

Top Sources on the Plastic Surgery In-Service Examination: Lag Time from Publication and Trends over the Last Ten Years

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Abstract

Background: Every year the American Council of Academic Plastic Surgeons (ACAPS) publishes the answers to the plastic surgery in-service exam. In this publication, multiple journals and textbooks are cited for each question. To the best of our knowledge, there are no studies analyzing the top sources in this examination. This study identifies the top sources and citations, and lag time from publication.

Methods: A systematic review was conducted to identify all ACAPS In-Service Exam references from 2004 to 2013 from the website: <http://acaplasticsurgeons.org/InService-Exams/>. We identified the most referenced journals, textbooks, and the lag time from article publication to citation on the exam. Given the diversity of references for each question, and the historical significance of some, another lag-time was calculated taking into account only the most recent publication cited in each question.

Results: The most referenced journals over the last ten years were Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery, Clinics of Plastic Surgery, and the Journal of Hand Surgery, accounting respectively for ten year averages of 38%, 7.5%, and 5.5% of all journal references. When looking at the last five years, Annals of Plastic Surgery comes third after the Journal of Hand Surgery, each contributing 4.3% and 4.7%.

The top three referenced textbooks were Mathes' Plastic Surgery, Green's Operative Hand Surgery, and Grabb & Smith's Plastic Surgery, each accounting respectively for 16%, 12% and 11% of all textbook references. We noticed a consistent decline in textbook references from 2004 (45%) to 2013 with only 17% of all references (Figure 1).

Taking into account all citation sources since 2004, the median lag time from publication was around 7 years. For journal citations, mean lag time was 6 years with no significant variations over the last ten years. Considering only the most recently published source in each question, mean lag time was 4 years with minimal variation from 2004 – 2013.

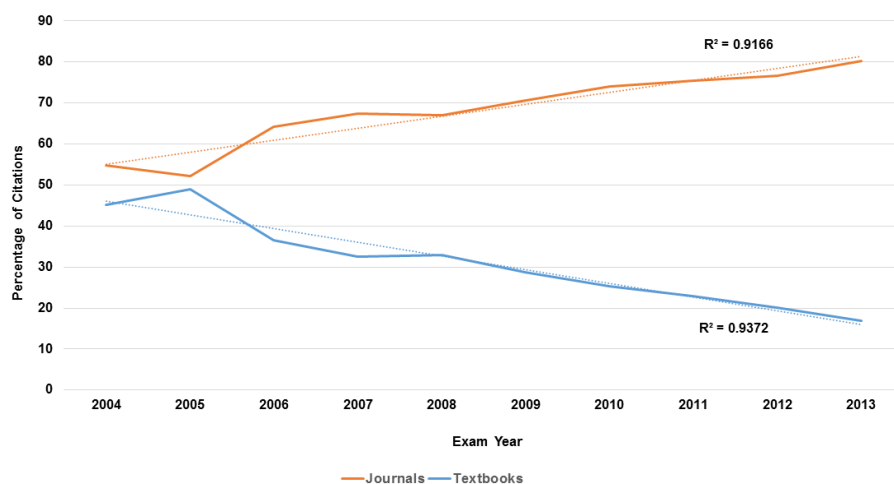


Figure 1. Journal vs. Textbook Citations from 2004 - 2013

Conclusion: Today's technology has made it easier for residents and their educators to have access to a much broader range of educational resources, such as online books and subscriptions to several journals. Knowledge of the top sources used for the in-service examination may help residents in organizing journal clubs and educators in designing a high yield didactic curriculum.

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