Vancouver Referencing Style Examples for Medical Students

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Vancouver referencing style examples are the fastest way to learn this system. Vancouver uses numbers instead of names and dates, so your reader follows a small number in the text to the matching entry in your reference list. Medical and nursing schools love it because it keeps the text clean when a paragraph leans on five or six sources at once, and that's the point.

This guide walks you through the whole system with worked examples. You'll see how in text citations work, how the reference list is built, and how to cite journal articles, books and websites without guessing. A checklist at the end helps you spot mistakes before you submit.

1. What Vancouver Referencing Is and Why Medicine Uses It

Vancouver is a numbered referencing style. Each source gets a number the first time you cite it, and that number stays with it through the whole paper. The numbers run in the order sources appear, so the first source you cite is (1) and the next new source is (2). Your reference list runs in the same order, which is why it's never alphabetical.

The style comes from the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, known as ICMJE. Most medical journals and many nursing and health schools follow its rules, so learning it once pays off across your whole degree. If your course guide says Vancouver, it usually means the ICMJE version, though some schools tweak small details. Check your own guide first. It's the one your marker uses.

Numbers suit medical writing. A clinical paragraph can cite a trial, a guideline and a review in one sentence, and names and dates would clog it up. Numbers keep the sentence readable while the full details wait in the reference list. That's the trade off: light text, but every number must match its entry.

2. Vancouver In Text Citations With Numbers in Order

Put the number where the claim sits. A single source looks like this: "Early mobilisation after surgery shortens hospital stays (1)." If your sentence names the study, the number still follows the claim: "Jones found that early mobilisation shortens hospital stays (1)." Use the same number every time you cite that source again. Never give it a fresh number.

Some schools want superscript numbers instead of brackets, so a citation looks like this: "Early mobilisation after surgery shortens hospital stays.1" Both forms are Vancouver, so either is fine as long as you're consistent. Your course guide decides which one to use, so stick to that form all through the paper. Mixing brackets and superscript in one assignment is the kind of small slip markers notice.

Several sources at once need a number each. Two sources read (1, 2), and three in a row can be shortened to (1 to 3). Don't cite a source you haven't read, and don't stack five numbers after one short claim when two would do.

3. How to Build a Vancouver Reference List

Your reference list runs in citation order, not alphabetical order. The first source you cited in the text is entry 1, the second new source is entry 2, and so on. Each entry starts with its number and a full stop, then the authors, the title, and the publication details. A source you've cited three times appears once, under its first number.

Authors are listed by surname followed by initials, with no full stops after the initials and no comma between the two. Up to six authors are listed in full. When a paper has more than six authors, list the first six and add et al. after them. It's one of the most tested parts of Vancouver, so learn it by heart.

Punctuation is part of the system. A full stop follows the article title, the journal title is abbreviated, and the year, volume and pages follow in a fixed order.

4. Vancouver Journal Article Examples

Journal articles are the most common Vancouver reference, so get this one right and half your list is done. The pattern is: authors, article title, abbreviated journal title, year, volume, issue in brackets, then first page to last page. Journal titles use the standard abbreviations from the National Library of Medicine, so British Medical Journal becomes BMJ.

Here is a finished entry for a journal article with two authors: "Taylor S, Ahmed K. Early mobilisation after hip replacement surgery. BMJ. 2024;384:e071234." Read it left to right and you'll see each piece in its place. Many online journals now use article numbers instead of page ranges, and the number takes the place of the pages.

A paper with more than six authors shows the et al. rule in action: "Patel R, Nguyen L, Smith J, Brown A, Jones M, Lee K, et al. Wound care in older adults. J Wound Care. 2023;32:e045612." Count the names and you'll find six, then et al. covers the rest. The diagram below breaks the first example into its parts.

Authors: Taylor S, Ahmed K. Surnames first, then initials, no full stops.

Article title: Early mobilisation after hip replacement surgery. Sentence case, then a full stop.

Journal title: BMJ. Abbreviated, using the standard short form.

Year and volume: 2024;384. Year, then a semicolon, then the volume.

Article number: e071234. The article number takes the place of page numbers.

5. Vancouver Book and Book Chapter Examples

Books follow the same logic with a few extra pieces. The pattern is: authors or editors, book title, edition if there is one, place of publication, publisher, then year. An example looks like this: "Brown A, Wilson T. Clinical Skills for Nursing Practice. 3rd ed. London: Oxford University Press; 2022." The edition only appears when the book is not in its first edition, so a first edition skips it entirely. For an ebook, add the web address or DOI at the end. That's the only change.

A chapter inside an edited book cites the chapter authors first, then the chapter title, then the word In followed by the editors and the book title. Here's how that looks: "Green P. Pain

assessment in older patients. In: Davies R, Hall M, editors. Handbook of Geriatric Nursing. Edinburgh: Elsevier; 2023. p. 45 to 62." The page range shows where the chapter sits, and the editors are named so the book can be found.

6. Vancouver Website and Online Source Examples

Websites are the easiest Vancouver entries to get wrong, because the details hide in footers and About pages. The pattern is: author or organisation, title, the word Internet in square brackets, place, publisher, year, the date you viewed it in square brackets, then Available from and the web address. An example looks like this: "World Health Organization. Falls [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2026 [cited 2026 Nov 12]. Available from: https://www.who.int" The entry shows the shape. In your own list, use the full address of the page you read.

When a page has no named author, use the organisation as the author, just as the example does. When a page has no clear year, use the year it was last updated. Don't leave the year out.

When a source has a DOI, give that instead of a web address. It's the safer link, since a DOI never changes. You'll find the DOI on the article page or in your library database. If a source has neither a DOI nor a stable web address, ask yourself whether it belongs in a medical assignment at all.

7. Common Vancouver Mistakes That Cost Marks

The most common mistake is numbering the reference list alphabetically. Vancouver lists run in citation order, so an alphabetical list tells your marker you learned a different style. The fix is simple: write the list as you cite, or renumber at the end. Never sort it like a Harvard list.

The second mistake is giving the same source two numbers. Once a source has a number, it keeps that number everywhere. Cite the same paper twice and both citations carry the same number, with one entry in the list. Search for the author name in your draft to see if you numbered it twice.

The third mistake is copying a reference from another paper without checking it. Second hand references carry the other author's errors with them. Don't trust a copied reference. Check each entry against the journal site or your library database before you submit. If the writing itself is what holds you back, our assignment writing service can help you plan, draft and polish your assignment around your brief, with your own ideas at the centre.

Vancouver referencing feels fiddly at first, but it's a small set of rules used the same way every time. Learn the journal pattern, keep your numbers in order, and check your list against your citations before you submit. If you'd like a hand with the writing itself, our assignment writing service is ready to help, and you can reach out through the contact page for a free quote.