

Guidelines for References in Scholarly Nursing Papers – K. Frenn

Generally a requirement for many of the papers you write for your nursing courses is the inclusion of a specified number of references. Choosing the appropriate references for your paper is an important step. These guidelines are written to assist nursing students in evaluating the quality of references for scholarly papers in the nursing discipline.

Remember your text for the course has good material but should not be your primary source of information! I would suggest however that you look at the references listed in your text as they are often an excellent source for further information.

1. **Timeliness:** References should have been written within the last five years unless they are considered a ‘classic’; for example an article written by a renowned nursing theorist such as Virginia Henderson.

2. **Nursing Journals:** The journals cited should relate to the topic of the paper and be primarily from the discipline of nursing. For example, journals such as the American Journal of Medicine (JAMA) and periodicals of other disciplines would not be appropriate unless they covered material directly related to your topic. Journals from other disciplines (i.e., sociology, philosophy) often relate to topics in nursing and may be used if relevant. All journals should be **peer reviewed** (when possible) which means the articles are reviewed by a panel of experts and implies they are of high quality.

Publications such as Nursing Times and Nursing Spectrum, while entertaining and informative, are not generally good sources of research information. Electronic versions of articles may be used. If the electronic version is the same as the printed version (paginated the same) you may cite it in the same way as you would for a reference obtained directly from the hard copy, otherwise use the directions for citation of electronic resources.

3. **Web sites:** Be wary of web sites. It is difficult to ensure that material on a web site is current, particularly if it is a web site from a group or individual unknown to you. Note the domain of the website (i.e. .com, .edu, .net, .org, .gov) as it lets you know where the information has originated. In general the internet may contain good material for you to explore and gather background information for your topic which can then guide you in your search for further materials.

4. **Do not use:** Noting the above means that Wikipedia is not a quality reference for a scholarly nursing paper. Likewise most newspapers, editorials and other short essays are also not acceptable.

5. **Other sources:** Position statements and other documents from professional organizations are often a good source of information and are appropriate references. Governmental documents, state and federal web sites can also be a source of materials. Podcasts (audio and video files posted on the web) can be sources of information but should be evaluated by the credentials of the individual or organization that has posted the file.