

Application Papers

A Brief Overview of Writing for Nursing

An application paper enables you to think through research and theory as they connect to real-life situations within your field while using reflective and critical thinking skills to articulate your personal and professional values on contemporary issues and situations.

There are several kinds of application papers you might encounter. You might be asked to apply learned decision making frameworks (ethical principles, theories, professional values, legal issues) to a scenario or ethical dilemma, writing about both your decision-making process and the decision you arrived at.

For example, you might explore the legal and ethical considerations regarding whether a feeding tube should be removed from a comatose patient. Or, you might extend established research findings and theories to contemporary problems and issues in nursing, showing the relationship between past theories and current nursing practices. For example, you may be asked to explain how the ideas, concepts, and behaviors valued by the U.S. Army nurses in World War II may be applicable to your role as a future nurse.

All application papers review a body of theory (decision-making frameworks such as ethical considerations, professional codes, and the law) and/or research (such as historical information about the nursing profession or the history of a particular treatment method). All application papers then show the explicit connections between a body of theory and research and a specific scenario or period in time. Many application papers ask you, as a developing professional in the field of nursing, to describe your critical thinking process and/or response to the situation.

Audience

Your primary audience are professionals in the nursing field. Secondary audiences include fellow nursing students and your professors. Those outside the field of nursing should also be able to follow the ideas and concepts presented; that is, your paper should not be packed with jargon.

Process Help for Scenario Responses

Before you begin writing your paper, you should gather your thoughts. A good process to follow is to:

Read carefully the scenario or ethical dilemma—and read it several times. Underline key phrases that complicate the scenario for you. Careful and multiple readings of the scenario's prompt is key to beginning any brainstorming.

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Putting the scenario aside, jot down the key factors that should play a role in your decision making. Don't rush to judgment about what the decision should be; doing so defeats the purpose of this critical thinking assignment! Rather, spend some time writing about the many considerations that go into your response to the situation.

Turn to the theoretical, professional, legal, and ethical frameworks you've discussed this semester. What were the guidelines and philosophical issues you have discussed and read about over the semester? Make a list. Then, try connecting each issue on the list with the scenario to which you must respond. Ask yourself: how does this way of thinking about the work of health practitioners help me to address the scenario? Don't worry if your writing is not clear; at this point, you are still in the brainstorming stage.

Ask yourself what you still need to know. After thinking about the scenario and the frameworks for decision making, what questions do you have? What considerations must you take into account, and where might you find information about those considerations? This part of your brainstorming process is geared toward getting you to think about what additional reading and research you might need to do before or as you write a draft.

Make a plan for the paper. Perhaps you are someone who likes to outline your drafts ahead of writing it. Or maybe you have decided you need to do some additional research or reading before writing the paper. Perhaps you have an idea of what your answer to the scenario is, based on the frameworks for decision making you have learned about during the semester. Some of what you have written through the above process may make its way into your paper. If you are unsure about how to begin writing, visit the Fred Meijer Center for Writing and talk with a writing consultant.

Format

Your professor's assignment sheet will detail the specifics about how your paper should be organized; it may give you prompts or questions to address in your paper. However, a typical application paper might include:

Introduction

An introduction that states the purpose of the paper, followed by a brief synopsis and/or the historical situation of the ethical dilemma to be discussed.

Body

A body that:

- Describes and discusses pertinent ethical principles and theories in relation to the given situation and scenario.
- Gives your own personal and professional values presented and linked to the effects on your decision making process.
- Describes the way in which you apply ethical principles and theories in tandem with your own personal and professional values to real-life nursing situations and dilemmas.
- Shows you have a grasp on the theoretical or historical information related to the scenario or topic you are writing about.

Conclusion

A conclusion should show you have thought reflectively about theories and ethical principles in relation to your own values and beliefs, as well as discuss how you will use that information in your future work as a nurse.

For more help writing introductions and conclusions, see the handouts on our website, <http://www.gvsu.edu/wc>.

As always, you should follow APA style when formatting your document and citing sources. *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* is the definitive source on APA. A useful website to consult is <http://www.dianahacker.com/resdoc>.

See our website for a link to a website that can help you with paraphrasing and summarizing: <http://www.gvsu.edu/wc>.

Voice/Tone and Special Notes

Writing in nursing should be professional and formal and reflect the type of academic writing found in articles of the nursing journals you read for all assignments.

- Wording should be direct, straightforward and professional.
- Paraphrasing and summarizing should be fluid and integrated throughout instead of direct quotes.
- Avoid colloquialisms, jargon, or contractions, as your paper should be professional and formal.
- Try to write mainly in the active voice.
- As much as possible, avoid writing in the first person (“I” and “me”). You may need to write in passive voice, at times, to eliminate the first person. If the assignment asks for your perspective, you may write in the first person.

For help in understanding the difference between active and passive voice, see the handout at our website: <http://www.gvsu.edu/wc>.

Prompts for Writing Consultations

- Does the application of the theory seem plausible, appropriate, and clear?
- Are the theories and ethical principles fully discussed and understandable?
- Does the paper relate the values, principles, and legal issues most relevant to personal and professional values?
- Does the paper link the assigned ethical dilemma or scenario to current nursing practices and theory? Can you recognize the dilemma?
- Is the paper organized chronologically and structured logically?
- Does the essay begin with a strong introduction?
- Is the issue clearly organized into well-developed paragraphs with appropriate transitions?
- Are sources introduced and integrated smoothly into the discussion? Is there paraphrasing throughout instead of direct quotes?
- Is proper credit given to the ideas of the author of secondary sources?
- Does the manuscript’s format and citation style conform to APA guidelines?
- Double check grammar and mechanics taking care to note where the writing could be recast into active voice.