References serve three primary purposes: documentation, acknowledgement, and directing or linking the reader to additional resources. Authors may cite a reference to support their own arguments or lay the foundation for their theses (documentation); as a credit to other authors (acknowledgement); or to direct the reader to more detail or additional resources (directing or linking) [40].

Each reference is divided with periods into bibliographic groups (i.e., principle types of references), which serve to make each bibliographic group distinct. Bibliographic elements are the items within a bibliographic group, and may be separated by the following punctuation marks:

- **Commas**: if the items are sub-elements of the bibliographic element or a set of closely related elements, such as the authors’ names in the reference list.
- **Semicolons**: if the elements in the bibliographic group are different, such as between the publisher’s name and the copyright year, or if there are multiple occurrences of logically related elements within a group; semicolons are also used before volume identification data.
- **Colons**: are used before the publisher’s name, between the title and subtitle, and after a connective phrase such as “In” or “Presented at” [41].

Students should “always consult the primary source and should never cite a reference that they themselves have not read.” [40]

Two references should not be combined under one reference number. [41]

**Authors**: use initials of first and second names with no spaces. Include up to six authors. If there are more than six, include the first three, followed by et al. If no author is given, start with the title. [44]

**Capitalization** [3.9.2]:
- For articles, capitalize only the first letter of the first word, proper names and abbreviations that always appear in caps.
- For other titles, capitalize the first letter of every word that isn't an article, preposition or less than 3 letters.

**Dates**: Use the order: month day year, spelled out. [48]

**Journals**: The NLM Catalog, published by the National Library of Medicine, may be used to obtain a list of currently indexed MEDLINE titles; select the Limit for Current Subsets called "Currently indexed in MEDLINE." If a journal does not paginate continuously through the volume, include the month and day of the journal. [48]

**Sample Abbreviations for Journal Titles**:
- American Association of Nurse Anesthetists: AANA J.
- American Journal of Nursing: Am J Nurs
- BMJ: British medical Association: BMJ
- Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism: J Clin Endocrinol Metab
- Journal of Nursing Administration: J Nurs Adm
- Medical Letters on Drugs and Therapeutics: Med Lett Drugs Ther

**Place**: use abbreviations of states, not postal codes. [451-454]

**Uniform Resource Locators (URLs)**. "Use the URL that will that will take the reader most directly to the article, not a long search string and not a short, more general URL (one to the publisher's home page, for example)’ if a URL is provided, as close as possible to publication verify that the link still works” [64]

**Note**: Some browsers may show italicized text as underlined. When preparing reference lists, italics are specified, and should be used. If you don't see an example for your type of reference, consult the manual itself.