Writing Case Reports

Although the basic act of writing only requires putting thoughts and ideas on paper, the process of developing and writing a substantial case report is a bit more involved. From conducting a thorough literature review, to organizing the thoughts, facts, and supporting evidence surrounding the case in a thoughtful manner, to providing the appropriate references, writing a case report can seem daunting. However, we have collected a number of resources intended to guide you through the writing process.

Research

A thorough case report must be supported by a robust literature review. After the thesis of the case report is determined, the next step is to locate supporting evidence. The following sites provide tips for conducting a successful literature review:

- The Literature Review: A Few Tips on Conducting It (The University of Toronto)
- Literature Reviews: An Overview for Graduate Students (North Carolina State University)

Once you understand more about the literature review process, visit the USA Library website to get started. The Finding Journal Articles page provides access to several different research databases to which the library subscribes. An excellent place to start is PubMed, which is a free, public citation and abstract database maintained by the National Institute of Health and the National Library of Medicine. In addition to offering thousands of citations and abstracts, you can connect to any full text the USA library offers immediately through the USA shield icon.

The library subscribes to several research databases, such as ProQuest, InfoTrac, and the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews. If you’ve found a specific article citation, you can verify whether the library provides full-text access to it using the A-Z Journal Locator. If USA does not provide full-text access, please contact the library to request the article via Interlibrary Loan (ILL).

Books and eBooks can also be used in your literature review. The USA Library provides a focused and up-to-date health sciences collection.

The Writing Process

After supporting literature has been compiled, a case report can then be formed. A basic case report is usually comprised of the following (or similar) sections: Background and Purpose, Case Description, Intervention, Outcomes, and Discussion. Be sure to review the faculty-provided grading rubric, both at the start of and throughout the case report process. The University of St. Augustine has recorded a series of videos discussing its standards for case reports.
The writing style for a clinical case report differs somewhat from traditional academic writing, in that it often incorporates terms, techniques, and situations unique to a clinical setting. However, it is important to write in an academic voice, not in “clinical speak.” Spell out acronyms upon the first use, and avoid using abbreviated versions of clinical terms. Always use a 3rd person voice, and try to be concise in descriptive passages. And, as with all types of writing, pay special attention to grammar and spelling. The following texts and sites provide in-depth discussions of graduate-level writing, and of scientific writing:

How to Write, Publish, & Present in the Health Sciences: A Guide for Clinicians and Laboratory Researchers by Thomas A. Lang, 2010

Graduate Student Online Writing Tutorials (Yale)

Teaching Graduate Students How To Write Clearly by Eric-Jan Wagenmakers, 2009

Scientific Writing Booklet (University of Arizona)

Style Points for Scientific Writing (University of Washington)

References

For supporting evidence, citations must be provided, both in-text and in a list of references at the end of the report. Depending on what citation style is required for the report, in-text citations may take the form of an author’s name and date in parentheses at the end of a sentence, a footnote, or a superscripted endnote. In-text citations must be used each and every time another author’s work is mentioned in the case report.

The in-text citations will be listed in full either in the references page or in the footnotes. The USA Library provides citation guides for the American Psychological Association (APA), American Medical Association (AMA), and Vancouver citation styles, and also provides full online access to the AMA Manual of Style. More citation information can be found in the following locations:

APA Style

Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL) APA Formatting and Style Guide

Citing Medicine, 2nd edition