



How to write a paper for publication

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Abstract

As a professional group, nurses, whether as academics or practitioners, find it difficult to write informatively about their practice or translate the outputs of academic studies into accessible to the publications.

This article aims to discuss a series of progressive steps and present some guidelines when preparing a paper for publication in nursing journals.

This manuscript will assist the novice writer with the writing process. This will walk the prospective author through selecting a topic, searching the literature, following through with the submission of the manuscript and, and finally emphasizing the rewards of publication. The discussion also explores how to respond to written reviewer's comments once the paper has been returned by the publishers. Along the way, helpful tips will be highlighted to enhance your chances of getting your manuscript accepted for publication.

Keywords: Publishing, literature review, writing, publication process.

INTRODUCTION:

Writing a scientific paper and seeing it through to publication in a peer-reviewed journal is a major endeavor; it also represents challenge, especially for the inexperienced writer (14). Publications by nurses in high quality journal are part of the current trends in the dissemination of nursing knowledge. However, to enable this whole process into action, there is need to examine an “up-stream” approach and tackle the root for the development of nurses to write for publication, whether in English or any other language (11,15,21).

Within higher education, there has been a traditional culture that to be a rounded academic, an individual must have a profile that demonstrates active involvement in research and publishing. The pressure to publish is also related to building and establishing a unique body of knowledge and reducing the theory-practice gap (1,2,18,20). Pressure from governmental sources to increase productivity can influence both academics and clinicians to evidence achievement and progress through publication (9). The move of nursing into higher education has led to a cultural change in the outlook of both those responsible for education provision and the learners involved (9,19).

There are many reasons to write and publish :to advance and disseminate knowledge, to advance your institution and to advance your career (14) and also other variables are include the reasons why individuals publish are varied and include career progression, personal objectives, employer or other expectations, fame and financial rewards (1).

The development academic writing, including for publication has several advantages: firstly there is evidence to suggest that the support of academic writing may increase research productivity (8), faculty esteem, and increased publication (9). Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, there is also evidence to suggest that through the development of faculty, the writing skills of students may also be enhanced (9,10,21).

It is recognized that writing for publication is difficult, and for the outcome to be successful, knowledge of certain techniques, considerable time, effort and commitment are essential (1). However, there is also agreement that writing for publication can be learned, and it is usually a lack of confidence and subjecting oneself to peer scrutiny that act as barriers or deterrents for many (1,9,14). It has been said that nurses are continually writing in one form or another. Yet, a brief review of the literature identifies that there exists a shortage of nurses writing for publication (9). The research results indicate that interest in research activity exists, however the dissemination of research findings presents a major problem.

While undoubtedly there has been a surge of new nursing research journals and high quality articles over recent years there remains a concern within the profession that actual output is not of the quantity anticipated or required (5, 8,15,22).

It also found that the level of publication activity within the nurse population is low, with only an estimated 0.4-3% of nurses promulgating their findings in national academic of professional journals (8).

It should be remembered that the dissemination of research is only one possible reason for nurses to publish (Table 1).

The aim of article is to consider the essential steps in preparing a paper ready for publication, and how to avoid mistakes, might lead to outright rejection.

WHAT TO WRITE

There are several types of scientific paper: a case report, a report of clinical trial, a how to do it report, are view article or a laboratory research paper. Whatever type of paper you write, explain all abbreviations at first mention, even in the abstract, and avoid the use of clichés, jargon, colloquialisms and slang (14).

HOW TO START

Driscoll &Driscoll (2002) identify four questions that challenge the aspiring writer. The questions are (7,9, 15):

- 1-Can I write already?
- 2-What should I write about?
- 3-Who is going to read it?
- 4-How should I write it?

The first question relates to personal confidence. Authors may question whether they have the ability to write for publication; this is well supported in other texts (9).

The second question relates to difficulty in identify and developing suitable ideas for publishable papers (1,8).

It is always easier to write about an area where you have expertise or have taken an active role; this might include reporting the results of an audit you instigated, the implementation of practice guidelines, or even a case study about an unusual clinical condition and the nursing care delivered (1).Once you realize that you can publish, the next step is to select a topic, then do to the existing literature and select the appropriate journal (15).

Searching the literature requires an inquiring mind and a bit of detective work.

Begin by using a data-base that indexes the nursing literature. Your first choice should be the Cumulative Index to Nursing Allied and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL).

Once the broad topic has been identified, time should be spent reflecting on the following points (1,12):

- *What am I writing about?
- *Who am I writing for?
- *Why am I telling them this?.

By reflecting on the above questions, you will have a clearer idea about scope and boundaries of your intended paper (1,12).

In the third question, the need to be undertaken prior to writing is the selection of a suitable journal and intended target audience is considered (1,14).

Once you have examined the philosophies and chosen one whose aims and objectives you feel most comfortable with, examine the membership of the editorial board. If the editorial boards are an academic, there will be an expectation that you submit work to peer-reviewed journal with a heavy citation index (1).

If you are part of a research team, the members may have identified to publish at least two papers, one that might address the methodological issues and the other could be directed towards clinicians with an emphasis on the implications for practice (3,4,10).

On the other hand, the advantage of being part of a research team or in a writing syndicate is that the workload can be divided (1,16), and facilitate the development of inexperienced writers through the opportunity to work with more experienced authors (1,9). Other advantages include a potential increase in writing activity, a potential for collaborations to help overcome traditionally perceived professional barriers (3,4,9).

In the fourth question, reflects uncertainty related to the writing process itself and consequently encapsulates numerous other obstacles to the writing process (1,9).

There is no formula about when to write; individuals tend to identify their own best time. Most successful authors find a regular place where they can concentrate; to minimize interruptions, they put notices on doors, remove telephones and anything that may interfere with the creative flow of ideas (1).

Four of the most common mistakes made include papers that are submitted without a clear and logical structure, failure to state the aims/purpose of the article, lack of in-depth review of the literature or conclusions that are disproportionate to the results from data analysis (1,5,6,8, 13). Therefore, devote time to organizing the content and devise a simple structure for your paper (1). When your manuscript is to write, keep the following points in mind: (1) develop an organized outline, (2) focus on clarity of purpose, (3) be sure to have an introduction stating what your paper will cover, and (4) have a summary where many of the main points are reemphasized. It is highly recommended to have a colleague read it for a second opinion or use any available resources for assistance (15).

An article can be divided into a series a major paragraph, each with a message. The results should be confined to another paragraphs should focus on the implications and conclusion.

A Framework for Writing

Each journal has its own house style and idiosyncrasies about layout and presentation; if an author has prepared a paper that is clearly not in accordance with specific journal guidelines, it is likely to be returned unread (1,13,14,22). Few editors are willing to forward manuscripts to reviewers, which fail to conform to guidelines (1,15).

With the exception of reviews, case reports, research article scientific papers normally use the same format: Title, abstract or summary, introduction or statement of the problem, aims or objectives, hypotheses, methods, results, discussion, conclusion and references (3,6,12,14,21,22).

Title; The title may be readability and may be in the form of a question. It must rapidly convey an idea or information so that it will capture the immediate attention of the reviewer and reader (1,12,14).

Abstract; writing an abstract first, in breaking the traditional convention, does work for some types of publications. A good abstract can be most important paragraph in the article and should be coherent and precise (12).

The abstract is generally given a strict word limit by publishers, usually around 120-250 words, so be sure to acquaint yourself with the journal requirement (12,14). Keep in the mind that International Nursing Index, Pub med, Medline or Latindex, Lilacs etc. databases, as part of their indexing procedures, use both Title and Abstract plus any extra key words you supply (6,14,18,22). Sometimes the abstract appears in the form of a single paragraph and it is structured by division into the sections appearing in the text, introduction, methods, results and discussion (12,14).

Abstract are not references and can be used to guide the writing the paper itself (12,14).

Introduction; The introduction section should be fairly uncomplicated. Basically, it is the section where the study's justification and statement of hypotheses belong, and will develop the themes later (12, 14,17). It should contain an extensive review of the literature, should include a statement about the hypothesis to be tested or the specific questions that you feel need to be answered (5,14,17).

Whatever type of journal you are writing for, always define or operationalise the terms or concepts used in the paper. Give an explanation to all abbreviations at first mention in the text (12).

Methods Section; Dividing the methods up into sub-sections is a good idea (1,5,14).

The contents of the methods section should include the following: aim, design, sample of participating, instruments, ethical considerations, data analysis and data collection (11). When the discussing the use of techniques, give enough detail to allow the experimental methods to be repeated by others or alternatively provide references in which full details of the techniques can be found, and limit your writing to a description of the modifications you have incorporated into those methods. The best designed studies are those that have had the benefit of a statistician's advice before the experimentation phase. Indeed, all studies need careful statistical design before the start of data collection (14).

Result Section; Results should provide information with regard to data and indications of statistical significance. Be careful to include only data in this section, not the background findings that led to the data. Background material should appear in the discussion section or in the introduction (1,12, 14,15).

In writing the results section use your rough set of results and figures as a guide. There is a different set of skills needed in creating tables, histograms, bar charts and other kinds of visual presentations (1,14).

For maximum impact present the central findings of the study in graphical form. Tables organize the data into a more accessible form, giving the data greater impact than text (1,5,14).

Discussion Section; The discussion is the most difficult section to construct (14). In the discussion section, the first paragraph can serve as a summary for the study in question or statement of the problem (11,12).

The inclusion of key findings of your study and their analyses, in relation to the relevant literature, familiar with recent advances in the field should be presented here (12,14).

The discussion should be written with a sense of flow and with care being taken to avoid reiterating results. A way of giving flow the discussion is to discuss your findings under a number of headings (14). Discuss about the strengths and limitations of the study and suggest future research studies (12). End the discussion with a summary paragraph incorporating a conclusion (14). This should give an indication of any implications for clinical practice and should always state explicitly the implications of your study for nursing education, management (4,12).

References; it is essential to observe the journal's house style and sources should be listed at the end of separate page. References lists are formatted according to the journal's author instructions (1,12,14,15). Most authors and readers of journals in this region are familiar with the "Vancouver style" or "the APA style" of referencing (12).

SUBMITTING THE PAPER

This is an important landmark in the process of preparing a paper for publication; however, the final checks still need to be undertaken. Three activities feature at this stage include reading aloud, use of critical friends and comment on your proposed paper; reduce, refine and rewrite (1,11) (Figure 1).

Prior to submitting the final version of your paper, go through the guidelines for authors and ensure that you have followed these explicitly. Check that the front page has the title of paper, the contact details of lead author, names of coauthors and their qualifications. The author with whom correspondence should be addressed, their telephone number, fax number and e-mail must also be included. At the same time, consider if there are any acknowledgements to be made. These should be added after the conclusion and should be brief.

For some journals, the acknowledgements of receipt of manuscript are usually done by electronic mail systems. This is the fast system and the process of submission, reviewing and publication of your article can be monitored on line the journal's Internet website. When you are contacted by the editor, you will be given editorial feedback or check-list and comments from the reviewers.

Many journals have online submission, which allows the submission process to be easier and quicker.

More importantly, never send your manuscript to more than one journal at a time. Only when your paper has been rejected, can you formally invite another journal to review the manuscript.

If you have not heard from the editorial administrator within that timeframe, then write a short e-mail asking for clarification on the progress of your paper.

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR REJECTED MANUSCRIPT?

There are four possibilities that could emerge from the review of your paper (1,15):

- *Acceptance (unconditional)
- *Acceptance with minor revisions
- *Acceptance with major revisions
- * Rejection.

The majority of papers usually go through a number of revisions before they are acceptable for publication. The length of this process depends upon whether there is minor or major editing or revisions to be undertaken .If your paper needs further revisions to be of an acceptable quality, you will be required to make some revisions to the text. A covering letter is needed, with all the changes you have made and note where they appeared in the revised (12).

Once a paper has been accepted, you will receive a follow-up e-mail from a production editor who will seek confirmation of contact details, and unless already returned, a signed copyright form.

The outcome is a rejection with an explanation as to why the paper was not accepted. Several reasons for rejection might be that (1) the manuscript does not follow the author guidelines, (2) is too wordy, (3) reads like a paper written for school, or (4) presents inaccurate/ incomplete data and inappropriate findings, (5) text is difficult to follow or poorly written, and (6) topic is not pertinent to the journal or (7) is not timely. If you get a rejection, do not give up, but instead look at the reviewer's comments and decide how you want to revise the paper to resubmit it to another appropriate journal (15).

CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed indicates there is a significant and increasing pressure on both academic and clinical staff to publish. Authors should be well advised to follow a few simple rules in order to avoid a number of pitfalls when preparing a manuscript. This paper tried to summarize these rules, in the hopes that they could serve as guideposts for potential authors.

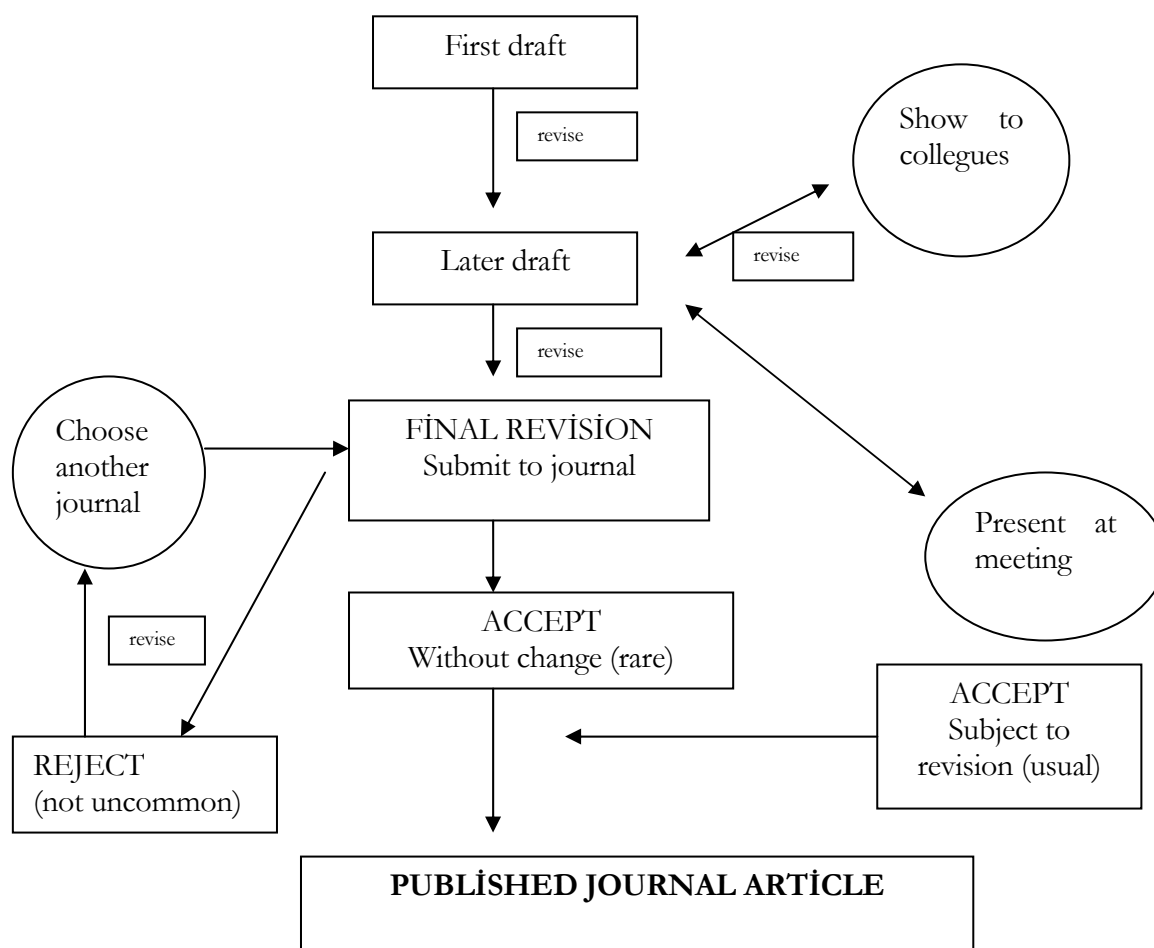
Table 1: Reasons Nurses Need To Publish

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|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Evidence on which practice can be based. *The results of primary/secondary research. *Specific expertise /experiences. *Practice innovations *Explorations of cases. *Reflections of practice. |
|--|

*An opinion
*A contribution to an ongoing dialogue
*News.

Adapted from: Keen A.(2005).

Figure 1: Typical flowchart of the development and refining of a manuscript.



Adapted from: Rosenfeldt et al.2000.

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