What Is a Scholarly Source?

In any course you take, professors are going to ask you to find scholarly sources for discussions and assignments. A source is scholarly when it

- comes from a professional, peer-reviewed publication (e.g., a journal or a government report such as from the FDA or CDC);
- contains references for sources cited, so you can find the original source of information;
- is written by a professional or scholar in the field and indicates credentials of the author(s); and
- is no more than 5 years old; however, consult with your instructor regarding the appropriate age of articles.

Most nursing, medical, science and social science journals meet these criteria. If an article seems like it is too simplistic or is a brief summary, look for other references. Don’t stop the hunt for your information.

Newspaper articles and lay person literature (Readers Digest, Healthy Life Magazine, Food and Fitness) can be sources for background about your topic for a project, but are not considered scholarly.

What else is not a scholarly source?

- Course textbooks (course textbooks are not peer reviewed and are distillations, interpretations, and analyses of other work)
- Lessons from online courses or undocumented handouts
- Information from Wikipedia or any wiki
- Articles in healthcare and nursing-oriented trade magazines, such as Nursing Made Incredibly Easy and RN Magazine
Grey Literature

Grey literature is scholarly but not peer-reviewed. These resources can be used but do not meet requirements for peer-reviewed sources. Students may use these sources as supporting evidence based on the discretion of the SME of the course. The SME can determine which grey literature source (eg., professional organization website, white papers) are appropriate to be used for a threaded discussion(s) or assignment and would constitute receiving full credit for using this resource in the paper or threaded discussion.

The grey literature is defined, in general, as sources that do not come from commercial publishers; the primary purpose of a commercial publisher is to print or produce literature. Grey literature comes from entities that do not have publishing as a primary purpose. Some of the types of literature are: book chapters, books, conference abstracts, research and technical reports, briefings and reviews, unpublished data, dissertations, theses, policy documents, working papers, multimedia content, and personal correspondence.

Grey literature is based on facts and findings. In the grey literature, authors can explain the standard of evidence on which a publication is based. Grey literature goes through many reviews by many different persons or groups and many see this process as an ongoing form of ratification rather than validation. Government reports actually are part of the grey literature – they are not peer reviewed and the government’s main purpose is not the publication of literature. Internet resources on dissertations (a form of grey literature) provides additional views on the scholarly level of this literature.

My textbook has a famous nursing author and is full of references. Why can’t I use my textbook as a scholarly source?

Chamberlain faculty members choose textbooks carefully based on accuracy and currency of the content, how the information is presented, and numerous other factors. For obtaining an organized foundation of knowledge in a given domain, textbooks are essential.

However, in written papers, PowerPoint presentations, threaded discussions, and other course assignments, textbooks are not accepted as scholarly sources for several reasons. First, you need to expand your use of information sources and your understanding of different perspectives on the topics covered by various assignments. In some rare instances, a specific assignment may allow use of one course textbook. Unless an assignment specifically gives permission to use a course textbook as a resource, do not use your text as a lone reference.

Second, the rubric for guiding your responses in threaded discussions includes a criterion for scholarly support. To achieve the full point allocation, you must provide one scholarly source for one post in each discussion, each week. If you use a course textbook as a source and do not provide a peer-reviewed article as a scholarly source, you will not receive the full number of points for this criterion. You will receive some points, though, because you have used a secondary source to support your post.
Course textbooks are considered secondary sources because they are integrations of previously published content. Individuals who apply scientific findings and evidence use primary sources, so they can examine the theories, concepts, and research for themselves. Asking students to use primary sources contributes to formation of scholarly attitudes related to lifelong learning.

*Finally,* faculty members plan the curriculum based on program outcomes. Program outcomes are based on published professional standards. The professional standards we follow in the CCN MSN program are the AACN Essentials of Master’s Education in Nursing as well as other standards related to each specialty track. Essential 1 and program outcomes 1 and 7 are relevant to the issue of reference requirements at CCN:

**Essential 1: Background for Practice from Sciences and Humanities**

- Recognizes that the master’s-prepared nurse integrates *scientific findings* from nursing, biopsychosocial fields, genetics, public health, quality improvement, and organizational sciences for the continual improvement of nursing care across diverse settings.

**Program Outcomes**

- PO1. Practice safe, high-quality advanced nursing care based on concepts and knowledge from nursing and related disciplines.
- PO7. Design patient-centered care models and delivery systems using the best available

*Scientific findings and evidence* are best gleaned from peer-reviewed, primary sources available in professional publications found in the library. Recall the peer-review process: An article is submitted to an editor of a journal, and the editor sends the article out to the author’s peers—people with comparable credentials as the author. The article is published if the peers recommend publication. This assures that scholars in the field have attested to the quality of the scholarly content in the article. By virtue of the length of time taken to get to publication, textbook material may not have the most current information. Furthermore, most textbooks are reviewed by professional editors. Some textbooks may use nurse peers to review assigned sections of a book, but the process in not considered to be formal peer review.

Thus, our requirement that students apply current peer-reviewed literature to assignments and threaded discussions is based on the academic values promulgated by the Essentials and carried out through our program outcomes. We have a vision that our students will be clinicians, teachers, administrators, policy-makers, and informaticists who integrate the most current, high-quality literature into practice. Textbooks can be used as supplemental sources but cannot meet requirements for primary, peer-reviewed evidence.

2/15 approved by GCC