

# Editor's Craft

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## Name Dropping

An important element of almost every scientific article, chapter, or book is the reference list. The list serves several purposes. For example, it indicates that the author of the current publication has considered other work in the field, whether the results are in close agreement or altogether different. References confirm an author's cognizance of the framework in which the data he or she is presenting exist. Also, and by no means least important, the entries offer readers additional sources for their own personal information.

When I edit articles for **Pharmacotherapy** I give a good deal of attention to the reference list; in fact, that is the section to which I generally turn first. The format must conform to our style. Entries must be numbered in order as cited, and they cannot be duplicated. Certain items that are given as references must be transposed to appear in parentheses in the text, such as personal communications and citations of unpublished observations. These are a few of the mechanics. A more problematic issue concerns naming names.

Regardless of the type of article they are writing — case report, outcome of a clinical trial or other investigation, or review of therapeutics — authors have a tendency to mention by name in the text those whose works they are citing, in addition to giving the numbers of relevant entries in the reference list. Thus, a frequently encountered construction is, "Cathcart et al studied the results of xyz therapy in 306 patients with osteoarthritis."<sup>7</sup> Nothing is wrong with this grammatically; however, I generally delete the names and rework the sentence(s).

As a rule, it simply is not critical to the science to state who did what. A major exception, of course, concerns individuals who have expanded our knowledge significantly. An overview of adrenocorticotrophic hormone would be invidiously incomplete if it did not mention Kendall and Hench, the co-Nobelists who, respectively, discovered and first applied the agent. To include congeries of names sentence after sentence (or at least paragraph after paragraph), however, is in the main unnecessary. Certainly the road to learning and understanding is rendered uneven when one has to plod over obstacles labeled for every Thomas, Richard, and Harold who ever contributed to the literature. Readers who are interested can turn to the end of the article and easily connect the superscript numbers in the text to the entries in the reference list.

Finally, it is a fact of publishing professional journals that space is a precious commodity. Therefore, if I can tighten

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to read

A comparison of these dosages resulted in significantly greater relief in patients who received the higher dosage than in those who were given the lower amount.<sup>14</sup>

I am ensuring that every pica is used as efficiently as possible. Each essential bit of information is retained, and credit is given where it is due. In addition, to my mind, the material reads better.

Therefore, keeping in mind the need for clarity, attribution, and economical use of space, I edit as described. When an author drops names, so do I.

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