A Guide to Scholarly Writing in Nursing

By Dr. Donna Hallas and Dr. Harriet R. Feldman

Your assignment: Write a scholarly paper for a nursing course. What is your reaction? *Panic*!? Confusion? A need to get prepared! Most nursing students ask the following questions: "What is considered scholarly writing style?" "What should be included in the paper?" "Where do I find references?" "What references are appropriate?" "How are references cited?" "How should the paper be typed?" "Why do I need to write papers for nursing courses anyway?" These questions and anxieties are expressed by nursing students across the country, especially since undergraduate and graduate nursing students are asked to write scholarly papers throughout their nursing journey.

Nursing papers are often written using the American Psychological Association (APA) (2001) style guidelines, and we've prepared this article so that you'll be on your way to writing a successful paper. We've included information on the APA format, with examples, so that you're not only developing your writing skills while at school but during your career as a professional nurse.

Why is it Important for Nursing Students to Write in a Scholarly Style?

A major purpose for written communication within nursing is to clearly and concisely document plans-of-care for clients using the nursing process. The quality of nursing notes and nursing care plans is often dependent upon a nurse's ability to assess the patient and critically develop, analyze, and communicate the plan of care. Nursing notes are legal forms of documentation, and principles related to scholarly writing usually do not apply to this type of documentation. The ability to write in a scholarly style, however, is an essential skill for nursing graduates since written communication in the form of comprehensive nursing care assessments, case management, and documentation of nursing policies and practice is used on a daily basis in all health care settings.

Writing well is also a prerequisite for the pursuit of graduate nursing education. In addition, many nursing journals that keep the nursing community up to date on advances in nursing practice and policy statements about nursing care and critical health care issues require the use of APA style (2001).

How to Do It: Format

The Title Page

Page 1 contains the title of the article and the author's name and affiliation. Complete contact information for the author who has been designated to receive feedback on the paper is necessary for ease of communication between editor and author. This typically includes mail, phone, fax and e-mail information.

The Abstract

The abstract is a comprehensive, brief summary of the entire article. It provides accurate information about what is contained in the paper, including the purpose, results, and conclusions drawn by the author. Although the abstract is placed at the beginning of the paper, it is usually written after body of the paper is completed. According to APA style (2001), abstracts should be succinct and not exceed 120 words (p. 13).

The Introduction

The paper begins with an introduction, which is the beginning of the actual paper, and does not contain a heading on the first line. The topic is introduced in a couple of paragraphs, including information on why it's is important and the relationship of this topic or study to previous work. The introduction "gives the reader a firm sense of what was done and why" (APA, 2001, p. 16).

The Literature Review

A literature review is the next step and includes identifying current nursing, medical, and other pertinent journals and textbooks related to the topic. An internet search is a very efficient way to search nursing and medical journals, and general search engines are also helpful in finding information relevant to your topic. An important component of the literature review is a critical analysis of the ideas in each original article. A literature review lets the reader know that the writer has an understanding of the work of others in the topic of interest. It also serves as a solid foundation for new concepts and original ideas that are presented in the paper.

Searching the Internet

The web is an excellent resource for conducting a comprehensive literature review. Most internet access services such as Yahoo (**www.yahoo.com**), Netscape (**www.netscape.com**), or America Online (**www.aol.com**) use subject directories to organize online information. For example, the words 'legal issues in nursing' were typed in July 2003 into the keyword section of the subject directory. There were over 38,601 references to this topic. By clicking onto 'medical legal issues' at the bottom of the web page, the search was narrowed to the American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants. From this, several relevant web sites and a few nursing articles could be selected for further inquiry.

Remember: Literature searches for nursing topics on the web should be limited to refereed professional nursing or medical

Levels of Heading	
One Level	Centered Upper and Lower Case Headings
Two Levels	Centered Upper and Lower Case Heading *Flush Left, Italicized, Uppercase and Lowercase Side Heading*
Three Levels	Centered Upper and Lower Case Headings *Flush Left, Italicized, Uppercase and lowercase Side Heading* *Indented, Italicized, lowercase paragraph ending with a period.*

Note: Adapted from the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Fifth edition, 2001 by American Psychological Association.

journals. Refereed publications are peer-reviewed and preserve anonymity of the author/s during the review process. Information in these journals is recognized as scientifically-based information that can be applied to clinical practice or theory development in nursing. Other information obtained on the web must be critically evaluated before use in a literature review since anyone can publish information on the web and the information may not be scientifically sound; it may just reflect an opinion. (Take a look at the information box for online resources on writing scholarly papers).

Types of Papers

Information that follows the literature review depends on the type of paper you are writing. If you are writing a research paper, the methods, results and discussion of the results follow the review of the literature. If you are describing a case study, a critical analysis of the case follows the literature review.

Stylistic Considerations

Headings and pagination orient readers to the paper. They help to organize the document by introducing various sections of a paper. For APA style papers, there are different levels of headings: main headings and sub-headings. Since there are variations based on the total number of headings in a given paper, it is wise to refer to the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (2001) for the distinctions. Examples of frequently used Level 2 and Level 3 headings are shown in the table located on page 81.

Remember these other important stylistic considerations:
• Margins (1 inch on all sides);
• Font (12-point Times Roman or Courier);
• Spacing (double spacing throughout);
• Alignment (flush left and uneven right margin);
• Paragraph indent (5-7 spaces);
• Pagination (1 inch from upper right corner of every page beginning with the title page);
• Page header (first 2-3 words of the paper; 5 spaces to the left of the page number on every page beginning with the title page).

Citing the Works of Others

Giving Credit Where it is Due

Since many ideas, paraphrasing, and direct quotes come from specific sources, you will need to cite those sources when they are used. Documenting the work of others is extremely important and the ethical thing to do. Especially important is that you accurately quote and

acknowledge the works that you use. To represent the work of others as your own, knowingly or unknowingly, is *plagiarism*. While you may read many articles to help you think about a topic, you should only cite the sources you have actually used. The following examples are illustrative only and do not represent actual publications.

• There are rules for how to write citations based on whether they appear as part of the formal structure of a sentence or not as a formal part of a sentence. For example, "Jones and Matthews (1998) found …." is a citation that is integral to the sentence (part of the formal structure).
• The following quote is an example of where the citation is not integral to the sentence: "Reviews of research on widgets and arteries have concluded that some widgets consistently clog arteries (Jonas, Smith, & Martin, 1999; Perkins & Forrester, 2001)."
• There are other rules about citations that are important to note, for example, under what conditions all authors are listed versus use of a surname and et al. (and others), or when six or more authors are cited.
• Additional rules pertain to when it is appropriate to use the ampersand (&) and how to cite a primary work in a secondary source, for example, when a book is out of print and information from that work is cited in another book or article. This is illustrated in the following: "Jones and Smythe's study (as cited in Sutherland & Hall, 1999)…." Further, there are rules about the use of direct quotes and when they are imbedded in a paragraph and when they are separated from the text. (See the Guide to Quotations below).

References

References start on their own page after the body of the paper and before any tables or figures if they are used. According to the Publication Manual of the APA (2001), the format of a reference listing is a hanging indent, which means that the first line of each reference is flush left and succeeding lines for each are indented. References are listed alphabetically according to the last names of first authors. Complete reference information

A Guide to Quotations
• Include author, year, page number as part of the citation
• Quotations of fewer than 40 words: enclose in quotation marks within the formal structure of a sentence
  ❏ Widgets "were 40%, more useful than wonks" (Nathan, 2001, p. 82)
• Quotations of 40 or more words
  ❏ Do not use quotation marks
  ❏ Separate from surrounding text and indent entire quote, using block format, 5 spaces from left margin

includes author name/s (last name first and initials of first/middle name), year of publication, and source references, including, title, journal, volume, pages, city of publication, publisher, depending on whether the reference is a journal or a book. In general, references used for a nursing paper should be no more than 5 years old.

Tables and Figures

Tables follow the reference list and figures follow tables in sequence. Tables have headers and page numbers; although figures follow in sequence, they have neither headers nor page numbers.

Each paper should end with a conclusion or discussion in which you should summarize the information you've written about throughout your paper.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Accept the challenge of writing scholarly papers! Remember that there are lots of resources to get you started with scholarly writing using the Publication Manual of the APA (American Psychological Association, 2001). Write papers throughout your nursing program that represent your best efforts at critical thinking. As a graduate nurse, begin by writing papers (manuscripts) on case studies that you find interesting. Submit your manuscript to a nursing journal for consideration for publication. Accept the constructive suggestions from the editors and reviewers and re-submit your manuscript, if advised to do so. You will feel very proud when your name is in print for the first time. Ideas for future manuscripts will become a natural part of your professional career.

All nurses have the potential to contribute to the scientific body of knowledge in the nursing profession. We, the nursing community of scholars, look forward to reading your contributions as they enrich our profession and our careers. ◎

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A Guide For Your Reference Page

Journal Article

Feldman, H.R., & Acord, L. (2002). Strategies for building faculty research programs in institutions that are not research intensive. *Journal of Professional Nursing, 18*, 140-146.

Book

Feldman, H.R. & Lewenson, S.B. (2000). *Nurses in the political arena: The public face of nursing.* NY: Springer.

Web Document

Degelman, D., & Harris, M.L. (2000). *APA style essentials*, Retrieved May 18, 2000, from Vanguard University, Department of Psychology Website:http://www.vanguard.edu/faculty/ddegelman/index.cfm?docid=796.

Writing Resources

For an example of a complete article www.vanguard.edu/psychology/reayere.pdf

For an example of an undergraduate research proposal www.vanguard.edu/emplibrary/files/psychproposal.pdf

For a template of an APA-style paper www.vanguard.edu/emplibrary/files/psychapa.doc

To download free Acrobat Reader www.adobe.som/product/acrobat/readstep2.html

References*

American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American psychological association* (5th ed.). Washington DC: Author.

Feldman, H.R., & Acord, L. (2002). Strategies for building faculty research programs in institutions that are not research intensive. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 18, 140-146.

Feldman, H.R. & Lewenson, S.B (2000). *Nurses in the political arena: The public face of nursing*. NY: Springer.

*Editorial Note: Due to the editorial style of the magazine, the references cited for the work are not indented as per APA guidelines - they are indented according to Imprint's style guidelines, and not due to the authors.