

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### Maximising the Potential of the Internet with Online Journals: Tips for Editors and Authors

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#### Introduction

Exclusively online journals are a unique media form, different from hard copy also available online (Dueze, 2003). As technology evolves, authors and readers have higher expectations for the quality and usability of online resources, in terms of appearance, accessibility, and functionality (Powell, 2005). According to Dede (Campus Technology, 2006), a major challenge in the evolution of online resources is that we are limited by our effort to make them resemble the physical world we already know, rather than extending them beyond the familiar hard copy options to take advantage of solely web based characteristics.

However, these limitations decrease each day. The paradigm of online publishing incorporates links, images, text, and sound to encourage a reader-selected path through journal content. The fluidity of blending these multiple resources renders each reader an active participant and constructs a unique reading experience whereby he or she "can dialogue [with the text] as a producer of meaning" (Norris, 1999, p. 197). This article discusses ways in which both editors and authors can maximize the vast resources and interactive power of the Internet to enhance scholarly journals.

#### **Considerations for Editors:**

##### **Identify unique readers**

Give intentional thought to the mission and philosophy of your journal (Brown & Irby, 2002). Who are the different audiences who might read a totally online journal? How can content be tailored to reach these readers? Consider readers in remote locations who may have limited access to hard copy resources: What content are they most interested in and/or in need of reading?

##### **Link to relevant web resources**

How can your journal best use web resources to provide scholarly content? For example, in addition to incorporating links to online resources within articles, online journals can respond very quickly to topics of current interest by incorporating interactive web-based features, such as reader letters and author replies, blogs, and reader surveys.

Intentional collaboration between editors and authors helps maximize the full potential of an exclusively online journal. A survey (Holmes, 2004) demonstrated that readers place value on direct links to citations, alerting services, and accessibility to archived content. Encourage authors to seek out and include appropriate web-based resources that expand or clarify the article topic. Many online resources are available for open access in pdf format. A direct link from the article can take readers immediately to the original source of information and provide additional depth of content or answer further questions. Images are widely available to demonstrate concepts, although they may be subject to copyright. In addition to clicking on images, readers show interest in video and audio files as these become more easily available. Recent trends demonstrate that online readers perform increasingly complex searches for media beyond print (Ozmutlu, Spink, & Ozmutlu, 2003). All web-

based resources need to be sharp and readable; this is especially important as readers use more portable electronic access devices with smaller screens (Dede, 2006). Also, multimedia features often require larger bandwidth that can deter readers, so it is necessary to critically question whether or not features enhance or detract from the scholarly content (Dueze, 2003).

### **Offer quality content**

Seek to maintain the high standards of scholarliness and quality essential to any professional journal. As with any scholarly journal, peer-review of manuscripts is essential to assure scholarly credibility (Brown & Irby, 2002). However, it is especially important to evaluate web-based information (e.g., websites) for such scholarly criteria as accuracy, authority, objectivity, and currency (Dobie, Fowler, Coats, & Bildersee, 2001). Be sure that the author evaluated the resource before including it in the manuscript.

### **Write in the current scholarly manner**

As society increases use of communication via electronic media, the mechanics of written expression are shifting toward those of oral expression (e.g., casual and abbreviated spelling in text messages) (Ferris, 2002). It is prudent for editors to maintain high expectations of writing style and format to assure the scholarliness of online offerings (Brown & Irby), recognizing that standards may change as online scholarly documents become more common.

### **Provide updates**

In the fluid web world, information changes continuously. In addition to using web-based resources that are current, an exclusively online journal should seek to maintain currency itself. While it is nearly impossible to immediately update links, authors should be encouraged to provide any updated information that they can. An exclusively online journal should have in place a process for updating links to keep information as current as possible.

Letters to the Editor provide another way to update topics and encourage interaction between authors and readers. Similar to a hard copy journal, letters to an online journal may be forwarded to authors to respond as desired. However, the online venue allows immediate posting of letters, so a topic that sparks considerable reader response can be updated through letters with a currency likely not possible in a publication limited by printer publishing schedules.

Consider listservs and ongoing updates whenever possible to keep readers aware of the latest content posted to the journal (Holmes, 2004). Email lists can be useful to announce new topics or articles. A What's New link on the homepage entices readers to explore new content. Partnerships with existing services, such as Medscape Nursing MedPulse, can allow your journal to take advantage of free online newsletters that features links to selected journal articles.

### **Facilitate quick yet comprehensive reading**

Easy navigation through the journal, and through each article, by readers of all abilities is critical for online reading. Consider what processes are in place to assure a reader-friendly experience. How do readers access the journal? Is authentication required? How and where is content indexed? Is there a system to track usage? Readers who must work too hard to navigate expend cognitive resources they could use for digesting your content (Su & Klein, 2006).

Especially important is the ease of the process readers use to locate both overall journal features and specific article content (Powell, 2005). Listing content in a structured way facilitates navigation and allows readers to review and select desired features. Linking lists can be used to guide readers quickly to journal content as well as to headings within individual articles. Links on this type of list

should indicate what a reader has already visited (e.g., by color change) (Su & Klein, 2006).

Finally, when electronic resources are incorporated, be certain someone checks links for accuracy and reviews navigation steps. It is helpful to have someone in addition to journal staff periodically review web resources (e.g., links, graphics) and offer feedback from an outside perspective. If navigation considerations are not seamless, readers are likely to go elsewhere.

The above considerations can help editors reflect on how they might use an exclusively online journal to its fullest extent. Communication with authors about the journal's purpose and priorities will facilitate a collaborative relationship to encourage them to incorporate these types of resources into manuscripts submitted for publication. Below are considerations for authors who wish to publish in an exclusively online journal.

### **Author Considerations**

#### **Include web resources**

Before preparing your manuscript for submission to an exclusively online journal, take the time to navigate the journal and search for ways it includes web resources. Think about how you can include similar types of resources, such as images or video/audio files, to strengthen your article. Be sure to evaluate resources you include for quality and scholarliness. There are many established guidelines to evaluate websites and online content (Dobie et al., 2001). Provide evidence of that evaluation in your article if possible.

You may have more room to include tables and photos in an online journal. This is an advantage of online publication as so many times a visual representation of a concept can add to reader understanding and/or appreciation of it (Ozmutlu et al., 2003). Review these visuals with a critical eye to make sure they complement the topic and the article does not become too busy (Su & Klein, 2006).

#### **Provide advance organizers**

Online journals often allow more freedom related to the acceptable length of manuscripts. This is a wonderful advantage as complex topics or research can be fully addressed without the restriction of page limits. With longer articles it is even more essential to organize content clearly. Keep in mind that online readers read differently and online articles don't look like hard copy articles (Dueze, 2003; Ozmutlu et al., 2003; Su & Klein, 2006) Many online readers skim as they read online. Frequent use of different levels of headings can help organize content and draw attention to your most salient points.

#### **Dialogue with readers**

Provide an email address so readers can communicate with you about your article. Readers who may not make the effort to postal mail a question or comment will often send a quick email, thus using electronic resources to further discuss your topic. This can be very reaffirming showing that the time and effort you invested in publishing your expertise was well spent. It is also a valuable way to network with, and learn from, others who are interested in your topic.

Likewise, consider responding to letters the editor may receive about your article. Norris (1999) notes that online discourse may spur a reader to revise their worldview. She further asserts that even lurking (or passively following online dialogue) is beneficial. Editors of online journals want to create a scholarly product that utilizes the power of the Internet, such as author/reader interaction and website links.

#### **Share updates with the journal**

You are an expert on your subject matter and are often immersed in the current online resources that pertain to it. Don't hesitate to contact the journal editor to provide updates about contact information, links, or content. The web is a publication venue that encourages updates and allows editors a dynamic and flexible environment to disseminate scholarly content. If at all possible, many editors will incorporate updates into the online journal publication process.

## Conclusion

Continued growth of online resources offers a wealth of potential for nurse authors and editors to disseminate scholarly information critical to the growth of the nursing profession, at a pace previously unthinkable. New trends, such as increased online interactivity, blogs, and archived video and/or digital lectures, can add even more exciting possibilities to online publishing. Close collaboration between editors and authors will help exclusively online journals lead the way to full utilization of these exciting web-based features, and those we cannot yet even imagine!

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