while citing in the text and preparing the reference list [12]. Editors appreciate these as it suggests that the author has read the Instructions to Authors diligently.

### AUTHOR NAMES

Citing the name of the authors correctly in text and

**Box 2** CITING REFERENCES AS PER VANCOUVER STYLE*Single Author*

Mohta A. Common conditions in Pediatric surgery. Indian J Pediatr. 2014;81:684-9.

*Multiple Authors (less than six authors)*

Falagas ME, Korbila IP, Giannopoulou KP, Kondilis BK, Peppas G. Informed consent: how much and what do patients understand. Am J Surg. 2009;198:420-35.

*Multiple Authors (more than six authors)*

Dillon P, Hammermeister K, Morrato E, Kempe A, Oldham K, Moss L, *et al.* Developing a NSQIP module to measure outcome in children's surgical care: opportunity and challenge. Semin Pediatr Surg. 2008;17:131-40.

*Book*

Townsend CM, Beauchamp RD, Evers BM, Mattox KL. editors. Sabiston Textbook of Surgery-The Biological Basis of Modern Surgical Practice. 17<sup>th</sup> ed. Vol 1. New Delhi: Saunders; 2004.

*Chapter in a Book*

Argani P, Beckwith JB. Renal neoplasms of childhood. *In:* Mills SE (Editor). Sternberg's Diagnostic Surgical Pathology. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams and Wilkins; 2004. p. 2029-30.

*Internet Reference*

World Health Organization. The World Health Report. Available from: URL: <http://who.int/whr/en/index.html>. Accessed September 19, 2009.

reference list is essential. Names of the authors should be taken from the original publications. Only the last name of the author is cited in the text without initials. If the cited paper has two authors, both names may be cited e.g. Gupta and Chawla; if more than two authors are listed, last name of the first author followed by '*et al*' is adequate.

Abbreviation of the names of the authors has been discussed widely. Many errors appear in the names as we are not aware of the pattern of writing the names. It is a common practice to write the first name last in Chinese authors [13]. Similarly, in authors from southern states of India, first name is the last word preceded by some initials which may refer to the family name or that of the village. It may be difficult to abbreviate the names. Some names may include special characters or letters which again cause problems. Long names are difficult to abbreviate. If the full name of the author is Lakshmi Kant Radha Reddy, it can be abbreviated variously as Reddy LK, Reddy LR, Radhareddy LK as per the perception of the author preparing the manuscript. Similarly, spellings of Chaudhary can be also be written as Chaudhury, Chowdhury, Choudhury etc; all of which shall not be available in a single search in a database. If some scientist needs to retrieve all the scientific work done by these authors, it will be impossible due to incorrect abbreviation of name or misspelt last name [14]. Advice may be taken from an author from same cultural background to correctly abbreviate the name. Some journals give the citation to be used with abbreviated names to avoid errors.

Sometimes the difference in the names of the authors in

various sources appears due to carelessness by the authors while submitting their manuscripts. It has been seen that the name of same author has been differently mentioned even in the credits of two papers in the same issue of the journal [15]. Therefore it is incumbent on the authors to check their full names correctly with desired abbreviated names so as to prevent any errors.

**COMMON PITFALLS**

Although many authors take due care in preparation of the reference list and exercise due diligence in verifying the same, sometimes errors crop up in the citation in text as well as in the reference list.

**Errors in citation**

- (i) Citing a reference as a cross reference and not reading the original article
- (ii) Citing the same citation more than once in a manuscript leading to duplication
- (iii) Not identifying the in-text citation as per the format of the target journal
- (iv) Citing the name of the authors along with the initials
- (v) Pooling multiple citations at the end of the sentence instead of insertion along with the referred fact
- (vi) Citation in text without appropriate entry in the reference list
- (vii) Citing a reference after reading only the abstract
- (viii) Personal communications as reference
- (ix) Inclusion of references in Abstract and Results section

### Errors in reference list

- (i) Not in the desired format of the journal
- (ii) Copied from another article without direct verification from original article
- (iii) Copied from scientific data bases without reading the original article [16]
- (iv) Errors in abbreviation of names of authors, journal, page numbers, volume number etc.
- (v) Error in number of authors listed
- (vi) Inclusion of non-essential items like issue number, or date and month of publication.
- (vii) Submission of a previously rejected article to new journal without modifying the citation and reference list style in accordance with the new Journal.
- (viii) Citation of print version while the internet version has been accessed
- (x) Inclusion of retracted references

### RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING CITATION AND REFERENCES

Reading the original article for citation and inclusion in reference list as per the journal guidelines is the most important requirement for accuracy. However, some assistance is available for improving the same.

Many reference and citation management softwares are available for scholars for recording and utilizing citations or references. This can be used to reproduce the reference lists at more than one occasion. Some of these softwares are EndNote, and Reference Manager by Thomson Reuters; Papers and Readcube by Labvita; Mendeley by Elsevier and Zotero [7].

Many professional Manuscript Submission Systems use software to validate the uploaded references. If a reference cannot be validated, authors need to verify the source of the same.

### CONCLUSIONS

It is essential to cite the original literature reviewed and used for preparation of the manuscript, and provide a correct reference list. It acknowledges the previous researchers, and also gives credence to your work. Due diligence exercised in citation and preparation of the reference list makes the editors and reviewers confident about the research and the manuscript. As the paper becomes more credible, the readers are more convinced about the study and shall be able to cite it with confidence. Although apparently taxing, efforts made for citing and listing appropriate references may increase the

acceptability of the manuscript. The recent availability of reference management software (e.g., Mendeley, Zotero) has made this work easier to accomplish, though selecting the appropriate reference, and reading through it, is still the author's responsibility.

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