

Why do you need to include references in your senior thesis?

There are several reasons to include references in your senior thesis. I list some of them below. Convince yourself that they apply to your work.

1. **Credibility.** References connect your work to a general scientific body of knowledge. It is important for the reader of your thesis to be convinced that you are aware of this. Not only is your work related to other work, but your awareness of this fact has resulted in an explicit tie: it has allowed you to get inspiration, avoid repetition, check for confirmation, detect discrepancies, and propose refinements; in other words: to act like a professional scientist. Thus the reader's time will not be wasted on learning about idiosyncratic views that may or may not be related to the scientific enterprise in the real world. *You do not live in a parallel universe!*
2. **Focus.** References allow you to focus on your most relevant contribution and to treat all peripheral material cursorily. You do not have the space or time to cover the full background and all possible ramifications of the issue; instead, you are giving the reader the option to discover or verify the particular points that they are interested in by pointing them to the appropriate sources of information. *You may be standing on the shoulder of giants, but do not re-enact the climb!*
3. **Appreciation.** References allow you to give credit to all the work that has made your work possible and/or is giving it meaning. Your current work certainly depends on prior work. Ideas, models, techniques, theories, and technologies developed elsewhere are inspiring your work. By applying, verifying, refocusing, or extending other work, you are giving new meaning to this prior work; but the significance of your contribution is also magnified or even made possible by this other work. It is professional courtesy to recognize this mutual indebtedness by stating the connection explicitly. *Acknowledge the giants whose shoulders you stand on!*
4. **Responsibility.** References allow you to delineate the exact boundaries of your contribution. They allow you to claim intellectual responsibility for your ideas, data, techniques, and interpretations unambiguously. They protect you from being held responsible for work you did not do, but that you may have used or mentioned in the process. They also protect you from being perceived as claiming more than your share. *Claim all the credit you deserve, but no more than that!*