

## Editorial

# Editorial - Academic Referencing Practices

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This is the first of a series of short guidance pieces on international academic standards which the *Sudan Journal of Medical Sciences* will be producing for researchers over the coming year. As the Senior Editor at KnE Publishing, I am honoured to have been invited to write the inaugural guest editorial in this series.

This editorial will focus on academic referencing practices, providing a brief overview of why accurate referencing is important, what forms it can take, practical considerations and the requirements for the *Sudan Journal of Medical Sciences*.

Accurate and comprehensive referencing practices are a cornerstone of scientific research and indeed all fields of academic study. References form the foundation of all published studies, not only providing the context for each article, highlighting where each study fits into existing scholarship and what new concepts or techniques it is providing, but also allowing readers to widen their understanding of the field and trace the intellectual heritage of a given publication.

There are many reasons why accurate and effective referencing is important. Firstly, it ensures authors avoid accusations of plagiarism which can arise if intellectual debts are not adequately signposted. Secondly, it helps to showcase the breadth and depth of one's research to readers and reviewers. Thirdly, it defines the uniqueness of a piece of work by contextualizing it within existing scholarship. Moreover, references provide supporting evidence for an author's ideas, making research appear more authoritative and arguments more persuasive. Furthermore, referencing allows authors to streamline articles, briefly citing established scholarship before focusing on valuable new material.

References should be included whenever an author makes use of an idea derived from someone else's work, whether it is a complete quotation, a piece of data, a summary, or a paraphrased idea. This information can be drawn from an article or book, newspaper or magazine, website or other electronic resources, conference paper, lecture, or personal correspondence *inter alia*.

References can take various forms and their use is largely determined by a given journal's style guide. References can be brief in-text citations in parenthesis such as

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Published 30 June 2020

Production and Hosting by  
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Editor-in-Chief:  
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(Paterson-Morgan, 2019). They can also be footnotes or endnotes, comprising simple source statements or more detailed discussions of tangential ideas and literature reviews. Depending on the journal, authors might be asked to provide a references list or a bibliography (or both). References are individual works cited within the text, typically in numerical order, whereas a bibliography is a larger list of works which have contributed to the study, usually ordered alphabetically.

It is important to always check a journal's submissions requirements and style guide before submitting an article. There are multiple options to choose from, including the Chicago, Harvard, APA, MLA and Vancouver referencing styles.

The *Sudan Journal of Medical Sciences* uses the Vancouver style. This is a numerical referencing format which includes numbers in parenthesis which relate to numbered references at the end of the document. For example:

In the text: The format of *SJMS* complies with the "Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals" as published by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1979 [1].

Reference: [1] Harlem O, Huth E J, Lock S P, *et al.* Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts Submitted to Biomedical Journals. *Ann. Intern. Med.* 1982, Jun. 96(6):766-768.

However, regardless of which style a journal requires, a researcher can ensure they always have all the necessary information by noting down the following details for every item they read and take notes from:

- Author surname and first name
- The article, chapter, or publication title
- Publication details (including journal title and volume number, or book publisher and location)
- Page numbers
- Website URLs and dates accessed (for online resources).

This will ensure that an article can easily be prepared in accordance with any journal's referencing requirements.

That is not to say that referencing is not a time-consuming process. However, there are various digital solutions which can help with referencing, such as Endnote. In addition, many publishers and research aggregators offer a 'how to cite' function for online resources, allowing users to select the appropriate referencing style and download

a correctly formatted reference into their records. Meanwhile, some publishers offer editorial solutions (such as KnE Publishing's Support Services) performing the time-consuming reference formatting processes for a small fee.

Not conforming to internationally recognized academic referencing standards can raise concerns about the quality of the article and the validity of the underlying research. In addition, if incorrect or inadequate referencing is submitted, this can produce long delays as editors are obliged to send content back to the author requesting additional material. An article will not necessarily get rejected if the wrong referencing style is used but displaying accurate and correct references undoubtedly facilitates acceptance.

To conclude, accurate referencing is a mark of academic rigour and high-quality research. It ensures an article will be integrated into wider scholarly discussions and debates, enhancing its potential impact.