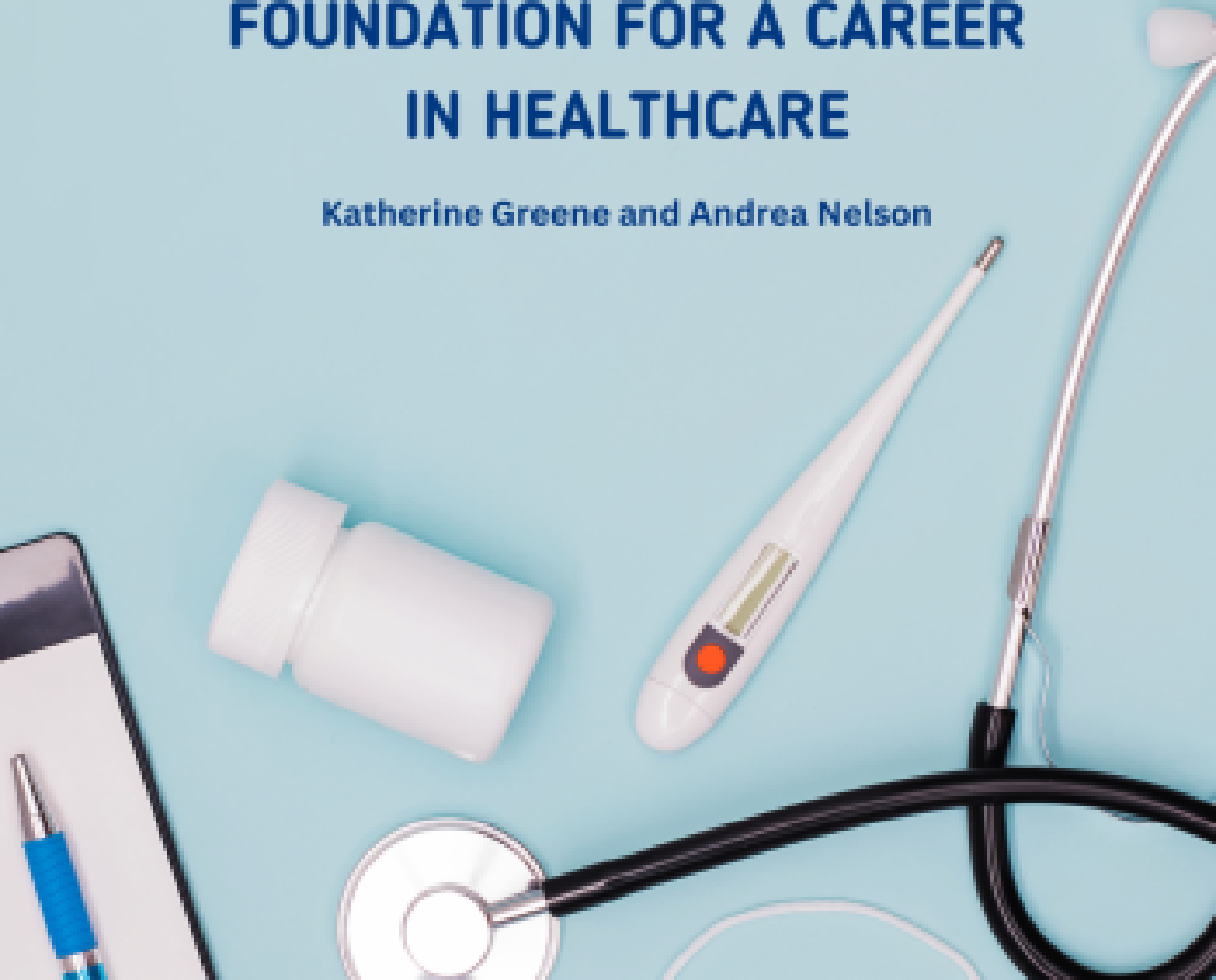


CAREER CORNERSTONES:



ESTABLISHING A FOUNDATION FOR A CAREER IN HEALTHCARE

Katherine Greene and Andrea Nelson



Career Cornerstones: Establishing a Foundation for a Career in Healthcare

Career Cornerstones: Establishing a Foundation for a Career in Healthcare

KATHERINE GREENE AND ANDREA NELSON

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Contents

Introduction	1
Acknowledgements	2
Chapter 1: Scholarly Research Skills	5
Chapter 2: Academic Writing and Integrity	19
Chapter 3: Healthcare Careers	35
Chapter 4: Job Skills	45
Chapter 5: Ethics	65
Chapter 6: Professionalism	81
Chapter 7: Communication in Healthcare	105
Chapter 8: Life Management	121
Appendix A: Tables	137
Appendix B: Image Credits	149
Appendix C: Offline Copies of Test Yourself Quizzes	153

Introduction

Welcome to *Career Cornerstones: Establishing a Foundation for a Career in Healthcare*. This book was created for students entering their respective health profession's program. This book is designed to help students be successful not only in their health profession's educational program, but also as they start to intern or work in healthcare settings.

HOW OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OER) WORK

This book has been adapted from multiple OER resources. You can find out information regarding all of the resources utilized in this book at the end of every chapter in the "References and Attributions" sections.

Students: This OER book has interactive content is built into each chapter that is available only in the online format. If using a PDF copy or EPUB version of this book, you will be directed to a hyperlink to access the interactive content. At the end of each chapter is a vocabulary list of associated terms related to chapter's content. The interactive reinforcement activities may require you to click, drag and drop, and/or watch videos.

Faculty and teaching staff: While this OER book was curated and created for Healthcare Administration, Health Sciences, and Pre-Professional students, our hope is that you will take this OER and customize it for your program and share again.

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***Other formats available upon request

Acknowledgements

This is our second Open Educational Resource (OER) with *Pressbooks*. After seeing how greatly our previous OER book, *Medical Terminology for Healthcare Professions*, was received by our students along with the incredible textbook cost savings of having a free OER, we decided to make another OER for the cornerstone course in the University of West Florida's (UWF) Health Sciences and Administration Program. For this OER, we were pleased to receive an ACE (Adapt, Create, Engage) Award to develop this book sponsored by the UWF Library and the UWF Center for Teaching Learning and Technology. Once again we were lucky to have our Health Sciences librarian, Cindy Gruwell, serve as our mentor and advisor. We are so happy that the creation of this book will save our students here, and elsewhere, on textbook costs while also allowing them to have continued access to this book after their course ends.

Andrea M. Nelson, PT, DPT, CLT, GCS Emeritus, University of West Florida

anelson@uwf.edu

Katherine Greene, MPH, University of West Florida

kgreene2@uwf.edu

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Chapter 1: Scholarly Research Skills

Learning Objectives

- Ascertain the value of evidence-based research.
- Identify appropriate search skills to locate a peer-reviewed article.
- Determine what a keyword is and why it is a more effective way to search.

INTRODUCTION

No matter what academic subjects you study, at some point you will need to conduct research. Even if your coursework does not require formal, documented research, it will, at minimum, include regular research behaviors. Every day, whether deciding which movie to watch or choosing a new technology product, everyone participates in basic, informal research behaviors: a process of seeking information, testing it against other forms of collected information, and analyzing as much “data” as possible before making decisions or being persuaded. Although more formal, the same process applies to scholarly writing.

Chapter Resources

[Key Takeaways](#)[Vocabulary](#)[Test Yourself](#)

THE IMPORTANCE OF EVIDENCE

Most of the assignments you will complete as a college student will ask you to make an argument, take a stance, or prove a hypothesis. The best way to do this is to research the topic, develop a thesis statement, claim, or hypothesis, and then use evidence.

Evidence is the facts, examples, or sources used to support a claim. Depending on the assignment, this might be data retrieved from a scientific journal article, a quotation from a scholarly resource, or a theory in an academic text. In fact, if you make a claim or an argument without evidence, your paper could appear to be an unsupported opinion or not particularly well-researched. Even when the assignment elicits opinion, your writing will be more convincing if you provide evidence.

EVIDENCE IN HEALTHCARE

As you prepare for a healthcare career, it is also vital that you recognize the value of using evidence in a professional context. The goal of the healthcare system is to provide ideal care from a qualified provider in an appropriate setting for a particular patient. In other words, the patient is to receive the best possible care from a provider with the right expertise in a setting that maximizes efficiency and minimizes risk and abuse of resources—all the while treating the patient with respect and allowing involvement in the care plan as the patient desires.

Evidence-based medicine (EBM) uses the scientific method to organize and apply current data to improve healthcare decisions. The best available science is combined with the healthcare professional's clinical experience and the patient's values to arrive at the best medical decision for the patient. In short, the goal of evidence-based medicine is to improve medical outcomes based on the highest quality evidence available.



Image 1.1. Using the best available evidence increases the effectiveness, safety, and efficiency of health interventions. [Image description].

TYPES OF SCHOLARLY RESOURCES

You may need to draw on many different types of information, depending on what you are creating, and how you will use it. Your lecturers will expect you to find relevant information sources, but they will also expect you to be careful and discerning to avoid fake or invalid information in an academic context. It is important to be able to identify not only the different types of information sources but also which ones are most appropriate for your needs.

Popular resources communicate a broad range of information to the general public. The author is often not identified and may not be an expert. The language used is not technical, and these resources are more attractive than scholarly journals, with catchy titles, attractive artwork, and many advertisements but no footnotes or references. It is, therefore, difficult to assess whether a popular source is reliable. Popular resources are published by commercial publishers after approval from an editor. Examples include newspapers, magazines, news reports, social media posts, and websites.

Professional resources are written for professionals in a field. The author is most often identified; however, sources are not always documented by citations and a reference list. The language may or may not be technical. They are meant for people in a particular profession and contain information about trends and news from the targeted field, book reviews, and case studies. Professional resources are usually published by professional associations and commercial publishers after approval from an editor. A trade magazine is an example of a professional information source.

Scholarly resources are written by qualified experts (often academics) within a university setting for scholars in a particular field of study. The author is identified, and their credentials are available. Sources are documented, and technical language is often used. They are usually published in scientific journals by universities, professional

associations, and commercial publishers after approval by peer review or from the journal's editor. Scholarly material can be categorized as followed:

- Primary sources – Resources, such as population statistics or policy documents, that provide a first-hand account of an event or time period and are considered to be authoritative
- Secondary sources – Resources, such as scholarly books or journal articles, that involve analysis, synthesis, interpretation, or evaluation of primary sources.
- Tertiary sources – Primary or secondary information that has been condensed and rewritten in a simplified form, such as textbooks or fact sheets.

Grey literature is authoritative information, often published by government bodies and non-government organizations (NGOs). The authors may be individual experts, a panel, or a committee. The veracity of grey literature is generally not reviewed by experts prior to publishing; thus, you will need to evaluate the credibility and reliability of such material before referencing it in your work (see [Evaluating Resources](#)). Your library will likely have databases holding grey literature. However, grey literature is usually not published commercially and is often made available on an organization's website; you may have to use advanced Internet search techniques to locate these materials. Examples of grey literature include reports (including research reports and government reports), literature reviews (not published elsewhere in a journal), policy documents, standards, conference papers, and theses or dissertations.

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

Some journals are categorized as peer-reviewed journals, meaning they contain articles that are viewed as credible and authoritative. They specifically publish articles that have been **peer-reviewed**. In order for an article to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, it has to go through a formal submission process which includes a peer review stage where experts ensure the accuracy, originality, significance, and other characteristics of the research before it is accepted for publication. These articles are highly regarded because the findings and results have been reviewed by experts in the field.

When researching a topic for your academic work, you may be asked to find “scholarly,” “academic,” “research,” or “peer-reviewed” journal articles. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but not all articles are peer-reviewed.

TYPES OF JOURNAL ARTICLES

Peer-reviewed journals may contain different types of articles, each with its own audience and purpose. As a health sciences student, you are likely to come across the following journal articles:

- **Clinical Trial:** A research study performed in people that is aimed at evaluating a medical, surgical, or behavioral intervention. It is the primary way that researchers find out if a new treatment, like a new drug, diet, or medical device (for example, a pacemaker) is safe and effective in people.
- **Randomized Controlled Trial:** A clinical trial or study where participants are randomly assigned to different groups.
- **Meta-Analysis:** A quantitative analysis that reviews data from previous research done on a particular topic to better draw conclusions about that research and topic.
- **Literature Review:** A compilation of the most significant previously published research on your topic. A

literature review outlines, evaluates, and synthesizes relevant research to organize what is known about a topic and identify gaps in the literature.

- **Systematic Review:** A literature review that not only compiles but also analyzes all the pertinent literature on a specific topic. The review attempts to answer a research question, and it can be a very valuable source of resources for your work.

FINDING SCHOLARLY ARTICLES

In this “information age” when so much information is available at our fingertips on the Internet, it is crucial to be able to critically search through the reams of information. Selecting credible sources provides reliable and useful data to support your ideas and convince your audience.

NARROWING YOUR TOPIC

For many students, having to start with a research question is the biggest difference between how they did research in high school and how they are required to carry out their college research projects. It is a process of working from the outside in. You start with the world of all possible topics (or your assigned topic) and narrow down until you’ve focused your interest enough to be able to tell precisely what you want to find out, instead of only what you want to “write about.”

Although finding a good topic may initially feel like looking for a needle in a haystack, choosing a general topic is the first step. To select a topic, start by thinking about aspects of your field or discipline that might be interesting to pursue, such as “health education” or “diabetes treatment.” Do some background reading to understand more about the topic.

Strategies for Narrowing a Topic

The following strategies can help you choose a topic:

- **Start with the assignment.** Does it provide you with topic options, or can you select your own?
- **Look at topics that are relevant to you.** For example, pick an area of interest, an area of experience, or an area where you know there is a need for more research.
- **Start with “what” and “why questions and expand.** For example, what is the current research on eating disorders, and why is it significant to health sciences?
- **Think about a current problem in the workplace.** Consider a current issue in a clinical or hospital setting, such as hand washing or patient falls.
- **Ask for help.** Consult your professor or a librarian about possible topics for your assignment.
- **Don’t go too broad or too narrow.** Do some background searching and identify a topic angle. Keep in mind, if you are getting too many results, your topic may be too broad. If you are not getting enough results, your topic may be too narrow.

DEVELOPING YOUR QUESTION

You can't tell whether an information source is relevant to your research until you know exactly what you're trying to find out. The research question defines that and divides all information sources into two groups: those that are relevant to your research and those that are not—all based on whether each source can help you find out what you want to find out and/or report the answer.

The steps for developing a research question, listed below, can help you organize your thoughts.

- Step 1: Pick a topic (or consider the one assigned to you).
- Step 2: Write a narrower/smaller topic that is related to the first.
- Step 3: List some potential questions that could logically be asked in relation to the narrow topic.
- Step 4: Pick the question that you are most interested in.
- Step 5: Change the question you're interested in so that it is more focused.

Developing Research Questions for Quantitative Clinical Topics

PICO stands for (P) Patient, population, or problem, (I) Intervention or exposure, (C) Comparison, and (O) Outcome. To use PICO, answer questions about each of these elements. Formulating an answerable question using the PICO model could look something like this:

- **Patient, Population, or Problem:** What are the characteristics of the patient or population (for example, gender, age, and other demographics)? What is the situation or disease you are interested in (e.g., diabetes management)?
- **Intervention or Exposure:** What do you want to do with the patient, person, or population (e.g., treat, diagnose, observe)? For example, reaction to a specific type of treatment.
- **Comparison:** What is the alternative to the intervention (e.g., placebo, different drug, surgery)? For example, how does a sample group that receives a drug compare to a similar group that is given a placebo?
- **Outcome:** What are the relevant outcomes (e.g., morbidity, death, complications)? For example, how do lower cholesterol numbers impact the target population?

Not all topics will work with all PICO categories, so don't worry if you can't match the model exactly.

SEARCHING FOR RESOURCES

Once you know what you want to search for, you must then filter through the hundreds, if not thousands, of resources that may be relevant to your research. For the best results, choose your search tool and search strategy thoughtfully.

Common Search Tools

Google Scholar is a tool for finding books and journal articles that you might normally get from a library. Where possible, it provides links to online versions and library copies to help you locate an item. Use Google Scholar to find scholarly articles and books, verify citations, and explore related resources. When books are available through Google Books, some of their content may be available online.

If you want to conduct a broad search that covers various subject areas, Google Scholar may be a good choice; however, it has significant limitations. First of all, it covers a broad range of subjects, so your search results will likely include materials not related to the health sciences. Second, it does not have as many advanced search options as specialized databases like PubMed, CINAHL, and Cochrane, so you may not be able to focus your search as well. This is particularly challenging when you consider that a Google Scholar search may return millions of results.

A specialized database—often called a research or **library database**—allows targeted searching on one or more specific subject areas, for a specific format, such as books, articles, conference proceedings, video, images, or for information published with a specific date range. Most of what specialized databases contain can not be found by Google or Bing.

Search specialized databases to uncover scholarly information that is not available through a regular web search. Specialized databases are especially helpful if you require a specific format or up-to-date, scholarly information on a specific topic. However, you may want to use fewer search terms since the optimal number of terms is related to database size. Internet search engines like Google and Bing work best with several terms since they index billions of web pages and additional terms help narrow the results. Each scholarly database indexes a fraction of that number, so you are less likely to be overwhelmed by results even with one or two keywords than you would be with a search engine. Phrase searching (putting multiple words in quotes so Google or Bing will know to search them as a phrase) is also less helpful in specialized databases because they are smaller and more focused. Databases are better searched by beginning with only a few general search terms, reviewing your results, and, if necessary, limiting them in some logical way.

Effective Search Strategies

Effective searching takes precision. You've probably been searching in a more casual way for years and may wonder: Is going to the trouble of precision searching actually worth it? When you are searching for the best evidence to support your work, the answer is yes, precision searching is worth it.

An important thing to remember is that searching is an iterative process: we try search statements, take a look at what we found and, if the results weren't good enough, edit our search statements and search again—often multiple times. Most of the time, the first statements we try are not the best, even though Google or another search tool we're using may give us many results. It pays to search further for the sources that will help you the most. Be picky.



Image 1.2. Information can be found in many different formats and mediums, such as popular magazines, academic books, or digital journal articles. [\[Image description\]](#).

Keywords

Keywords are words that hold the essence, or the key idea, of what you are trying to find. Keywords are usually nouns, e.g., people, places, or things. Using relevant keywords in your search will lead you to better information.

You can identify the first keywords from the topic itself. Try to think of two to four keywords. If you have too few, your search results won't be specific enough, and if you have too many, you may get too few results. Identify the main concepts in your research question by selecting nouns important to the meaning of your question. Leave out words that don't help the search, such as adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and, usually, verbs.

Be alert to words that may have connotations other than the concept you are interested in. For instance, if you identify depression as a main idea, be aware that the search engine won't automatically know whether you mean depression as a psychological state, as a condition of the economy, or as a weather characteristic.

Synonyms can be used to broaden your search to retrieve more results. Synonyms are words that have the same, or similar meaning as the main keywords. Synonyms of keywords are interchangeable, which means that the meaning of your search will remain the same.

Phrase searching

You can use **phrase searching** to make sure the words you are searching for are found together. When you enter search terms into a search box, most databases treat the words separately. Your search results will include articles and books in which the words appear somewhere, not necessarily together. You end up with a large number of search results – many of which may be irrelevant to your search. To improve the relevance of your results, you may want the database to retrieve results that only contain certain groups of words together. When searching for an exact phrase, (i.e., exactly the same words in the same exact order), most library databases support the use of “quotation marks” (“ ”) around the phrase, which could be two or more words.

Boolean operators

Boolean operators, including AND, OR, and NOT, are words that make it easy for you to customize the results of your search.

- Using the AND operator tells the database that all words, or terms, that you have connected with AND must be found in any results returned.
- The NOT operator will narrow your search results by excluding or removing a specific word or words from the search results.
 - Be careful when using NOT, as it can remove results that would actually have been relevant.
- For a broader search, to find articles that discuss marketing with Facebook or Twitter, you could use the OR operator.

When you are using more than one operator in a search (e.g., AND and OR), you will need to group your keywords and operator words using brackets so that the database knows which action to perform first. For example, [healthy NOT healthcare] AND [food OR diet].

Wildcards

A **wildcard** is a special character that replaces one or more letters in a word (e.g., color) in order to search for multiple variations of the word. When keyword searching, you may miss relevant and useful results if the term you have searched for does not appear in that exact form in an article or book. Wildcard symbols can help you to find word variations so that you don't miss anything.

To use a wildcard, insert the wildcard symbol used by that database to replace the letter that may change. However, keep in mind that different databases use different symbols for their wildcard. If you want or need to use a wildcard in your search, check the help section of the database you're using to find the wildcard options.

Truncation

To "truncate" a word simply means to shorten it by removing one or more letters to go back to the root word. **Truncating** a word allows you to search for multiple variations of a word at once. You can do this by adding a truncation symbol (e.g., *) to the end of the root of the words. Like wildcards, different databases use different symbols for truncation. Check the database's help section to find out which one to use.

Subject headings

Many databases provide the option of searching using **subject headings**. A subject heading is a word or phrase that is assigned to an article or other resource and describes the topic of the resource. It is a bit like a social media hashtag but without the # symbol.

Searching by subject heading is more powerful than other search strategies. When you search by keyword, that word might show up in a number of places in relation to the article, such as the abstract, the author's name, or the journal title, even if it is not specifically what the article is about. This means your search results may include many articles that are not relevant to you. Conversely, when you search by subject heading, you are limiting your results to articles that are actually about that topic.

Not every concept has a subject heading, so in some cases, you won't be able to find a subject heading that means exactly what you're looking for. Rather than trying to convert every keyword into a subject heading, it is often best to use a combination of keywords and subject headings.

EVALUATING RESOURCES

It is important to realize that looking for quality, evidence-based resources is more than just finding resources; it is about finding credible resources. When evaluating your resources consider the following:

Studies

- **Accuracy/Bias:** Does the information presented appear truthful/impartial or incorrect/biased?
- **Funding:** Who funded this study? Was it through the government, private donations, or a private company?
- **Leadership:** Who was in charge of the study, or who runs the entity that funded it? What information can you find on them through a web search?
- **Mission:** What is the stated purpose of the study and the mission of the entity that funded it?

- **Reputation:** What is the reputation of the authors and the funders? Are they well-known, and well-regarded? Have you heard of them before? What information can you find on them?

Websites of Organizations

- **Accuracy/Bias:** Does the information presented on the website appear truthful/impartial, or incorrect/biased?
- **Funding:** How is the organization funded?
- **Leadership:** Who runs or founded the organization? What can you find out about them through a web search?
- **Mission:** What is the stated or implied mission of the organization? (Look at the “About” page.)
- **Reputation:** Is this a well-known, well-regarded organization? Have you heard of it before?
- **Web Address:** Does the URL end in .edu, .gov, or .org? (Note: This is not always foolproof. URLs of all types can be bought.)

CRAAP Test

The CRAAP Test is another method for quickly evaluating sources for quality. It stands for Currency, Relevancy, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.uwf.edu/healthcarecareerfoundations/?p=5#h5p-1>

How to Read a Peer-Reviewed Article

Knowing how to evaluate the quality of a journal article requires you to understand its structure and the purpose of each section.

- The **Abstract** provides a big-picture overview of what the article is about, synthesizing the most important information. It should also identify both the purpose of the research, as well as its conclusions.
- The **Introduction** should give you an understanding of what is being researched, how, and why the research is of importance.
- The **Literature Review** is a comprehensive scan of previously published research on a specific topic. Authors use the literature review to provide readers with a current understanding of the topic and identify existing research gaps.
- In the **Methods** section, you should be able to find information about the authors’ research process, such as whether the research was qualitative or quantitative and the sample size. This section might also

feature tables, statistical analyses, calculations, and questions asked as part of the research.

- The **Results** section is where you find information (both analyzed results and raw statistical data) about the final results of the authors' research.
- The **Conclusion** section contains a discussion of the results and the authors' overall observations.
- The **References** section provides you with a full scope of research consulted as part of the authors' project. References are an excellent way to find additional journal articles on a specific topic.

Key Takeaways

- The use of *evidence* in academic writing strengthens your claim. In the healthcare setting, evidence improves the safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of healthcare decisions.
- Evidence can be found in *popular*, *professional*, and *scholarly resources* or *grey literature*. Each type of source has unique characteristics that may make it more, or less, appropriate for your research needs.
- To find relevant information, you will first need to narrow your topic and develop a research question. Then use *keywords*, *phrase searching*, *boolean operators*, *wildcards*, *truncation*, or *subject headings* with search tools like Google Scholar or a library database to find resources that apply to your research question.
- Evaluate your search results, such as with the *CRAAP test*, to ensure that you are using quality evidence from reliable sources.

Vocabulary

- **Boolean operators** – words that make it easy for you to customize the results of your search (e.g., AND, OR, and NOT)
- **Evidence** – facts, examples, or sources used to support a claim
- **Google Scholar** – a tool for finding books and journal articles that you might normally get from a library
- **Grey literature** – authoritative information that is not usually published commercially; the credibility and reliability of the material may not undergo peer-review prior to publishing
- **Keywords** – words that hold the key idea of what you are trying to find; usually nouns
- **Library database** – a specialized database that allows targeted searching on one or more specific subject areas, for a specific format, or for information published with a specific date range
- **Peer-reviewed article** – an article that has undergone a formal submission process where experts ensure characteristics of the research before it is accepted for publication
- **Phrase searching** – searching with an exact phrase to improve the relevance of your search results
- **Popular resources** – meant for a large general audience; may not be credible or reliable information
- **Professional resources** – meant for people in a particular profession
- **Scholarly resources** – written by qualified experts for scholars; may be categorized as primary, secondary, or tertiary
- **Subject headings** – a word or phrase that is assigned to an article or other resource and describes the topic of the resource
- **Truncation** – shortening a word by removing one or more letters to search for multiple variations of a word at once

- **Wildcards** – a special character that replaces one or more letters in a word to search for multiple variations of the word

CHAPTER 1 TEST YOURSELF

Please see Appendix C for an offline copy of the [Chapter 1 Test Yourself](#) activity. To view interactive H5P elements that have been excluded from this version of the text, please visit it online here: <https://pressbooks.uwf.edu/healthcarecareerfoundations/?p=5#h5p-17>

REFERENCES AND ATTRIBUTIONS

Introduction

“[Chapter 12 Introduction](#)” in *Writing Guide with Handbook* by Robinson, M. B., Jerskey, M., & Fulwiler, T. Published by OpenStax under a [CC BY 4.0](#) license. Lightly edited for brevity. Access for free at <https://openstax.org/books/writing-guide/pages/1-unit-introduction>

The Importance of Evidence

“[Write Clearly: Using Evidence Effectively](#)” by the University of Guelph. Published under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license. Lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

Evidence in Healthcare

“[Evidence Based Medicine](#)” by Tenny, S., & Varacallo, M. Published by StatsPearls Publishing under a [CC BY 4.0](#) license. Lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

Types of Scholarly Resources

The following resources were combined:

- “[Working with Information](#)” by Rowena McGregor, Robyn Tweedale, Lyndelle Gunton, Emma Peters, Yvonne Rose, Susanne Schultz, and Karanpal Singh Sachdeva in *Academic Success*. Published by the University of Southern Queensland under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license. Edited for brevity, flow, clarity, and to change to American spelling conventions. Material on categories of scholarly resources condensed and transformed into bullet list. Added original content on credibility and reliability considerations.
- “[Popular, Professional, & Scholarly](#)” in *Choosing & Using Sources: A Guide to Academic Research* by Teaching & Learning, Ohio State University Libraries. Published under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license. Transformed bullet points into paragraph format and edited for brevity, clarity, and flow.

Peer-Reviewed Articles

“[Know Your Resources](#)” by The Learning Portal. Published by the College Libraries Ontario (CLO) under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license. Lightly edited for grammar and flow.

Types of Journal Articles

[“What Are Clinical Trials and Studies?”](#) by the National Institute on Aging. Published by the National Institutes of Health under the public domain. Lightly edited for consistency with its new context.

[“Some Common Types of Scientific / Health Sciences Articles”](#) by the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Library and Informatics Center. Published under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license.

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Finding Scholarly Articles

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Developing Your Question

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Common Search Tools

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Effective Search Strategies

[“Why Precision Searching?”](#) in *Choosing & Using Sources: A Guide to Academic Research* by Teaching & Learning, Ohio State University Libraries. Published under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license. Edited for brevity and tone.

The following sources were combined to form the section on keywords:

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- [“Main Concepts”](#) in *Choosing & Using Sources: A Guide to Academic Research* by Teaching & Learning, Ohio State University Libraries. Published under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license. Edited for brevity.

The following sources were combined to form the section on phrases:

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[“True or CRAAP?”](#) by The Learning Portal. Published by the College Libraries Ontario (CLO) under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license. The question on evaluating for authority was edited to be relevant to an American audience.

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IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

Image 1.1: This photograph shows two individuals sitting at a table. The person in the foreground is listening to a community health worker, who is using a flip chart to discuss the traffic light method to label foods for the management of diabetes. [\[Return to Image 1.1\].](#)

Image 1.2: This photograph, shot from an overhead perspective, shows a person sitting at a desk and typing on a computer. To the person’s left are several notebooks. [\[Return to Image 1.2\].](#)

Chapter 2: Academic Writing and Integrity

Learning Objectives

- Understand the importance of maintaining high integrity standards in academia.
- Differentiate between paraphrasing and summarizing in academic writing.
- Develop skills for avoiding plagiarism such as citing sources, note-taking, quoting, and paraphrasing.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the key skills all successful students must acquire. You might think the most important thing in a class is to learn facts or memorize key terms. You read your textbook and take notes on important dates, names, causes, and so on. However, no matter how important these details are to your instructor, they don't mean much if you can't explain them in writing. While the grade in some courses may be based mostly on class participation, oral reports, or multiple-choice exams, writing is by far the single most important form of instruction and assessment. In college courses, writing is how ideas are exchanged, from scholars to students and from students back to scholars. This chapter will also explore what it means to write with academic integrity; that is, clearly acknowledging both your contributions and the scholars from whom you obtained the evidence used in your writing.

Chapter Resources

[Key Takeaways](#)[Vocabulary](#)[Test Yourself](#)

COMPONENTS OF ACADEMIC WRITING

Academic writing has certain characteristics, regardless of the course you are writing for:

- It follows expected rules for spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar.
- It should be factual and objective, free from personal opinions, bias, and value judgments. On rare occasions, you may be asked to state your point of view on a particular concept or issue. You should only do so if explicitly instructed to do so.
- It is formal, yet not overly complicated. It is unlike standard conversational language.
- It should be clear, not vague. Writing should be concise and arranged in a way that makes logical sense.
- It is often informed by other scholars' work; thus, you must indicate where and from whom you obtained your facts, concepts, or quotes through in-text citations and references.

SPELLING

One essential aspect of good writing is accurate spelling. With computer spell checkers, spelling may seem simple, but these programs fail to catch every error. Spell checkers identify some errors, but writers still have to consider the flagged words and suggested replacements. Writers are still responsible for the errors that remain. For example, if the spell checker highlights a word that is misspelled and gives you a list of alternative words, you may choose a word that you never intended even though it is spelled correctly. This can change the meaning of your sentence. It can also confuse readers, making them lose interest. Computer spell checkers are useful editing tools, but they can never replace human knowledge of spelling rules, homonyms, and commonly misspelled words.

The best way to master new words is to understand the key spelling rules. Keep in mind, however, that some spelling rules carry exceptions. A spell checker may catch these exceptions, but knowing them yourself will prepare you to spell accurately on the first try. Take note of the following exceptions:

- Write *i* before *e* except after *c*, or when pronounced as *y* like “neighbor” or “weigh.”
- When words end in a consonant plus *y*, drop the *y* and add an *i* before adding another ending.
- Homonyms are words that sound like one another but have different meanings.

CAPITALIZATION

Text messages, casual e-mails, and instant messages often ignore the rules of capitalization. In fact, it can seem unnecessary to capitalize in these contexts. In other, more formal forms of communication, however, knowing the basic rules of capitalization and using capitalization correctly gives the reader the impression that you choose your words carefully and care about the ideas you are conveying.

When writing, you should always capitalize:

- the first word of a sentence
- proper nouns—these include the names of specific people, places, objects, streets, buildings, events, or titles of individuals
- days of the week, months of the year, and holidays

Be aware that other rules of capitalization may apply to your academic work. For example, the APA style guide stipulates when words should, or should not, be capitalized.

PUNCTUATION

As the little marks between words, punctuation is like a system of traffic signs: it guides the reader toward the intended meaning of the words just as road signs guide drivers to their destination. They tell the reader when to go, when to pause, when to stop, when to go again, when to pay close attention, and when to turn (Truss, 2003, p. 7). They're also crucial for avoiding accidents. A paragraph without punctuation—no periods, commas, apostrophes, et cetera—quickly spins out into utter nonsense and kills the reader's understanding of the writer's meaning.

GRAMMAR

Grammar organizes the relationships between words in a sentence, especially between the doer and action, so that the reader can understand in detail who's doing what. When you botch those connections with grammar errors, however, you risk confusing the reader. Severe errors force the reader to interpret what you meant. If the reader then acts on an interpretation different from the meaning you intended, major consequences can ensue, including expensive damage control. You can avoid causing confusion by following some simple rules for how to structure your sentences grammatically. By following these rules habitually, especially when you apply them at the proofreading stage, not only will your writing be clearer to the reader and better organized, but your thought process may become more organized as well.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Perhaps the most common grammatical error is subject-verb disagreement, which is when you pair a singular subject noun with a plural verb (usually ending without an s) instead of a singular one (usually ending with an s), or vice versa. Look for subject nouns (the main doers of the action) and the main verbs that the subject noun takes and make sure that they are in agreement according to expected grammar rules.

Incorrect: The patient are coming to the clinic for her appointment at 2:30.

Correct: The patient is coming to the clinic for her appointment at 2:30.

Comma-Splices

A comma splice is simply two independent clauses separated by only a comma. Fixing a comma splice is as easy as swapping out the comma for the correct punctuation or adding a conjunction (e.g., for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), depending on the relationship you want to express between the two clauses.

Incorrect: The new medication is expected to be effective, more testing is required.

Correct: The new medication is expected to be effective. More testing is required.

Correct: The new medication is expected to be effective, but more testing is required.

Run-On Sentences

Whereas a comma splice places the wrong punctuation between independent clauses, a run-on (a.k.a. fused) sentence simply omits punctuation between them. Once you've found that missing link, fixing a run-on is just a simple matter of adding the correct punctuation and perhaps a conjunction, depending on the relationship between the clauses.

Incorrect: Making lifestyle changes can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease and regular exercise can lower your blood pressure it is best to exercise at least five days a week for 30 minutes each day.

Correct: Making lifestyle changes can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease. Regular exercise can lower your blood pressure; it is best to exercise at least five days a week for 30 minutes each day.

Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is one that's incomplete usually because either the main-clause subject or predicate (or both) is missing. The fix is to join the fragment subordinate clause with its main clause nearby so they're in the same sentence. You can do this in one of two ways, either of which is perfectly correct: 1) delete the period between the sentences and make the subordinating conjunction lowercase if the subordinate clause follows the main clause, or; 2) move the subordinate clause so that it precedes the main clause, separate the two with a comma, and make the first letter of the main clause lowercase.

Incorrect: Health insurance in the United States can be a complicated subject. Because there are many types of plans and different reasons for out-of-pocket costs.

Correct: Health insurance in the United States can be a complicated subject because there are many types of plans and different reasons for out-of-pocket costs.

Correct: Because there are many types of plans and different reasons for out-of-pocket costs, health insurance in the United States can be a complicated subject.

Point of View and Tone

Point of view refers to the vantage point from which a story, event, report, or other written work is told. The point of view in which you write depends on your purpose for writing. For most academic writing, you will use the third person (e.g., he, she, it, they.). The third-person point of view emphasizes the information instead of the writer.

Tone is the general character or attitude of a piece of writing, and it is highly dependent on word choice and structure. It should match the intended purpose and audience of the text. [Table 2.1](#) describes how you can achieve an academic tone in your writing.

Table 2.1: How to Achieve an Academic Tone

Exclude	Include
First-person pronouns (e.g., I, my, me) and second-person pronouns (e.g., you, your, yours).	Third-person pronouns (e.g., he, she, it, they).
Contractions; instead, use the full words.	Excellent spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Follow expected capitalization rules. Use correct subject-verb agreement.
Poor connectives. <i>But</i> , in particular, is a very poor connective. Also, avoid the overuse of <i>and</i> .	Instead of <i>but</i> , use words like <i>however</i> , <i>although</i> , <i>nevertheless</i> , <i>yet</i> , or <i>though</i> . Try alternatives to <i>and</i> , such as <i>plus</i> , <i>in addition</i> , <i>along with</i> , <i>also</i> , <i>as well as</i> , <i>moreover</i> , or <i>together with</i> .
Colloquial language.	Academic vocabulary (sometimes this is discipline-specific, such as technical or medical terms).
Hyperbolic language or emotive language.	Clear and succinct writing. Appeal to the readers' minds, not feelings.
	Accurate citations, both in-text and the reference list.

Word Choice and Organization

Effective writing involves making conscious choices with words. When you prepare to sit down to write your first draft, you likely have already completed some freewriting exercises, chosen your topic, developed your thesis statement, written an outline, and even selected your sources. When it is time to write your first draft, start to consider which words to use to best convey your ideas to the reader.

Specific words and images make your writing more interesting to read. Whenever possible, avoid overly general words in your writing; instead, try to replace general language with particular nouns, verbs, and modifiers that convey details and that bring your words to life. Add words that provide color, texture, sound, and even smell to your writing.

However, as you edit your work to incorporate specific words, avoid using language that your readers are unlikely to understand. **Jargon** is a type of shorthand communication often used in the workplace. Experts in many professional fields use specialized and technical expressions that allow them to communicate efficiently and clearly with each other. Such language is often incomprehensible for nonexperts and should be avoided in writing for general readers.

Slang describes informal words that are considered nonstandard English. Slang often changes with passing fads. Groups of people with similar skills and interests often develop slang that allows them to express ideas quickly and

vividly. Slang is generally considered too casual for most academic writing, but it may be appropriate for personal essays.

The order in which you place your ideas will also enhance, or detract from, the clarity of your writing. Paragraphs are guides for readers. Each new paragraph signals either a new idea, further development of an existing idea, or a new direction. An effective paragraph has a main point supported by evidence, is organized in a sensible way, and is neither too short nor too long. When a paragraph is too short, it often lacks enough evidence and examples to back up your claims. When a paragraph is too long, readers can lose the point you are making. Paragraphs help readers make their way through prose writing by presenting it in manageable chunks. Transitions ([Table 2.2](#)) link sentences and paragraphs so that readers can clearly understand how the points you are making relate to one another.

Table 2.2: Types of Transitional Words and Phrases

Type of Transition	Words and Phrases
To compare or show similarity	Likewise, similarly, in like manner
To contrast or change direction	But, yet, however, nevertheless, still, at the same time, on the other hand, conversely
To add to	Also, and, furthermore, next, then, in addition
To give examples	For example, for instance, to illustrate, specifically, thus
To agree or concede	Certainly, of course, to be sure, granted
To summarize or conclude	Finally, in conclusion, in short, in other words, thus, in summary
To show time	First, second, third, next, then, soon, meanwhile, later, currently, concurrently, at the same time, eventually, at last, finally
To show a spatial relationship	Here, there, in the background, in the foreground, in the distance, to the left, to the right, near, above, below

Evidence (References)

Citing is the practice of giving credit to the sources that inform your work. As a student, citing is important because it shows your reader (or professor) that you have invested time in learning what has already been learned and thought about the topic before offering your own perspective (see [Academic Integrity](#)). As a scholarly writer, providing accurate citations puts your work and ideas into an academic context. They tell your reader that you've done your research and know what others have said about your topic. Not only do citations provide context for your work but they also lend credibility and authority to your claims.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic research leads us to the insight that comes from gaining perspectives and understandings from other people through what we read, watch, and hear. In academic work, we must tell our readers who and what led us to our conclusions. Documenting our research is important because people rely on academic research to be authoritative, so it is essential for academic conversations to be as clear as possible. Documentation for clarity is a shared and respected practice, and it represents a core value of the academy called **academic integrity**.

In other words, you must take full responsibility for your work, acknowledge your own efforts, and acknowledge the contributions of others' efforts. Writing with integrity requires accurately representing what you contributed, as well as acknowledging how others have influenced your work. When you are a student, an accurate representation of your knowledge is important because it will allow both you and your professors to know the extent to which you have developed as a scholar. Part of that development is evidenced by how you apply the rules for acknowledging the work of others.

Academic integrity is important because it ensures fairness in the education that students pursue, in the academic work that students complete, and in the grades that students earn. If students expect their work to be marked and to receive grades for the work that they do, then they need to prepare, complete, and submit work that is their own – work that reflects their own understanding of the course content and work that demonstrates that they're developing a mastery of the skill set that they'll need to progress through the course and program and to succeed in their workplace after graduation. Cheating may get you the right answer on a particular exam question, but it won't teach you how to apply knowledge in the world after school, nor will it give you a foundation of knowledge for learning more advanced material. When you cheat, you cheat yourself out of opportunities.

You also risk failing the course or even expulsion from the college or university. Each institution has its own definitions of and penalties for academic dishonesty, but most include cheating, plagiarism, and fabrication or falsification. The exact details of what is or is not allowed vary somewhat among different universities and colleges and even among instructors, so you should be sure to check your school's website and your instructor's guidelines to see what rules apply. Ignorance of the rules is seldom considered a valid defense.

WHAT IS PLAGIARISM?

Plagiarism is the unauthorized or uncredited use of the writings or ideas of another in your writing. While it might not be as tangible as auto theft or burglary, plagiarism is still a form of theft. In the academic world, plagiarism is a serious matter because ideas in the forms of research, creative work, and original thought are highly valued.

If information is very well known to most people, it may be considered "common knowledge," and it does not need to be cited. For example, the months of the year, the capitals of countries, and the freezing temperature of water constitute common knowledge. However, what is commonly known in one field may not be known by the general public. If you aren't sure if something can be considered common knowledge, it is always safer to cite it.

If you are not from the United States, the American attitudes in reference to plagiarism may be different. For example, in some cultures, using the words or ideas of others can be a sign of honor and respect. In these countries, the ownership of words may not be as valued as it is with authors performing research from the United States. Due to the strict standards required for high-level research, high value is placed on the words written within the article. As such, some actions that may not constitute "plagiarism" in some cultures will be judged by the standards of the United States. If these standards are not adhered to, you may be subjected to grade reduction or academic counseling and/or punishment, as this is considered a form of theft.

Most students understand that it's wrong to plagiarize but are confused about what plagiarism really is. Understand that plagiarism can take many forms.

Unintentional Plagiarism

Unintentional plagiarism is the result of improperly paraphrasing, summarizing, quoting, or citing your evidence in your academic writing. Generally, writers accidentally plagiarize because they simply don't know or they fail to follow the rules for giving credit to the ideas of others in their writing.

Unintentional plagiarism includes:

- failing to cite sources.
- not using quotation marks around quoted material.
- using another person's overall sentence structure and ideas while replacing certain words from the original work with synonyms (this includes using a website or program to make such changes).
- copying phrases from various sources and using them in your work (also known as patchwriting).
- copying a picture or other type of media file without crediting the source.

Both purposeful and unintentional plagiarism is wrong, against the rules, and can result in harsh punishments. Ignoring or not knowing the rules of how to not plagiarize and properly cite evidence might be an explanation, but it is not an excuse.

Collusion

Collusion means working together with others although explicitly being told to work individually. It is different from collaboration, which is working together on an assignment as a group as explicitly permitted or required by your instructor.

Collusion includes:

- working on individual assignments with a classmate.
- discussing online quizzes and exams with others.
- sharing computer code that is intended to be individually written.
- receiving unauthorized help from a tutor or other person to complete assignments.
- in group projects, misrepresenting the individual contributions of the group members.

Contract Cheating

The most severe form of misrepresentation of something as your own is called **contract cheating**, which happens when a person completes an assignment for a student and the student then submits it as their own.

Contract cheating includes:

- submitting a paper from a so-called "tutoring" service or "essay mill" as your own, for which you paid.
- submitting a paper that someone else wrote for you (for example, a friend or a family member) as your

own, no matter if you paid for it or not.

- swapping papers with another student and submitting each other's papers as your own, even if you made some changes.
- producing work for a fellow student (with or without being paid), and they submit it as their own. In this case, you are deliberately aiding another student to behave fraudulently, and both of you will be subject to disciplinary actions.

Self-Plagiarism

Self-plagiarism is often described as the reuse of one's own previous work without acknowledging that you are doing so or by not citing the original work. It is "recycling" one's own work without referencing the earlier work.

Consult your college or university's code of academic conduct to determine whether reusing past work without citing it is considered to be a violation of academic integrity. Understand that your instructors may also have policies pertaining to if and in which circumstances reusing work is acceptable.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU PLAGIARIZE?

The consequence of plagiarism can range in severity, including:

- you may receive a zero for the writing assignment.
- the instructor may give you an opportunity to write the assignment again. However, not all instructors will allow for second chances.
- you may receive a failing grade in the course.
- you may be expelled (forced to leave) from your college or university.
- the information may be noted on your transcript.

For more information, consult your course syllabus and your college or university's code of academic conduct.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Knowing what not to do is only the first step. Understanding how to quote, paraphrase, and summarize ideas from other scholars will help you maintain your own academic integrity.

QUOTING

Quoting means taking a part of a source word for word as it is. Quotes can be at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a sentence. However, it is a good practice to introduce quotes with some sort of statement that signals to the reader that information is coming that is not your own. Short quotes always require that you enclose them in quotation marks so the reader knows that these are the exact words you took from your source. Not putting quotation marks around a short quote is considered a form of plagiarism. Long quotes are put in a block indented from the remaining text and have no quotation marks.

PARAPHRASING

Paraphrasing means rewriting someone else's idea in your own words (i.e., using different vocabulary and sentence structure than the original source) without changing the original meaning. A good paraphrase demonstrates mastery of a topic, which is an important part of most assignments. Paraphrasing also allows you to maintain a consistent voice throughout your assignment and make better use of the material by emphasizing key concepts that are more relevant to your work or more resonant with your reader.

Try using this four-step method for effective paraphrase writing:

- Step 1: Read the original text in its context until you understand it fully.
 - Trying to paraphrase information out of context can lead to misunderstanding and therefore misrepresenting the information. Before trying to paraphrase something, read the passage in context and ask questions like:
 - What is the focus?
 - How does this information relate to my research topic?
 - What was the authors' main finding/conclusion?
 - Once you have answered these questions, you will be prepared to identify the specific pieces of information that are relevant to your paper, and that you may want to paraphrase. Identify any words from the original that are essential terminology and cannot or should not be changed. Check your understanding of any unfamiliar words and concepts in a dictionary.
- Step 2: Without looking at the original text, write a first draft of the paraphrase.
- Step 3: Compare your paraphrase to the original passage to ensure it accurately conveys the ideas in your own words.
 - Ask yourself:
 - Am I presenting the meaning of the passage accurately?
 - Have I used exact wording from the original unnecessarily?
 - Are there words or turns of phrases that are unique to the original that I want to retain and therefore must put in quotation marks?
- Step 4: Revise the paraphrase if necessary. Integrate it into your assignment, making sure it is properly cited.

SUMMARIZING

Similar to paraphrasing, **summarizing** also involves restating a text or passage in your own words. However, a summary only restates the main points of a text and therefore is usually much shorter than the original. You would paraphrase when you want to explain a concept in detail, while you would summarize to convey the highlights of a longer source in a short space. The process for writing a summary is similar to that for writing a paraphrase, except summary writing involves leaving out most of the details of the original and highlighting only the key points.

Try using this four-step method for effective summary writing:

- Step 1: Read the original text until you understand it fully and separate the most important points from the supporting details.

- Ask questions like:
 - What do you want the reader to take from the text?
 - What is the focus?
 - How does this information relate to my research topic?
 - What were the authors' main findings/conclusions?
- Identify any words from the original that are essential terminology and cannot or should not be changed. Check your understanding of any unfamiliar words and concepts in a dictionary.
- Step 2: Without looking at the original text, write a first draft of the summary.
- Step 3: Compare your summary to the original to ensure it accurately conveys the main ideas in your own words.
 - Ask yourself:
 - Am I presenting the meaning of the original accurately?
 - Have I used exact wording from the original unnecessarily?
 - Are there words or turns of phrases that are unique to the original that I want to retain and therefore must put in quotation marks?
- Step 4: Revise the summary if necessary. Integrate it into your assignment, making sure it is properly cited.

When to Use Which

One common question that most new scholars ask is “How do I know when to quote, paraphrase, or summarize?” There is no easy answer, it just takes practice. You will work with a number of instructors who will have different ideas on what you should do. To start, here are a few general guidelines.

Use quotes when you want to:

- add the power of the author’s words to support your argument or claims.
- disagree with something specific an author said.
- highlight a specific passage.
- compare or contrast points of view.

Paraphrase when you want to:

- clarify a short passage from a text.
- avoid overusing quotations.
- explain a point when exact wording isn’t critical.
- articulate the main ideas of a passage or part.
- report numerical data or statistics.

Summarize when you want to:

- give an overview of a topic.
- describe information (from several sources) about a topic.

NOTE-TAKING

When you want to use your researched information to support your point of view, you then decide whether you want to use a direct quote, a paraphrase, or a summary of the original. Having the originals in front of you will allow you to double-check that you are quoting accurately and that you are paraphrasing properly. However, careless note-taking is one of the major factors in unintentional plagiarism. It is very easy to cut and paste information and lose track of the sources you used or mix what you borrowed with your own notes. As you read your sources of information, it is important to find a system for writing down the key points that you will use in your paper. Consider the following note-taking techniques:

Collect information word for word.

- Write down the citation information.
- Copy the exact text and put it in quotation marks.
- Add your own thoughts in a different color.

Collect information and paraphrase it right away.

- Write down the citation information.
- Write out your paraphrase.
- Add your own thoughts in a different color.

If you like to read digital files, you may want to take notes with a program like OneNote.

- Paste the file you are reading into the notebook.
- Make notes of key information, paraphrases, and analysis alongside the digital file.

Key Takeaways

- Regardless of which course it is written for, academic writing shares similar characteristics. It follows the expected rules of spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar. It has an objective *point of view* and a formal *tone*. The choice of words is deliberate. Ideas are organized in a logical order. It relies on *evidence*.
- *Academic integrity* is a core value of higher education. When you work with integrity, you take full responsibility for your efforts and give credit to those whose work you've used.
- *Plagiarism*, whether intentional or unintentional, violates academic integrity standards. Understand that it can take many forms and may result in harsh punishment.
- Knowing how to accurately *quote*, *summarize*, or *paraphrase* will help you maintain your academic integrity.

Vocabulary

- **Academic integrity** – accurately representing your efforts, as well as how others influenced your work
- **Collusion** – working together with others despite being instructed to work individually
- **Contract cheating** – when Person A completes an assignment for Person B, and Person B submits the work as their own
- **Jargon** – shorthand communication used by experts
- **Paraphrasing** – rewriting another person's idea in your own words without changing the original meaning
- **Plagiarism** – a form of theft; the unauthorized or uncredited use of another's work or ideas
- **Point of view** – the vantage point of written work; academic writing is usually in the third-person point of view
- **Quoting** – using part of a source word for word as it is
- **Self-plagiarism** – recycling one's prior work without acknowledging that the work has been reused; may constitute a violation of academic integrity standards (see your institution's academic integrity code)
- **Slang** – informal communication that often changes with passing fads
- **Summarizing** – restating another person's idea in your own words; unlike a paraphrase, a summary only highlights key points
- **Tone** – the general character or attitude of a piece of work, as determined by word choice and structure

CHAPTER 2 TEST YOURSELF

Please see Appendix C for an offline copy of the [Chapter 2 Test Yourself](#) activity. To view interactive H5P elements that have been excluded from this version of the text, please visit it online here: <https://pressbooks.uwf.edu/healthcarecareerfoundations/chapter/chapter-2-academic-writing-and-integrity/#h5p-18>

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Collusion

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Chapter 3: Healthcare Careers

Learning Objectives

- Evaluate various healthcare careers based on job qualifications and industry outlooks.
- Assess the skills required to be a competent healthcare professional.
- Understand the different career paths available in healthcare.

INTRODUCTION

Every day, around the clock, people who work in the healthcare industry provide care for millions of people, from newborns to the very ill. In fact, the healthcare industry is one of the largest providers of jobs in the United States. Many health jobs are in hospitals. Others are in nursing homes, doctors' offices, dentists' offices, outpatient clinics, and laboratories. In this chapter, we will explore past, current, and future healthcare employment trends, review the skills necessary to be a successful health professional, and examine the many different types of occupations in the health field.

Chapter Resources

[Key Takeaways](#)[Vocabulary](#)[Test Yourself](#)

HEALTHCARE CAREERS BACKGROUND

HEALTHCARE EMPLOYMENT: PAST AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Healthcare jobs make up a significant portion of the U.S. labor force, with a wide range of positions available to suit a variety of skills and interests. Between 2012 and 2022, total employment in the U.S. (excluding farm workers) grew by 15%, or 19.7 million jobs. In comparison, the healthcare sector grew by 16% (4.2 million jobs) ([Figure 3.1](#)) (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.).

However, at different times between 2020 and 2022, many areas of the U.S. faced healthcare workforce shortages tied to COVID-19 surges. COVID-19 put increased demands on the healthcare workforce in terms of messaging, immunizations, testing, and inpatient/outpatient care while often limiting the supply of healthcare workers able to respond. While some healthcare workers were stretched in the early phase of the pandemic and in subsequent surges trying to address the needs of COVID-19 patients, other healthcare workers not involved in the response were furloughed or had their hours reduced, as facilities temporarily closed or limited elective procedures to minimize revenue loss. The pandemic also exacerbated existing workforce shortages faced by home care

agencies. Some workers left the workforce due to fear of contracting the virus or infecting family members or clients; others were unable to maintain sufficient hours because clients refused visits because they were fearful of allowing anyone into their homes and because fewer clients were being referred to home health when many states restricted elective surgeries.

Significant actions by federal, state, and local authorities as well as by health systems and individual providers have attempted to address these disruptions. Some actions were new efforts addressing specific costs associated with testing for, immunization against, and treatment of COVID-19. Others sought to address workforce capacity shortages, such as increasing Medicare funding to support physician training. However, these pandemic-related disruptions and workforce shortages took place within the context of significant pre-pandemic shortages in some geographic areas, many of which were exacerbated by the uneven and extended duration of the pandemic, as well as pre-existing concerns about high levels of burnout and mental health challenges for many healthcare workers.

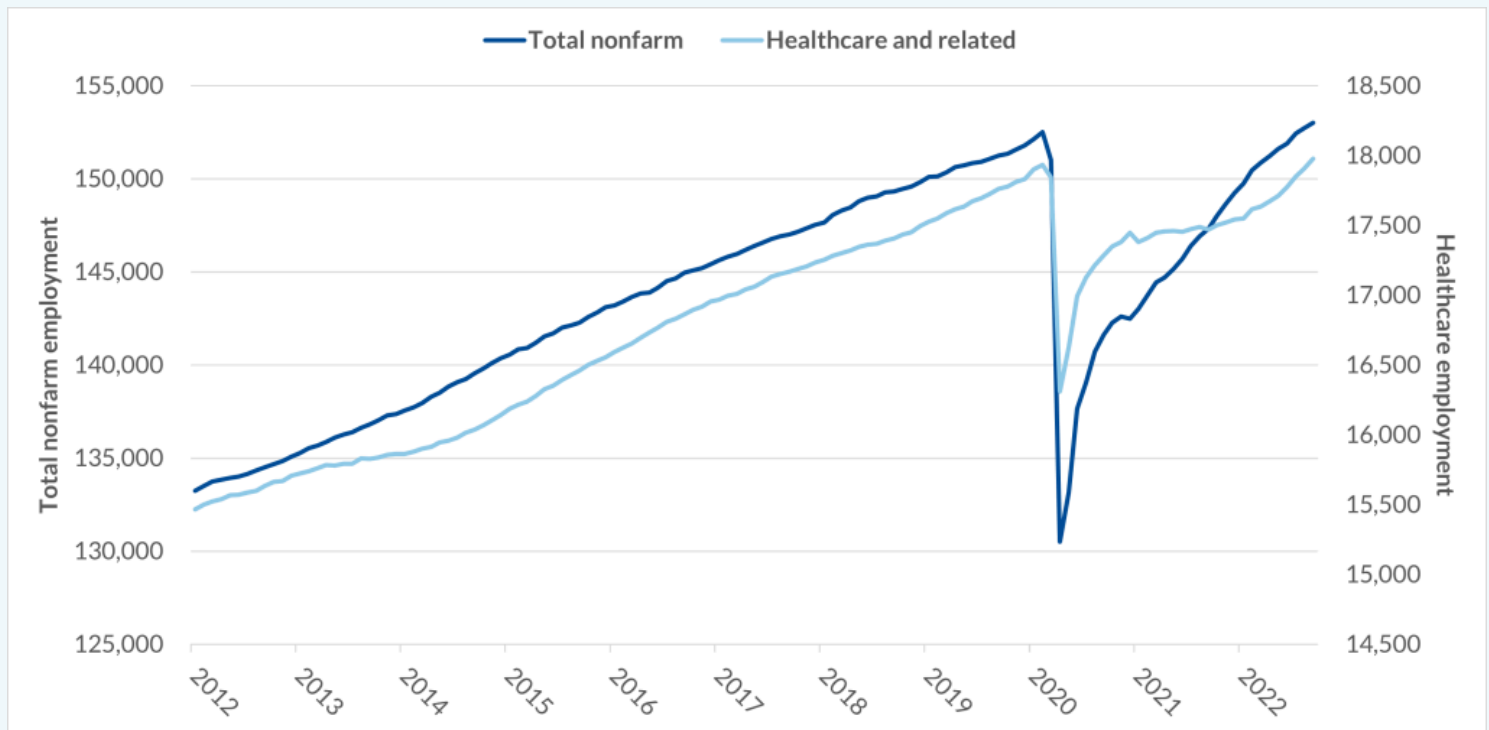


Figure 3.1: Healthcare and related employment, January 2012 – September 2022. Data exclude sole proprietors, the unincorporated self-employed, unpaid volunteer or family workers, farm workers, and domestic workers. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Employment Statistics (wage and salary employment, seasonally adjusted). Healthcare and related series include CES6562110001, CES6562120001, CES6562130001, CES6562140001, CES6562150001, CES6562160001, CES6562190001, CES6562200001, CES6562300001, CES9091622001, CES9092262201, and CES9093262201. [Image description.]

Nonetheless, the healthcare sector is, and is expected to remain, a significant piece of the U.S. economy. As of September 2022, healthcare and healthcare-related occupations comprise approximately 12% (18 million) of jobs in the U.S.; in other words, more than one in 10 employed Americans work in healthcare or healthcare-related jobs. Most work in hospitals (37%) and offices of health practitioners (28%), with nursing and residential care facilities (17%), outpatient, laboratory, and other ambulatory services (9%), and home healthcare services (9%) accounting for the remaining jobs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d.).

Overall employment in healthcare occupations is projected to grow 13% from 2021 to 2031, much faster than the average for all occupations; this increase is expected to result in about 2 million new jobs over the decade. In addition to new jobs from growth, opportunities arise from the need to replace workers who leave their occupations permanently. About 1.9 million openings each year, on average, are projected to come from growth and replacement needs.

CORE SKILLS IN HEALTHCARE

To be successful in any field, it is expected that workers within that industry possess certain competencies. A **competency** is the capability to apply or use a set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully perform “critical work functions” or tasks in a defined work setting. Not to be confused with competence, a competency describes a behavior but does not attempt to describe a level of performance. A **competency model** is a collection of competencies that together define successful performance in a particular work setting.

There are many career paths in healthcare, each with its own set of requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities. However, common competencies apply to all occupations within the field. Developed by the Employment and Training Administration and Health Professionals Network, the Fundamentals of Health Care Competency Model describes what a worker needs to know and be able to do in order to be successful in the field.

Select Competencies from the Fundamentals of Health Care Competency Model

- **Interpersonal Skills**
 - Maintain open lines of communication with others.
 - Interact respectfully and cooperatively with others who are of a different race, culture, or age, or have different abilities, gender, or sexual orientation.
- **Integrity**
 - Behaving ethically.
 - Accept responsibility for one’s decisions and actions and for those of one’s group, team, or department.
- **Professionalism**
 - Deal calmly and effectively with stressful or difficult situations.
 - Accept criticism tactfully and attempt to learn from it.
 - Dress appropriately for occupational and worksite requirements.
- **Lifelong Learning**
 - Learn and accept help from supervisors and co-workers.
 - Take charge of personal career development by identifying occupational interests, strengths, options, and opportunities.
- **Teamwork**

- Develop constructive and cooperative working relationships with others.
- Work as part of a team, contributing to the group's effort to achieve goals.
- **Problem Solving and Decision-Making**
 - Make difficult decisions even in highly ambiguous or ill-defined situations.
- **Business Fundamentals**
 - Recognize one's role in the functioning of the organization and understand the potential impact one's own performance can have on the success of the organization.
- **Health and Safety**
 - Take actions to ensure the safety of self and others, in accordance with established personal and job site safety practices.

For the full list, see "[Fundamentals of Health Care Competency Model](#)" from the [Competency Model Clearinghouse](#).

CHOOSING A CAREER

To understand what type of work suits you and to be able to convey that to others to get hired, you must become an expert in knowing who you are. Gaining self-knowledge is a lifelong process, and college is the perfect time to gain and adapt this fundamental information. The following are some of the types of information that you should have about yourself:

- **Interests:** Things that you like and want to know more about. These often take the form of ideas, information, knowledge, and topics.
- **Skills/Aptitudes:** Things that you either do well or can do well. These can be natural or learned and are usually skills—things we can demonstrate in some way.
- **Values:** Things that you believe in. Frequently, these are conditions and principles.
- **Personality:** Things that combine to make you distinctive. Often, this shows in the way you present yourself to the world. Aspects of personality are customarily described as qualities, features, thoughts, and behaviors.

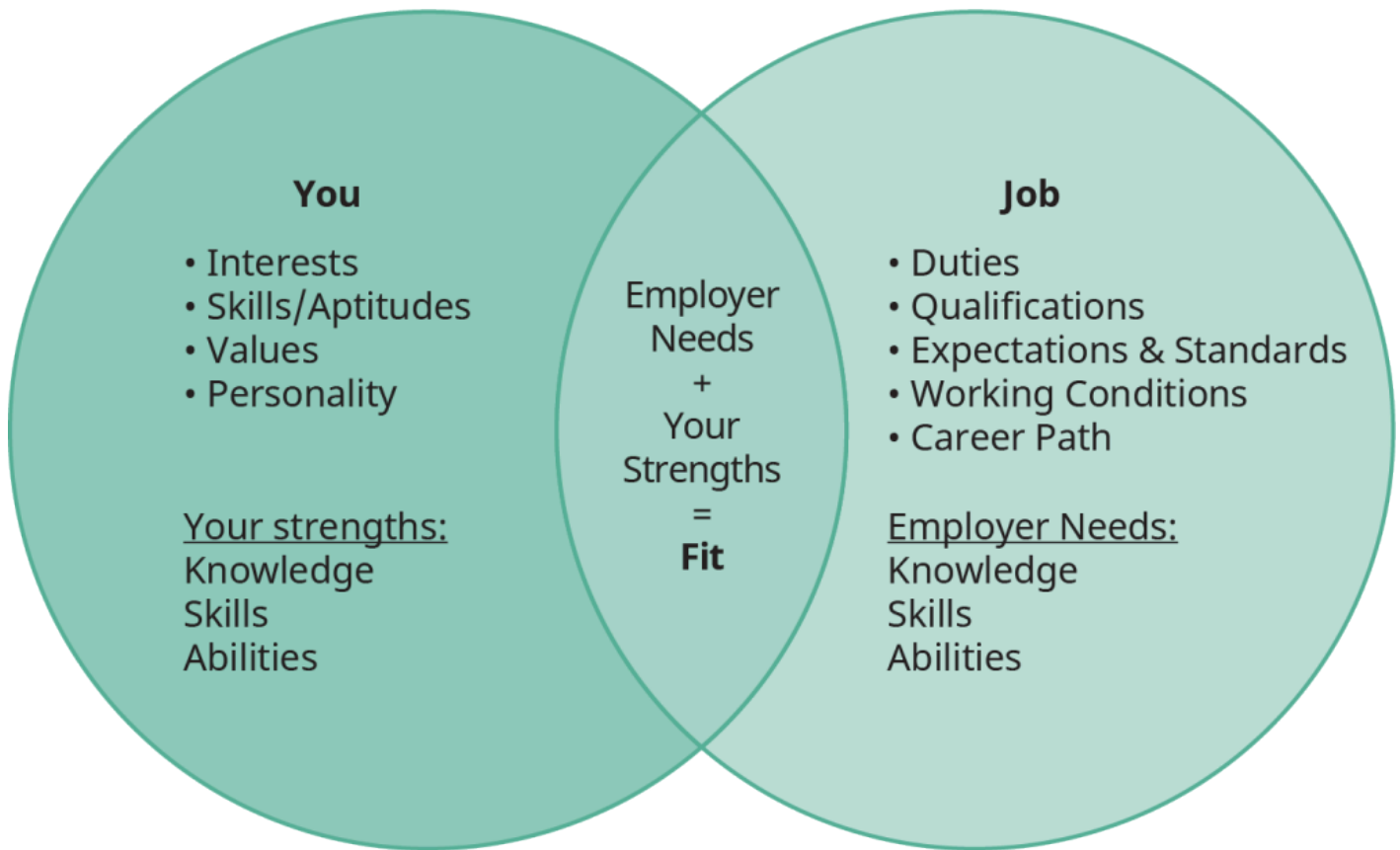


Image 3.1: Your fit for a job lies at the intersection of your attributes and the elements of the position. When your strengths align with the employer's needs, both can mutually benefit. [Image description.](#)

OTHER FACTORS

When considering your desired career path, also think about the factors that will influence your success as a student and future healthcare professional. Ask yourself the following:

- How much time must I invest before I actually start making money in this career? Will I need to spend additional time in school? If so, can I afford to wait?
- Will this career provide me with the kind of income I need in the short term and the security I'll want in the longer term? What investment will I need to make to be successful in this field (education, tools, franchise fees, et cetera.)?
- How will this career affect my personal and family life? Do friends and family members who know me well feel strongly (for or against) about this career choice? How important is their input?
- What physical and social factors do I desire in my career? For example, does this career necessitate working conditions that do not align with my needs or abilities? Will I be exposed to hazardous conditions? If so, am I comfortable with that possibility? Will this career require too much or too little interaction with other people for my preferences? Will the work be highly routine or challenging?

Additionally, know whether you must obtain credentialing beyond your college education before you can begin working, as this may add additional time and cost to your career plan. **Licenses** and **certifications** show

that a person has the specific knowledge or skill needed to do a job. Although the two terms may be used interchangeably, a license and certification refer to separate credentials:

- License
 - Awarded by a governmental licensing agency
 - Gives legal authority to work in an occupation
 - Requires meeting predetermined criteria, such as having a degree or passing a state-administered exam
- Certification
 - Awarded by a professional organization or other nongovernmental body
 - Is not legally required in order to work in an occupation
 - Requires demonstrating competency to do a specific job, often through an examination process

Typically, you earn these credentials after you've completed your education. Sometimes, you become licensed or certified after you've gained practical experience, such as through an internship, residency, or time on the job. Earning a license or certification involves meeting standards, which often includes passing an exam. An employer may require either credential.

These terms should not be confused with accreditation, which is the recognition from an accrediting agency that an institution maintains a certain level of educational standards requisite for its graduates to gain admission to other reputable institutions of higher learning or to achieve credentials for professional practice.

Choosing A Career: Self-Reflection Activity



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.uwf.edu/healthcarecareerfoundations/?p=30#h5p-22>

OCCUPATIONAL PROFILES

The following represent the five groups of occupations associated with the healthcare industry in the U.S.

Readers using the PDF or a screen reader, please visit [Appendix A](#) to view the occupational profiles in table format.

Key Takeaways

- Over the past 20 years, the healthcare industry has made up a significant proportion of jobs in the U.S. labor force, and that trend is expected to continue through at least 2031.
- Healthcare professionals are expected to possess specific competencies. Engaging in self-reflection is an important step to understanding which *competencies* (and therefore which career paths) are most suitable to your interests, abilities, and needs.
- Many occupations are available to individuals interested in a healthcare career, including those in the areas of biotechnology research and development, diagnostic services, health informatics, support services, and therapeutic services.

Vocabulary

- **Competency** – the capability to apply or use a set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully perform tasks in a defined work setting
- **Competency model** – a collection of competencies that define successful performance in a particular work setting
- **License** – a credential awarded by a governmental licensing agency that gives legal authority to work in an occupation and requires meeting predetermined criteria
- **Certification** – a credential awarded by a professional organization or other nongovernmental body that is not legally required in order to work in an occupation but demonstrates competency

CHAPTER 3 TEST YOURSELF

Please see Appendix C for an offline copy of the [Chapter 3 Test Yourself](#) activity.

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Healthcare Careers Background

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Other Factors

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Occupational descriptions and data from the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) except where noted. Published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor under a public domain license. Lightly edited for brevity and flow.

IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

Figure 3.1: Line graph comparing employment trends. The X-axis represents one-year increments, beginning in 2013 and ending in 2022. The left y-axis represents total nonfarm employment in 5,000 increments, beginning at 125,000 and ending at 155,000. The right y-axis represents healthcare and related employment in 5,000 increments, beginning at 14,500 and ending at 18,500. The graph shows steady growth in both nonfarm and healthcare and related employment between 2012 and 2020. Both lines have a steep decrease in 2020. The graph ends with both lines increasing in 2022 to pre-2020 numbers. [[Return to Figure 3.1](#)].

Image 3.1: A Venn diagram showing the relationship between “You” and “Career Fitness.” In the left circle, the “You” attributes are interests skills/aptitudes, values, and personality. Your strengths include your knowledge, skills, and abilities. In the right circle are the characteristics of a job: duties, qualifications, expectations and standards, working conditions, and career path. The employer’s needs include knowledge, skills, and abilities. Where the two circles intersect is text that reads “Employer Needs + Your Strengths = Fit”. [[Return to Image 3.1](#)].

Chapter 4: Job Skills

Learning Objectives

- Differentiate between hard and soft skills in the workplace.
- Understand how to build a resume and effective cover letter.
- Describe strategies to find leads for jobs or other career opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Whether you are entering the job market for the first time or looking to advance your career, it is crucial that you not only understand which skills make you stand out as a candidate but can also articulate that to employers. This chapter will explain the types of job skills employers look for and how you can expand your skillset. You will also learn how to write a compelling resume or curriculum vitae (CV) and cover letter that can catch the attention of hiring managers. Finally, we will review strategies for searching for professional opportunities and navigating the application process.

Chapter Resources

[Key Takeaways](#)[Vocabulary](#)[Test Yourself](#)

VALUABLE WORKPLACE SKILLS

Over the course of your life span, you will develop many different skills and abilities. Before diving headfirst into your job search, you will want to know what skills you have and how to describe them. This will help you to understand exactly what you have to offer employers as well as help with teaching valuable networking skills. This will all serve to expand the information on your resume and cover letter and help provide you with an advantage over others seeking the same role. Some of these skills you will have learned from navigating everyday life situations and some will be learned more purposefully through education, training, work, and volunteer experiences.

There are two main types of skills:

- **Hard skills** (also known as technical skills) – These are specific to your industry and the type of jobs to which you are applying. They are easily quantifiable and objective abilities that you have learned and perhaps have mastered.
- **Soft skills** (also known as transferable skills) – These are more general and considered essential to

succeed in any job or industry. You develop and utilize these skills through a variety of experiences and everyday tasks. They pertain to the way you relate to people, the way you think, or the ways in which you behave.

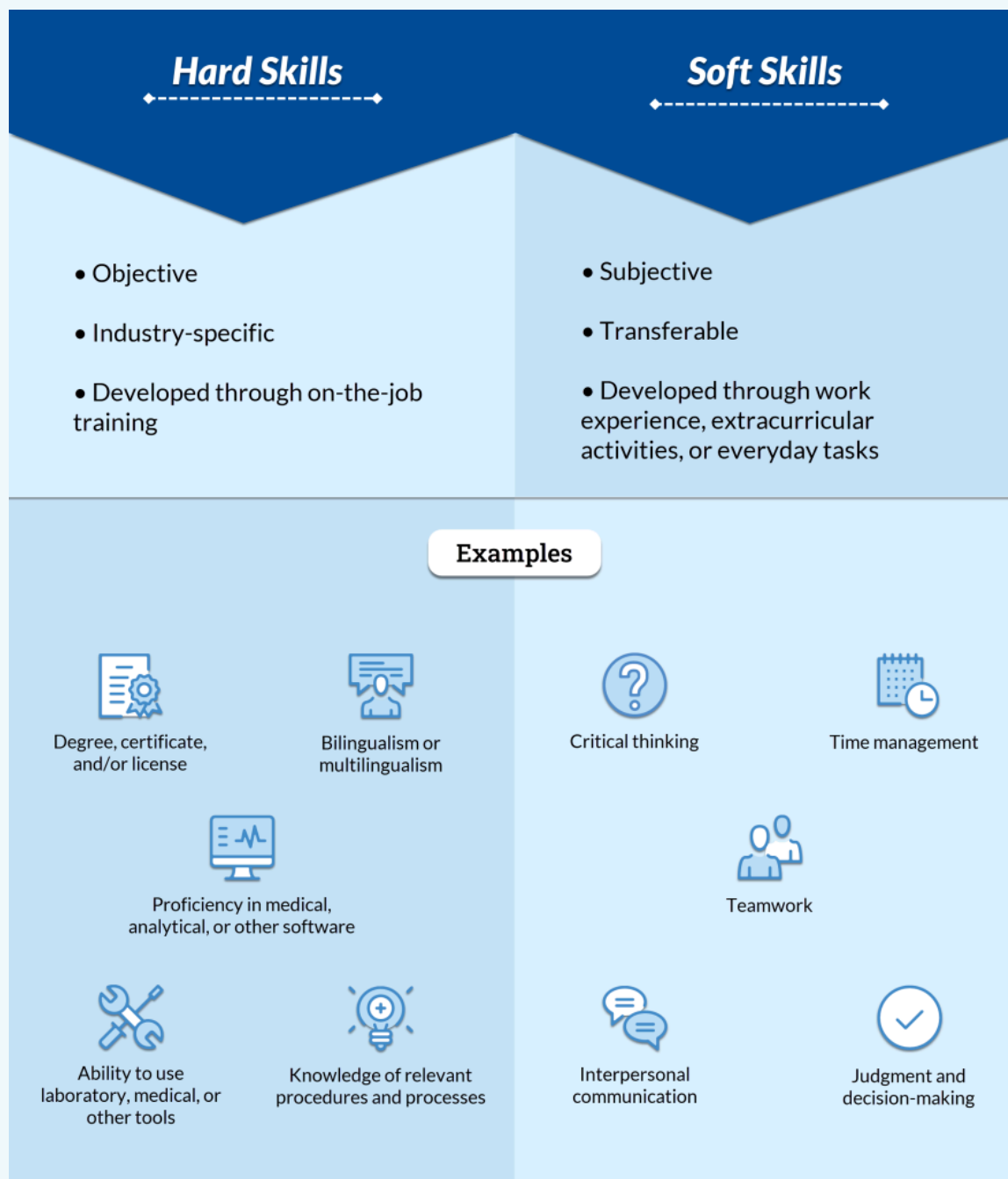


Image 4.1. A well-rounded healthcare professional has a mixture of hard and soft skills. Made with TechSmith Snagit™ assets. All rights reserved. [\[Image description\]](#).

Employers want individuals with the necessary hard and soft skills to do the job well and adapt to changes in

the workplace. Soft skills may be especially in demand today because employers are generally equipped to train new employees in a hard skill—by training them to use new computer software, for instance—but it’s much more difficult to teach an employee a soft skill such as developing rapport with coworkers or knowing how to manage conflict. An employer might prefer to hire an inexperienced worker that pays close attention to details rather than an experienced worker that may potentially cause problems on a work team.

Consulting occupational descriptions can allow you to identify the skills you possess and those you would like to develop further. In addition to the occupations listed in [Chapter 3](#), the following resources can help you brainstorm:

- [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)
- [O*NET Online](#)
- [Career OneStop](#)

GAINING NEW SKILLS

Many employers value experience as much as they do education. Internships and similar fieldwork allow you to use what you’ve learned and, sometimes more importantly, see how things work “in the real world.” These experiences drive you to communicate with others in your field and help you understand the day-to-day challenges and opportunities of people working in similar areas. Even if the internship is not at a company or organization directly in your field of study, you’ll focus on gaining transferable skills that you can apply later on.

Depending on your field of study and degree requirements, you might pursue a traditional internship or another type of training experience. Note the differences between the following types:

- **Internship** – A period of work experience in a professional organization, in which participants (interns) are exposed to and perform some of the tasks of actual employees. Internships are usually a relatively high commitment and may be paid and/or result in college credit.
- **Externship/Job Shadowing** – Usually a lower-commitment experience and shorter than internships. Participants observe work activities and perhaps undertake small projects.
- **Apprenticeship** – A defined period of on-the-job training in which the student is formally doing the job and learning specific skills. Unlike most internships, apprenticeships are usually formal requirements to attain a license or gain employment in skilled trades, and they are growing in use in healthcare.
- **Clinicals, Student Teaching, and Related Experiences** – Healthcare and other fields often have specific requirements for clinicals (learning experience in healthcare facilities) or student teaching. These are often components of the major and are required for both graduation and licensure.
- **Service Learning** – Students learn educational standards by tackling real-life problems in their community. Involvement could be hands-on, such as working in a homeless shelter. Students could also tackle broad issues in an indirect manner, such as by solving a local environmental problem.
- **Undergraduate Research** – Even as an undergrad, you may find opportunities to partake in actual research in your field of study. Colleges often have strict guidelines on types and levels of participation, and you will likely need to apply. The benefits include firsthand knowledge of a core academic activity and exposure to more people in your field.
- **Related Employment** – It may be possible to get a regular, low-level paying job directly in your field of study or in a related place of work. While it’s not essential, simply being around the profession will better

inform and prepare you.

If you do seek an internship or related activity, be aware that they can be very competitive. Work with your academic or career advisors to start the process early and put yourself in the best position to get a position. Consider all of the application components, including essays, portfolio items, and letters of recommendation; all of these may take time to generate. If possible, pursue multiple opportunities to increase your chances.

VOLUNTEERING

You can gain personally satisfying and enriching experiences by becoming more involved with your college or general community. Volunteering is one way to access a profession and get a sense of whether you will enjoy it or not, even before you do an internship. Organizations, clubs, and charities often rely on college students because of their motivation, knowledge, and increasing maturity. The work can increase your skills and abilities, providing valuable experience that will lead to positive results. In certain fields, it might be the only readily accessible approach, especially if you have no prior experience. As you gain experience volunteering, spend time reflecting on and recording your experiences so that you're better prepared to talk about them and utilize what you learned.

PLANNING A SUCCESSFUL SEARCH

A successful job search will require, at the minimum, a well-crafted resume or CV. It is also never too early to begin thinking about how to write an effective cover letter, build an e-portfolio, and prepare a list of professional references.

RESUMES

Since your resume is often your very first introduction to a prospective employer, your document needs to impress the hiring manager enough for them to want to meet with you in person and invite you for an interview.

A well-planned resume:

- Demonstrates your ability to organize and present ideas clearly.
- Shows your attention to detail by being free of errors.
- Provides details of your relevant experience and education credentials.
- Offers discussion points during an interview.

Anatomy of a Resume

Work histories come in a variety of forms; so do resumes. Although career experts enjoy debating which style is the best, ultimately you must consider which fits your current situation. Which style will allow you to best package your work history, and convey your unique qualifications?

- **Chronological resume** – Traditional format whose principal section is the “Employment Experience” section. In the chronological resume’s “Employment Experience” section, jobs are listed in reverse chronological order (starting with the most recent positions/schools and working backward), and achievements/skills are detailed underneath each position.

- **Functional resume** – Features a well-developed “Skills & Achievements” section, in which skills are organized into categories. The functional resume still includes an “Employment Experience” section, but it is streamlined to include only the basic information about each position held.
- **Hybrid resume** -Includes a well-developed “Skills & Achievements” section that highlights the candidate’s most important and relevant skills, but it also includes select bullets under each job in the “Employment Experience” section.

There are many reasons to choose one format over another. In brief, the chronological resume serves candidates with a long or uninterrupted work history in fields where the company worked for is of paramount importance. On the other hand, the functional resume serves candidates transitioning between fields, candidates shifting from a military to a civilian career, or candidates who have gained skills in various settings (workplace, academic, volunteer). The hybrid resume offers the best of both worlds.

Common resume sections

Whichever resume format you choose, familiarize yourself with the types and purposes of commonly included sections:

Contact Information

- Create a header that includes your address, telephone number, and professional e-mail address. Consider including a link to your e-portfolio or LinkedIn page.

Summary

- Think of this section as your “elevator pitch,” offering a quick impression of your personal brand. Include a few key (relevant) achievements/strengths (in bullets or sentences). Summary sections are especially useful for candidates with a long work history, or who have experienced job transitions.
- Here are two formulas for a one-sentence headline:
 - “[Field of study] graduate seeking opportunity to focus on [x,y,z] and promote [desired company’s mission or goal].”
 - “Accomplished [job title]/Certified [industry] professional holding more than [x] years of experience, specializing in [x,y,z].”

Employment Experience

- Include basic information for each job: job title, employer, dates employed, city/state (and country if outside the U.S.) of employment. Consider filtering work experience into “Related Experience” and “Experience” instead of one employment section to highlight the most relevant jobs (and downplay less significant experience). If you include internships and skilled volunteer positions, re-title this section “Experience.”

Education

- At a bare minimum, provide the following information for each educational item: the name of the school, the school’s location, your graduation date or anticipated graduation date, the degree earned, and your major (if relevant to the position you are applying to).

- Do include:
 - trainings and certifications (e.g. first aid certifications, sales seminars, writing groups).
 - your GPA (if it is 3.0 or better, and if it is expected in your industry).
 - relevant courses.
 - special accomplishments (conferences, special papers/projects, clubs, offices held, service to the school).
 - awards and scholarships (can also be included in a separate section titled Honors).
- Do not include high school if you are in college unless your high school work was outstanding or unique (like a trade/technology/arts high school).

In general, the length of a resume should be no longer than one or (at most) two pages (and each page should be full — no 1.5-page resumes). If your resume is on the longer side, your work history should justify the length. Some experts recommend one page per ten years of work history; while that may be extreme, it is better to cut weaker material than to add filler.

Create a strong first impression by keeping the format simple and professional. Use 11- or 12-point font size and web-friendly fonts. Avoid using graphics, multiple styles of bullets and fonts, tables, and columns, and ensure that your formatting is consistent throughout.

Above all else, demonstrate your attention to detail by being free of grammar and spelling errors. Proofread your resume – do not rely solely on spellcheck. If possible, have a trusted friend or family member read over your resume to catch any remaining errors.

Describing Your Accomplishments

When it comes to writing your resume, it's extremely important for you to be able to describe your accomplishments in order to set you apart from your competition. Clearly indicate and provide details of relevant experience, qualifications, and education credentials. The employer needs to be able to find the essential information in a short period of time, as often in the first step of the selection process resumes are read or scanned in only 30-60 seconds. Use keywords from the job posting and occupation-specific language/terminology.

If you haven't had a chance to brainstorm situations from your previous or current experience where you've performed exceptionally well, consider the following questions to get you thinking:

- Have you received praise from managers, supervisors, instructors, or clients?
- Have you ever been assigned a task that you could do better than others?
- Have you ever been asked to train anyone?
- How did you distinguish yourself or set yourself apart in your last job? What did you do to show your initiative?
- When did you go above and beyond your job duties to complete a task?
- Have you ever been promoted, recognized, awarded, or thanked by your coworkers?

Starting each sentence with a strong action verb will strengthen your writing and provide a clearer, more interesting picture of what you have done. Add value, provide tangible evidence, and increase credibility by including numbers, statistics, percentages, or figures when describing your experiences. The more you can present your skills and achievements in detail, especially quantifiable detail, the more authoritative you will sound. This means including references to technologies and equipment you have used, types of documents you have produced, procedures you have followed, languages you speak, technical languages you know, and so on.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://pressbooks.uwf.edu/healthcarecareerfoundations/?p=34#h5p-10>

CURRICULA VITAE

Some positions may request that you submit a CV. CVs are similar to resumes in their general form and function. Both provide a comprehensive overview of the applicant's relevant credentials for a specific position. Additionally, both need to be updated regularly throughout the applicant's career and adapted to specific audiences and contexts. However, CVs are distinct from resumes in several important respects ([Table 4.1](#)).

Table 4.1: Resumes vs. Curricula Vitae

	Resume	Curriculum Vitae
Length	One page (entry-level applicants) to three pages (advanced applicants with more than one decade of experience).	No upper limit.
Scope	Describes accomplishments related to work history, education, skills, et cetera.	Lists every academic position and achievement the applicant has fulfilled throughout their entire career.
Audience	Specific employers.	Faculty hiring committees. CVs are often also published in online directories so that current and prospective students and anyone visiting the department can view and evaluate that person's credentials.

Like a resume, you will want to provide details about your education, career history, and relevant volunteer experience on your CV. However, a CV does not add task descriptors to any of these positions or accomplishments. This is partially because there is a more common understanding as to what each one entails between the applicant and the audience since they are all part of the same professional community. Also, consider including the following information:

- Publications and presentations – State your publications in the same format that they would appear in a journal. Also, include any posters or presentations that you have produced from any research projects.
- Professional and society memberships – Include positions you have been elected into. Leave off memberships you pay a subscription fee to join.
- Management and leadership – These skills are vital in the health field, and they can be highlighted through clear examples either medically or nonmedically related. Examples include positions on committees, supervising juniors, and organizing events.

COVER LETTER

Your cover letter should always accompany your resume or CV, and emphasize, expand, and complement several key points related to the employer's needs. It should encourage the employer to want to read through your resume or CV and persuade them to meet with you to further explore your qualifications.

When you begin drafting a cover letter, read through the "About Us" page on the company's website, its mission statement, and social media sites to get more information and insight into the company before you start writing. This is also good preparation for the common questions that will often be asked, such as: "What do you know about our company/organization and why do you want to work for us?" Employers want to see you demonstrate your knowledge of the company, show how you could benefit their team, and provide compelling reasons why you would like to work for them. Emphasize and expand on several key points related to the employer's needs and highlight asset points, such as the ability to work flex hours or willingness to relocate. However, don't duplicate your resume or CV. Avoid presenting information not covered in the resume, but at the same time do not restate your resume or CV word for word. Rather, summarize your most relevant skills and experiences as they relate to the employer's needs.

Be sure to pay attention to the application instructions. Some require you to include a job number in your cover letter, while others specify the preferred file format for your document. Furthermore, there are some trend-setting companies that are challenging the more conventional cover letter formats. Should you be applying to these companies, make sure to closely read the instructions that are provided on the job posting and write your cover letter accordingly. Unless instructed otherwise, a three to four-paragraph, one-page cover letter is perfectly acceptable. Keep in mind that employers receive many applications, so a concise and focused cover letter is more likely to be read.

Finally, have a second set of eyes read through your cover letter for mistakes. One grammatical error may mean that your application will not be considered. Also, if you tend to build off of previously saved cover letters, ensure that you have changed all the pertinent information before sending. Submitting a cover letter with the wrong date or employer name on the application may cause an employer to have a negative first impression.

To Write or Not Write a Cover Letter, That is the Question

It's common to question why a cover letter is needed and whether or not recruiters or employers even read it. Although some companies are too busy to read cover letters, there are many managers at small- and medium-sized companies that do take the time to skim through them. Truthfully, you cannot know for sure what each and every employer or recruiter reads or relies on when deciding whom to interview. Sometimes job postings will helpfully clarify whether they want a cover letter or not. If they don't say either way, the safe bet is to write a cover letter as part of your targeted approach to the job application. It will show the hiring manager that you've made the extra effort to explain how well you suit the job and give them more information to make a well-informed decision about you. Preparing a well-thought-out, personalized, customized, and compelling cover letter is an effective job search strategy that can give you an advantage over other applicants.

REFERENCES

A **reference** is a person who can vouch for your skills, knowledge, and experience as they relate to the jobs you apply for. Employers often check applicant references in order to verify statements you made in your resume or interview. Speaking with people who are familiar with your work can provide reassurance to the employer about your past responsibilities, work ethic, professional behavior, skills, and dependability. Before you begin applying for positions, make a list of individuals that can serve as your references. Typically, candidates provide three or four references, but some positions may call for more. When thinking of people to serve as a reference, you might select work-related, professional, academic, or personal contacts ([Table 4.2](#)).

Table 4.2: Types of References

Type of Reference	Examples	Special Considerations
Work-related	Direct supervisor Close colleague at a current or former employer Former client	N/A
Professional	Close contact from a professional association, civic club, or community organization	N/A
Academic	Professor Instructor Advisor	Appropriate only for current students or recent graduates
Personal	Friends Neighbors	Appropriate only if you have no paid work experience and are required to provide a reference who can speak to your character

Choose your references strategically. Think of those that would speak positively about your experience, knowledge, interaction, personality, and work habits. Be confident that your references will recommend you to others without any reservations. If you have any hesitation that someone wouldn't speak well of you, move on to your next option.

If you don't have any references, get some! Engage in volunteering opportunities, get a part-time job, or consider participating in fundraising activities in the community to develop professional contacts who may serve as a reference.

The Timeline of Asking for and Updating Professional References

Before applying: Ask permission before listing an individual as a reference and confirm their most updated contact information.

During the application process: An employer may ask for your list of references at any point during the hiring process. Once you have submitted your list of references to an employer, let your references know so that they can expect to be contacted (Indeed, 2022).

After the hiring decision is made: Whether you are successful or not in getting the job, always take the time to thank your references. This will help you to maintain a positive relationship with your references and will allow you to continue using them as your reference in the future.

If you are applying for an opportunity that requires a letter of recommendation (LOR), such as graduate school

or an internship, it is best practice to contact your references well in advance of when the letter is due. Review the application guidelines to understand when your application materials will need to be submitted and prepare to contact your references at least one to three months in advance of that date (Peña et al., 2022). Beginning the process early gives your contacts plenty of time to write a strong letter for you, and it also allows you the opportunity to contact other people to serve as a reference for you if necessary.

E-PORTFOLIOS

An e-portfolio provides an opportunity for job seekers to present their skills and talents in a very tangible manner. It allows the job seeker to provide a basic resume or CV containing links to projects, assignments, videos, or social media sites to provide a comprehensive overview of their skills and personality for prospective employers.

You may be able to create an e-portfolio directly through your college or university's learning management system (such as Canvas or Blackboard). Services like Portfolium integrate with the learning management system, allowing you to import your coursework submissions into a portfolio that you can share with employers or network connections. You can also create an e-portfolio using free website builders like Wix, Squarespace, Weebly, and WordPress. These sites offer customizable templates that you can adapt to your needs. Focus on keeping your portfolio relevant to your career goals; selectively choose items from your portfolio to strategically strengthen your points related to the job you're interviewing for. Ensure that your documents are neat and organized. A visually appealing and well-organized web layout will draw the attention of the reader.

Your portfolio should be maintained over the course of your education and career. Make it a point to update it on a regular basis, and you will be prepared to showcase your skills whenever the next opportunity presents itself.

FINDING YOUR NEXT OPPORTUNITY

While searching for a job lead or other opportunity to advance your career, it is best to employ a range of search strategies. These can include networking, joining professional organizations and alumni groups, holding informational interviews, attending career fairs, and using job search engines.

NETWORKING

Networking refers to building and maintaining relationships so that you can connect to career opportunities. By building professional connections and cultivating mutually beneficial relationships, you can exchange valuable advice, information, referrals, and support.

There is really no better place to start than with the people in your life that already know you. Develop a broad list of contacts including family, friends, neighbors, classmates, professors, current and previous coworkers and managers, and people you have met through various extracurricular, social, religious, and business activities. After you've developed your list, spend time talking to the people in your network and inform them that you are looking for work and let them know what kind of work you are looking for. Help your network, too! Share any contacts, advice, or job leads that would be of interest to them.

Social media platforms can also help you grow your professional connections; however, an online social network is somewhat different than a personal network. Though you may have hundreds of contacts or followers in your social network, the degree to which you know each other will be limited by how deep a relationship you have developed with them. You will most likely not know most of your followers, be they on LinkedIn, Instagram,

YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, Twitter, or Facebook. When thinking strategically about your career goals, you can develop professional profiles and cultivate your relationships with key followers over time.

UTILIZING PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ALUMNI GROUPS

Joining a professional association and attending its meetings and conferences will give you ample opportunities to network with employers and their recruiting agents. You should consider joining a professional association while you are a student so as to benefit from student membership and conference rates. Networking during association meetings and participating in committees will help you to establish your reputation as a professional and meet potential employers in the process.

Your college is also likely to have a resource that goes far beyond the campus itself—the alumni association. College alumni often maintain a relationship with the school and with their fellow graduates. Just by attending the same college, you have something in common with them. You chose the same place, maybe for similar reasons, and you might be having similar experiences. Often, alumni are eager to help current students by offering their professional insights and making career connections. You can find out about alumni events on your campus website, at the career center, and in the alumni department. These events can be fun and beneficial to attend, especially those involving networking opportunities. Note that specific departments or campus organizations may have their own alumni groups, whether formal or informal. Try to find former students who majored in your field or who have a job similar to the one you'd like one day. Remember, members of alumni organizations make a choice to be involved; they want to be there. It's very likely they'll be interested in offering you some help, mentoring, or even introductions to the right people.

HOLDING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

An **informational interview** is a conversation with someone who works in your field of interest. It can be conducted in person, virtually, or by phone. The goal is to get current information that can help you better express yourself in applications and interviews and make informed career choices. An informational interview is not about asking for a job. Instead, it is a way to learn more by tapping into someone else's experience.

Conducting informational interviews will help you:

- Learn more about the career paths that interest you
- Gather valuable, industry-specific information
- Gain insider tips on the education, skills, and experience needed in your target career
- Market yourself during job searches
- Build contacts in your target industry or workplace

To get started, do some research on your contact's position and organization. Knowing what you are after shows determination, initiative, and that you aren't intending to waste anyone's time. Then, you'll want to prepare between three and eight meaningful questions to ask so that you can collect useful information. When you hold your interview, have your prepared questions with you, be ready to take notes, and keep to the agreed time limit. After your interview, follow up with a concise thank you message that mentions something you learned, something that you've done so far, and something you will do next to act on your contact's suggestions.

ATTENDING CAREER FAIRS

A **career fair** is normally when many employers gather at the same venue to promote their organizations with the intention of recruiting candidates. An employer information session is characteristically when one employer delivers a presentation about their organization to a group of interested candidates; this is often followed by a question and answer period, a networking session, or a brief interview. Employers are prepared to speak with you directly about your experience and skills and it becomes the perfect opportunity to not only network but also set yourself apart from your competition. However, as you will be one of many attendees, the pace may be very quick, so understand that you won't have a lot of time with each employer.

You should also attend career fairs and sign up for interviews with visiting recruiters. Because colleges are a great resource for the emerging labor pool, they have tight connections with industry partners. When company recruiters come to your college, be there to ask them about their employment opportunities. Recruiters aren't interested in students who aren't interested in them, so do your homework and arrive prepared to ask intelligent questions and make a good impression.

USING JOB SEARCH ENGINES

As many employers post opportunities online, using job search engines should be one part of your search strategy. A search for jobs related to the career you're training for may yield depressingly few hits if you use just one or two websites. If so, be prepared to use all of them and widen your search area to neighboring towns or cities. Even if you aren't seriously considering moving for a job—if your strategy is just to wait until relevant jobs arise closer to home—at least getting a sense of what's out there elsewhere is an important exercise.

Beyond the popular search engines like Monster or Indeed, also seek out the following:

- Job search engines specific to your sector or field
- Professional association sites specific to your field
- Company/organization websites (look for their Careers page)
- Professional networking sites such as LinkedIn

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

Finding a job or other career opportunity can be a time-consuming, emotionally challenging experience. Maintain your momentum and put your skills to use by setting goals, creating structure, and staying organized during your search.

Set Goals

Aim to accomplish something related to different job-searching efforts each day and each week. For example, "I will aim to submit two online job applications per day" or "I will make two to four new connections on LinkedIn each week." Setting and meeting daily goals will help you to believe that you are capable of finding a job and breaking down tasks will help you feel less overwhelmed.

Create Structure

Create a job search routine by scheduling specific times during your day or week that are dedicated specifically to searching for work. You should focus on the hours of the day when you have the most energy and the least distractions. While you do want to commit yourself to a reasonable block of time, avoid staring at the computer for too long or you may notice your productivity declining.

Stay Organized

Document your job search efforts as you go. Write down the jobs you've applied to and the dates on which you applied, and save a print or electronic copy of the job postings in case you need to refer to them in the future. Similarly, when attending job fairs or networking events, gather the names and contact information of those you spoke with. It is often helpful to use a spreadsheet to track the details of all of the information so that you can follow up. Not only is it good as a point of reference, but it creates a level of accountability. By tracking your efforts, you will notice that you've done a lot of work and this will make you feel proud and fuel your motivation. On the other hand, it might also give you an indication that you haven't been doing as much as productive as you had hoped and will help you get back on track.

Key Takeaways

- Before beginning the job search, understand which *hard* and *soft skills* you possess. If you would like to acquire new skills, consider pursuing an internship or other opportunity.
- A successful job search begins with developing the materials that will highlight your accomplishments. This includes a well-crafted resume or curriculum vitae, a tailored cover letter, and an e-portfolio. Applicants should also identify individuals who can serve as *references*.
- Searching for a career opportunity may require *networking*, joining alumni or professional groups, holding *informational interviews*, attending *career fairs*, and using a job search engine. Maintain momentum in your search by setting goals, creating structure, and staying organized.

Vocabulary

- **Career Fair** – An event where multiple employers gather to recruit candidates for employment
- **Chronological Resume** – A resume format that emphasizes the applicant's work history; jobs are listed in reverse chronological order
- **Functional Resume** – A resume format that emphasizes the applicant's skills; skills are organized into categories
- **Hard Skills** – Skills that are industry-specific and easily quantifiable; also known as technical skills
- **Hybrid Resume** – A resume format that combines the elements of the chronological and functional resume formats
- **Informational Interview** – A conversation with someone who works in your field of interest to learn about the field without an expectation of employment by that person

- **Networking** – Building and maintaining relationships so that you can connect to career opportunities
- **Reference** – Someone who can attest to your professional skills, knowledge, or experience as they relate to a job you are applying for
- **Soft Skills** – Skills that can pertain to any industry and refer to interpersonal and behavioral traits; also known as transferrable skills

CHAPTER 4 TEST YOURSELF

Please see Appendix C for an offline copy of the [Chapter 4 Test Yourself](#) activity.

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Holding Informational Interviews

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Attending Career Fairs

[“Method 5: Career Related Fairs & Events”](#) in *Be the Boss of Your Career: A Complete Guide for Students & Grads* by Lindsay Bortot and Employment Support Centre, Algonquin College. Published by Algonquin College under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license. Lightly edited for brevity.

[“Finding a Job”](#) in *Technical Writing Essentials* by Robin L. Potter and Tricia Hylton. Some content was partially adapted from Tom Bartsiokas’ and Tricia Hylton’s *Communicating@Work* (2019), which was adapted from Jordan Smith’s original *Business Communication for Success* (2015). Some content has been adapted from a chapter on preparing to apply for work by Megan Savage in *Technical Writing* (n.d.). Published by the University of Victoria under a [CC BY 4.0](#) license. Lightly edited for brevity and flow; revised and updated list of social media platform examples. Lightly edited for brevity.

Using Job Search Engines

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Maintaining Momentum

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IMAGE DESCRIPTIONS

Image 4.1: An infographic. Hard skills are objective, industry-specific, and developed through on-the-job training. Examples include a degree certificate and/or license; bilingualism or multilingualism; proficiency in medical, analytical, or other software; the ability to use laboratory, medical, or other tools; and knowledge of relevant procedures and processes. Soft skills are subjective, transferable, and developed through work experience, extracurricular activities, or everyday tasks. Examples include critical thinking, time management, teamwork, interpersonal communication, and judgment and decision-making. [\[Return to Image 4.1\]](#)

Chapter 5: Ethics

Learning Objectives

- Examine different ethical theories and the importance of ethics in healthcare.
- Assess the importance of patient confidentiality in healthcare settings.
- Investigate why consent in healthcare is required.

INTRODUCTION

People strive to be “good,” to do the “right” thing, and to lead a “good life,” but where do such basic, familiar moral values as good and right originate? Throughout history, religious people have explained these ideas as revelations of divine command. Anthropologists, however, view morals as customs that govern social interactions, and because all cultures display such customs, interpret moral practices in terms of a survival function rooted in human nature. By contrast, many social and political thinkers emphasize that moral concepts result from social conventions or agreements that are subject to deliberation and change. Governments today often consult social scientists and health experts who empirically investigate what fosters or improves human life, health, and happiness. Where science informs law and policy, it helps define in a conventional sense what we mean by good and right. In particular, health science helps establish what is considered good for the health of populations and communities. Further below we will examine ethical theories prominent in health ethics that offer contrasting perspectives on the nature and basis of morality. We will also explore the impact of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) on patient confidentiality and the importance of consent in healthcare and research.

Chapter Resources

[Key Takeaways](#)

[Vocabulary](#)

[Test Yourself](#)

WHY ARE ETHICS IMPORTANT IN HEALTHCARE?



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Media 5.1. [Ethics matters in health](#) [Online video]. Copyright 2018 by [World Health Organization](#).

ETHICAL THEORIES

As used here, an **ethical framework** refers to a tool or approach for practically addressing ethical challenges that often includes a stepwise procedure. An ethical framework may rely heavily on just one ethical theory, but frameworks generally take a pragmatic approach that procedurally allows for using a variety of theories or principles as the issue or context demands. Whereas an ethical framework has a practical orientation, an ethical theory also addresses more fundamental questions, so-called “metaethical” questions. Does morality originate in divine command, human nature, or human convention? Is it essentially a habit, intuition, form of reasoning, or a quality or purpose of an action? An **ethical theory** will offer a distinct, coherent understanding of the source and nature of morality that will shape how one reasons about moral issues and determine which principles are most important. Two persons employing the same theory, however, will not necessarily reach the same conclusion about an ethical issue; much will depend on which aspects of the issue they deem most important and on how they weigh different factors. Nevertheless, because a particular ethical theory tends to favor certain principles or types of principles, using the same theoretical approach will lead to similar lines of reasoning and selection of principles.

The diversity of ethical theories does not imply their mutual opposition so much as points to the extensive range of the moral landscape and the need to illuminate its various contours. A helpful way of illuminating this landscape is to distinguish theories depending on whether they focus on the actor, the action, or the results of action. To illustrate this particular way of carving up the moral landscape, [Table 5.1](#) describes some well-known ethical theories.

Table 5.1: Ethical Theories

Theory	Agent-centered	Deontology	Utilitarianism
Focus	Agent	Action	Result of Action
Key Figure	Aristotle	Immanuel Kant	John Stuart Mills
Main Concept	<i>Virtues:</i> Acquired habits, skills, or dispositions that make people effective in social or professional settings	<i>Duties:</i> Ethical rules or commands that constrain one's action or define obligations owed to others	<i>Results:</i> Good or bad outcomes of actions and policies or their beneficial or harmful effects on individuals and society
Examples	Honesty, courage, modesty, trustworthiness, transparency, reliability, and perseverance	Ethical and religious commandments, obligations to seek justice or respect persons and their rights	Burdens, risks, harms, or costs versus the benefits, advantages, or savings resulting from interventions or policies
Ethical action	Doing what a virtuous person would do in a given situation	Fulfilling an obligation or duty owed to oneself or society	Maximizing the net balance of benefits over harms
Uses	Assessing skills and capacities needed for success in a community, organization, or profession	Establishing compliance rules and regulations, and setting standards for evaluating actions and behavior	Conducting population-level cost-benefit, risk-benefit, or cost-effectiveness analyses

Aristotle's **virtue ethics** is an ethical theory that focuses on the moral character of the actor or agent (Bartlett and Collins, 2011). Classic virtues are dispositions or stable patterns of behavior that lie between extremes of vice. Courage, for example, lies between the extremes of cowardice and foolhardiness in taking risks. Habit and practice are necessary to develop virtues whose possession we equate with good character and that equip a person to be effective in society or an organization. Because good character translates into virtuous action that others aspire to emulate, we tacitly invoke virtue ethics whenever we ask how an outstanding public figure or health leader would handle a situation. In a modern professional context, virtues also include the skills the profession has identified that lead to success in that profession and which professional education and training instill in practitioners. Once established, virtues readily become the standards of obligation and accountability to evaluate professional performance and function similarly to the rules and principles of duty discussed below. Holding public health institutions accountable for the professional competence of their employees illustrates virtue ethics (Public Health Leadership Society, 2002). More recently, the capabilities approach has exploited the potential of virtue ethics to guide decisions about policy or interventions in a way that goes beyond matters of professional training and responsibilities. This approach takes a broader developmental view of human agency and capacity building. It

conceives health as a fundamental capability necessary for individuals to succeed in society, one in which many further capabilities depend (Sen, 2009; Ruger, 2010).

An ethical theory that focuses on action or, more properly, the rules governing action, is **deontology**. The word deontology comes from the ancient Greek word, *deontos*, which means duty. Because duties oblige us to obey rules that govern actions or conduct, they bind or constrain the will ahead of action. In judging whether an action is right or wrong, deontology ignores consideration of harmful or beneficial consequences and relies on these rules of duty to serve as the standard of judgment. People usually have rules of duty or obligation in mind when they speak of ethical standards or worry that standards are breaking down. Examples of these rules include religious commandments to honor parents, not lie, or not steal and rules of social interaction such as treating people fairly, doing them no harm, or respecting their rights. Rights often are said to stand in reciprocal relation to duties. Thus, the right to free speech presupposes a duty to respect the right of others to speak or the public health obligation to ensure conditions for maintaining health presupposes a right to health.

Deontology as a theory owes most to Immanuel Kant's view of the "good will" and his closely linked account of autonomy. A person of morally good will does the right thing for its own sake, which means acting purely for the sake of duty. Duties are moral rules or laws that bind the will and limit the scope of action. For Kant, basing decision for one's action solely on duty without regard to the potential good or bad consequences of the action is the only legitimate basis for moral action. Kant even goes so far as to say that "a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same" (Gregor, Timmermann, and Korsgaard, 2012).

Kant conceives duty as the quintessential expression of autonomy, which may come as a surprise to those who equate autonomy with rational free choice or even just following one's preferences without interference. However, the meaning of autonomy for Kant derives from its literal meaning in Greek, *autos* (self) and *nomos* (law); namely, self-legislating.

Autonomy enacts from within the moral rules and principles that bind the will and guide action. However, not every self-originating impulse should be obeyed; only actions conceivable as universal laws morally bind the will. Morally laying down the law for oneself entails legislating for everyone, but universally legislating does not mean asserting one's will over others. Nor does it mean that the ethical content of a moral law or duty is valid eternally and everywhere. Rather, it refers to the "**categorical imperative**" an unconditional requirement for an action to be moral. To qualify as a duty, a rule that commands action must apply to every rational person. Stealing, for example, could never qualify as a duty, because a situation where everyone steals from everyone else would undercut the one-sided advantage of stealing that the thief hopes to exploit. Although self-directed, autonomous action is necessarily other-regarding.

Stealing, for example, could never qualify as a duty, because a situation where everyone steals from everyone else would undercut the one-sided advantage of stealing that the thief hopes to exploit. Although self-directed, autonomous action is necessarily other-regarding.

Kant maintains that the categorical imperative can be expressed in two other ways equivalent to universality, namely, "respect for humanity" and a "kingdom of ends" (Gregor, Timmermann, and Korsgaard, 2012). In each, this other-regarding dimension of autonomy is evident. Respecting humanity means never treating persons as mere means or objects but always treating them as ends, that is, regarding them as fellow autonomous agents. Autonomously agreeing on actions, interventions, or policies requires that decision-makers mutually consider and understand their reasons for action and be willing to abide by the rules derived from these reasons as laws they collectively impose upon themselves (O'Neill, 2002).



Image 5.1. Ethical theories offer a distinct understanding of morality that shapes how we reason about moral issues. [Image description].

The idea of a fellowship of mutual consideration comes out most clearly in Kant's concept of a kingdom of ends. This concept is really the ideal of a systematic union or commonwealth of autonomous individuals making laws that apply to everyone. This ideal presupposes that ethical deliberation places respect for others as ends, as autonomous agents, above self-interest. The core idea is that we only consider actions that could gain acceptance by a community in which all see themselves as sovereigns who lay down universal laws binding on themselves and others. The hope is that the body of law governing society progressively embodies this ideal. Such mutual regard in laying down the moral laws that will bind one's actions differs significantly from insistence on noninterference with individual free choice, let alone with personal preferences. Conversely, the aspiration behind Kant's view of autonomy harmonizes well with the public health obligation to address collective problems through collective action.

For **utilitarianism**, judging the rightness of an action depends on an estimation of its subsequent practical outcome or result rather than on its conformity to principles of duty. Utilitarianism considers the best ethical course of action that will result in the greatest net benefits over potential harm. A utilitarian approach underlies cost-benefit analyses that weigh an intervention's costs (risks, harms, burdens, or disadvantages) against its benefits (advantages, utility, improvements, cost savings). In addition to its focus on consequences, utilitarianism is egalitarian, communitarian, and scientific in outlook. It is egalitarian in considering everyone's benefit and equally weighting each person's good, as opposed to privileging certain people. It is communitarian in attempting to increase benefits to society rather than individuals, seeking the "greatest good for the greatest number." It endeavors to be scientific by quantifying harms and benefits, accounting for probability, and calculating net benefit. Calculating net benefits over harms is less problematic when relevant factors employ a common scale of measurement, for example, weighing the financial costs of treating a disease with the cost savings from preventing that disease. Comparing different outcomes (e.g., financial costs versus quality-adjusted life years) sometimes involves difficult judgments about the relative value of each outcome. Because the utilitarian approach seeks to determine and promote the collective good based on aggregate measures, it readily lends itself to justifying public health interventions.

ETHICS AND MORALITY

Although many use the terms ethics and morality interchangeably, we will distinguish the formal discipline of ethics from the common morality that guides everyday actions and behavior. **Morality** refers to a society's shared, stable beliefs about what is good and bad, right and wrong. Through upbringing and socialization, each generation passes this common morality to the next. Common morality envelopes the individual like an ecosphere of shared customs, rules, and values. For most circumstances, people habitually rely on this common morality to guide their conduct, and it serves them well, just as standard practice generally serves professional practitioners well. Still, common morality can fall short where its rules conflict, where it inadequately illuminates novel moral problems, or where intense disagreement prevails among rival stakeholders. In such instances, the formal discipline of ethics offers a deliberate, systematic way of addressing troubling moral issues, conflicts, and dilemmas.

Ethics can assist in:

- Recognizing ethical issues and distinguishing them from factual issues
- Providing a vocabulary to systematically discuss ethics
- Identifying appropriate ethical principles to guide action in a particular context
- Using these principles to analyze actions in regard to their ethical acceptability
- Understanding the competing moral claims and values of stakeholders

- Designing alternative courses of action that incorporate these claims and values
- Evaluating which alternative best fits a given context, all things considered
- Establishing a procedurally just, transparent process for decision making
- Justifying decisions regarding recommendations, policies, or interventions

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Principles are general categories, rules, or guidelines that form the basis of a discipline. In ethics, there are various kinds of principles and many examples of each kind. The kinds include basic ethical categories (e.g., virtues, values, or rights), ethical commands or rules of conduct (e.g., not stealing, not harming, or treating others with respect), and guidelines for weighing outcomes (e.g., achieving the greatest good for the greatest number, distributing burdens and benefits fairly, or properly proportioning benefit to harm). Ethical principles like justice or respect for autonomy are simultaneously values, ideals, and the basis for deriving rules of conduct. Such rules serve as ethical standards to evaluate past and pending actions, programs, and policy recommendations. When addressing complex or controversial issues or issues involving numerous stakeholders, many different principles can come into play. But because ethical decision-making depends on context (e.g., on local circumstances, community stakeholders, and decision-makers), no formula can determine the most relevant ethical principles. Nevertheless, most ethicists and practitioners working in a field would agree that certain principles, theories, or frameworks provide more helpful guidance for that field. Given the need for flexibility, some prefer to speak not of ethical principles but of “general moral considerations” that can provide guidance in healthcare practice (Childress et al., 2002). At any rate, a complex ethical challenge involving stakeholders with competing moral claims frequently demands consideration of a variety of ethical principles and theories to address the situation and justify a proposed intervention.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND HIPAA



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Media 5.2. [HHS OCR – Your Health Information, Your Rights](#). [Online video]. Copyright 2012 by [USGovHHSOCR](#).

HEALTH INFORMATION PRIVACY RIGHTS

Patients feel that their health information is private and should be protected. That is why there is a federal law that sets rules for healthcare providers and health insurance companies about who can look at and receive their health information. This law, called the **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996** (HIPAA), gives patients rights over their health information, including the right to get a copy of their information, make sure it is correct, and know who has seen it.

Patients can ask to see or get a copy of their medical records and other health information. If they want a copy,

they may have to put a request in writing and pay for the cost of copying and mailing. In most cases, copies must be given to them within 30 days. Patients can ask to change any wrong information in their files or add information to their files if they think something is missing or incomplete. For example, if they and their hospital agree that the patient's file has the wrong result for a test, the hospital must change it. Even if the hospital believes the test result is correct, they still have the right to have a disagreement noted in the file. In most cases, the file should be updated within 60 days.

By law, health information can be used and shared for specific reasons not directly related to care, like making sure doctors give good care, making sure nursing homes are clean and safe, reporting when the flu is in the area, or reporting as required by state or federal law. In many of these cases, a patient can find out who has seen their health information.

Patients can learn how their health information is used and shared by their doctor or health insurer. Generally, health information cannot be used for purposes not directly related to their care without their permission. For example, a patient's doctor cannot give it to their employer, or share it for things like marketing and advertising, without their written authorization. Most patients probably received a notice telling them how their health information may be used on their first visit to a new healthcare provider or when they got new health insurance, but a patient can ask for another copy anytime.

Patients can let their providers or health insurance companies know if there is information they do not want to share. They can ask that their health information not be shared with certain people, groups, or companies. If they go to a clinic, for example, they can ask the doctor not to share their medical records with other doctors or nurses at the clinic. Patients can ask for other kinds of restrictions, but the doctors do not always have to agree to do what they ask, particularly if it could affect care. Finally, a patient can also ask their healthcare provider or pharmacy not to tell their health insurance company about the care they receive or drugs they take, if they pay for the care or drugs in full and the provider or pharmacy does not need to get paid by their insurance company.

Patients can ask to be reached somewhere other than home. They can make reasonable requests to be contacted at different places or in a different way. For example, they can ask to have a nurse call them at your office instead of their home or to send mail to them in an envelope instead of on a postcard.

PRIVACY, SECURITY, AND ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS

Most healthcare providers are moving from paper records to **electronic health records (EHRs)** or they may be using EHRs already. EHRs allow providers to use information more effectively to improve the quality and efficiency of care, but EHRs will not change the privacy protections or security safeguards that apply to patients' health information.

EHRs and Your Health Information



Image 5.2. Electronic health records can be beneficial to healthcare providers and patients alike. [Image description].

EHRs are electronic versions of paper charts in doctors' or other healthcare providers' offices. An EHR may include a patient's medical history, notes, and other information about their health including their symptoms, diagnoses, medications, lab results, vital signs, immunizations, and reports from diagnostic tests such as x-rays. Providers are working with other doctors, hospitals, and health plans to find ways to share that information. The information in EHRs can be shared with other organizations involved in a patient's care if the computer systems are set up to talk to each other. Information in these records should only be shared for purposes authorized by law or by the patient. Patients have privacy rights whether their information is stored as a paper record or stored in an electronic form. The same federal laws that already protect their health information also apply to information in EHRs.

Benefits of Having EHRs

Whether a healthcare provider is just beginning to switch from paper records to EHRs or is already using EHRs within the office, a patient will likely experience one or more of the following benefits:

1. Improved quality of care

As doctors begin to use EHRs and set up ways to securely share a patient's health information with other providers, it will make it easier for everyone to work together to make sure they are getting the care they need. For example:

- Information about a patient's medications will be available in EHRs so that healthcare providers don't give them another medicine that might be harmful to them.
- EHR systems are backed up like most computer systems, so if a patient is in an area affected by a disaster, like a hurricane, their health information can be retrieved.
- EHRs can be available in an emergency. If a patient is in an accident and is unable to explain their health history, a hospital that has a system may be able to talk to their doctor's system. The hospital will get information about their medications, health issues, and tests, so decisions about emergency care are faster and more informed.

2. More efficient care

Doctors using EHRs may find it easier or faster to track lab results and share progress with patients. If their doctors' systems can share information, one doctor can see test results from another doctor, so the test doesn't always have to be repeated. Especially with x-rays and certain lab tests, this means they are at less risk from radiation and other side effects. When tests are not repeated unnecessarily, it also means they pay less for their healthcare in copayments and deductibles.

3. More convenient care

EHRs can alert providers to contact a patient when it is time for certain screening tests. When doctors, pharmacies, labs, and other members of their healthcare team are able to share information, a patient may no longer have to fill out all the same forms over and over again, wait for paper records to be passed from one doctor to the other, or carry those records themselves.

4. Keeps electronic health information secure

Most patients feel that their health information is private and should be protected. The federal government put in place the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) Privacy Rule to ensure patients have rights over their own health information, no matter what form it is in. The government also created the HIPAA Security Rule to require specific protections to safeguard your electronic health information. A few possible measures that can be built into EHR systems may include:

- “Access control” tools like passwords and PIN numbers, to help limit access to patients’ information to authorized individuals.
- “Encrypting” patients’ stored information. That means their health information cannot be read or understood except by those using a system that can “decrypt” it with a “key.”
- An “audit trail” feature, which records who accessed the patient’s information and what changes were made and when.

Finally, federal law requires doctors, hospitals, and other healthcare providers to notify patients of a “breach.” The law also requires the healthcare provider to notify the Secretary of Health and Human Services. If a breach affects more than 500 residents of a state or jurisdiction, the healthcare provider must also notify prominent media outlets serving the state or jurisdiction. This requirement helps patients know if something has gone wrong with the protection of their information and helps keep providers accountable for EHR protection.

SHARING HEALTH INFORMATION WITH FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

HIPAA sets rules for healthcare providers and health plans about who can look at and receive a patient’s health information, including those closest to them – their family members and friends. The HIPAA Privacy Rule ensures that patients have rights over their health information, including the right to get their information, make sure it’s correct, and know who has seen it.

What Happens if a Patient Wants to Share Health Information with a Family Member or a Friend?

HIPAA requires most doctors, nurses, hospitals, nursing homes, and other healthcare providers to protect the privacy of a patient’s health information. However, if they don’t object, a healthcare provider or health plan may share relevant information with family members or friends involved in their healthcare or payment for their healthcare in certain circumstances.

When Health Information Can be Shared

Under HIPAA, a patient’s healthcare provider may share their information face-to-face, over the phone, or in writing. A healthcare provider or health plan may share relevant information if: