



Patient Information Forum

For Professionals Working in Consumer Health Information

Good referencing

May 2015

You may be confident that you're using robust, evidence-based sources to produce your health content – but how can your readers be sure?

Including a list of your sources in your content makes your information transparent. It shows readers that your information is accurate and evidence-based.

Here are some points to bear in mind when referencing health content.

- Always keep a record of in-text citations (where each point in your content is sourced from) on file, even if you don't include them in your final publication. You can refer back to these if necessary, for instance if you have a query about a particular point in your information.
- Aim to include a full list of all your references in your final information product. If you can't for any reason, make sure your readers are aware of how they can contact you to obtain sources. This is also in line with Information Standard requirements.
- There are many different referencing styles available for how to list different types of sources (journal articles, web pages etc) – it's up to you which style you use, or whether you produce your own – just make sure you keep it consistent.
- It can be useful to include web links in your references, eg, to the journal article or relevant page of the website you have sourced. Just be aware that 'deep links' can quickly change, so you will need to maintain these to make them useful.
- You may want to consider storing screenshots of web pages, especially those that are likely to change – so you have a constant record of references you've used.

Reference management software

You may want to consider using referencing software to assist with producing your health content. There are numerous different reference management software available, which all allow you to collect, store and organise your references. They all also work with word-processing applications like Microsoft Word, making it easier to include citations in your work and create a reference list or bibliography within seconds.

Things to think about when you're choosing which software to use include:

- How will you need to access the software – via desktop, or does it need to be web-based?
- Do your colleagues already use a reference management programme? It can be useful to share references, which will mean you'll need to be using the same one.

EndNote

EndNote is a desktop software, although you can also get web access through its counterpart, EndNote Online. The latest version of the software continuously syncs your citations to the web version.

There is also a free version of the software called EndNote Basic. You can only access this online and it has limited functionality – for instance, fewer style types. EndNote's 'Cite While You Write' feature

- Does the software have the appropriate reference style you need available; or if not are you easily able to edit or create new styles?

All the different software have their own strengths and areas of focus. We've picked some of the key ones below. You might want to try some to see which one you prefer (those that aren't free to access usually allow you to have a free trial).

For more comprehensive details about the pros and cons of these and other software and how they compare, the University of Oxford Bodleian Libraries gives a good guide:

<http://libguides.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/reference-management>

integrates the software with MS Word, and you can also insert citations and bibliographies into PowerPoint.

<http://endnote.com/>

Refworks

Refworks is a web-based reference manager – you create a personal database online, which you can access anywhere. Useful features include ‘Write-N-Cite’, which allows you to cite references and create bibliographies in MS Word, and ‘RefGrab-It’, which allows you to take

references directly from webpages or online PDFs, and to capture screenshots.

<https://www.refworks.com>

Mendeley

Mendeley is a freely available reference manager, with web-based, desktop and mobile versions. You can sync your library between these different versions. As with the other programmes, it’s compatible with MS Word, allowing you to cite references and create bibliographies.

search across PDFs. Mendeley also has a focus on developing social networks with colleagues.

<https://www.mendeley.com/>

Mendeley is particularly good for managing PDFs. References can be created straight away by importing PDFs, and it also allows you to

Zotero

Zotero is another freely available reference manager. It works either as an extension to Firefox, or via a desktop programme which you can connect to Google Chrome or Safari. Again, the software can be used with MS Word to cite and create your bibliography.

library. You can store screenshots of web pages, along with PDFs, images, audio and video files, which are automatically indexed in your library.

<https://www.zotero.org/>

Zotero is unique in being able to sense content in your web browser, allowing you to easily add it straight to your personal

About the author

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About PiF

PiF is a non-profit organisations working to improve the quality and accessibility of health information for patients and public across the UK. Our work involves: delivering resources and events for information producers; influencing to raise the profile of health information; and bringing together those interested in the field of health information via the PiF network. You can find out more at www.pifonline.org.uk .