

Get Published

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Why publish?

When I ask nurses to consider submitting an article for publication, this is often the first response I receive. There are many reasons for publishing articles in professional journals. Writing articles for publication is a natural part of the process of professional maturation. As we grow and mature as nurses, we experience more, and publication is an excellent way of sharing experiences, information and lessons learned with other nurses. Getting published is also a way of establishing a personal identity within your chosen profession. Lastly, the publishing process contributes to your own personal & professional growth as you work through the process of reviewing material, researching, writing, and rewriting!

"What should I write about"?

This is often the second question asked? The most obvious answer to this question is "write about what you know". Write within your area of expertise. For example, if you are a nephrology nurse, write about nephrology, if you are a medical nurse, write about experiences you have had on your medical ward or clinic. Choose a relevant & timely topic. If you are stuck for ideas, ask your co-workers for their thoughts. If there is a topic that you and your peers are curious about, most likely other nurses are also interested.

If you have cared for a difficult or unusual patient, consider writing about your challenges, strategies and outcomes so that others have the opportunity to learn. Have you written, or been involved in implementing, a new procedure? Examine situations you've experienced and found yourself dealing with. Do you have an idea for change that would improve patient care? Or have you, your ward, or your facility recently been through a process of change that made a difference? Consider writing a summary of what happened, the challenges that you faced, what worked and what you would recommend for others in a similar situation.

If you have already written material, consider using that work as a base or draft. Self-learning packets, teaching plans, and essays or papers written for courses all make excellent starters for articles.

What you write can take the shape of a continuing education article, a case study, a clinical consult, or a medication/book review.

A guideline for writing

First, choose the idea. The first step in the writing process is to choose an idea, considering your intended audience. Target a specific readership. Be specific. Who is your audience? Do you want to write a general interest article that might fit well in a general nursing journal? Or, are you interested in writing an in-depth description of a challenging situation that might be better situated in a specialty journal? Choose a single main idea and develop the idea. Keep the scope narrow. You are writing an article, not a chapter in a book. Try to tie the article in with your intended readers experience.

Before you begin, consider sending a query letter to the editor of your chosen journal asking if they are interested in articles on your proposed subject. Your chances will improve if you present a well thought out and developed idea.

Once you have chosen the journal and the topic, set a target date. Set several target dates, one for each piece of your article. Target dates are crucial in keeping you motivated and on track, but be realistic. If you have an active life or a demanding family, will you truly be able to finish by your chosen date? Make a timeline, with the target dates for each section. Put it in writing and post it in a visible place.

Plan a strategy for writing. Many budding authors feel overwhelmed by the thought of writing articles, wondering where to start. Aim to write your article using a "top down" approach. Start at the beginning and work your way through each section systematically.

Make an action plan. Schedule writing times. If you are writing the article with others, schedule weekly writing meetings where you all get together. (Articles with more than one author present challenges and call for patience and compromise).

The actual writing process

The first step in writing your article is to collect the material (information, data, references, etc) and then to organize the material into separate sections. Consider all the variables of the topic or the approach you plan to take. What influences your topic? Your article ought to have a beginning, a middle, and an ending that guide the reader.

Plan to divide your article into the following sections:

- Title - The purpose of your title is to attract the attention of potential readers. Choose a title that is interesting yet professional. Once readers are interested in your topic, they will read the abstract.
- Abstract - The purpose of the abstract is to convince potential readers that the article is worth reading.
- Background - why are you writing this article? What is the history behind your paper?
- Purpose - What is your purpose in writing this article? To inform, educate, share?
- Headings - Use these to divide your article into clear sections.
- Text - Body of your article. Here is where you make your point.
- Tables, charts and pictures - use to give data and illustrate examples
- Conclusion - This should be a summary of the main points of your article
- References - List references you used in writing your article so readers can follow up for more detail if they choose.

Next, sit down, in a quiet place without interruptions and write. Write only for short periods. Try to limit writing to one hour at any time. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation and grammar in the first draft. These can be addressed later. Once you have written a draft, put it aside for a few days, then reread it. Rewrite the article, then reread and rewrite again. When you are happy with it, give it to a friend or colleague to read and comment. Choose a person who will give you honest feedback, not one who will just tell you how wonderful it is because you wrote it. Then rewrite it again!

Writing tips

- Keep your format and style consistent throughout the article
- Develop and maintain a clear approach
- Develop each aspect of the article completely
- Tie each section together logically
- Keep gender neutral, use "patients" instead of "she" or "he"
- Use plural instead of singular (children instead of child)

Writing styles

- Use an active voice, not passive
- Use headings & subheadings to divide your article into clear sections
- Use clear language
 - Use familiar words instead of fancy
 - Use concrete words rather than abstract
 - Use single words instead of complex phrases
 - Use short words instead of long
- Write the way you talk
 - "use" not "utilize"
 - "about" not "with respect to"
 - "guess" not "conjecture"

Resources to use

There are many readily available resources for you to use. Your colleagues (with and without publishing experience), computers and the internet, your facility library, and professional groups and networks, both international and local.

"Other" important stuff to remember

- Check your facility's administration policies. Does the head of your department need to be included in any formal publications?
- As a general rule, you are only allowed to publish the same article in one journal although variations may be allowed.
- The journal that publishes your article generally retains ownership of the article and Journals usually request that you send a copyright "transmittal of ownership".
- The journal will probably require a brief biography. This is a short summary of your experience so the reader can gain insight into your perspective as an author.
- Cite any financial support you received from companies that are active in the field you are writing about to identify potential conflicts of interest that your readers may need to be aware of.
- Send as many copies as the journal's "guidelines for authors" ask for, and in the style they ask for.
- Make sure to get the editors name right.