Topping and Tailing Your Article: The Finishing Touches
Christine Webb

When you have finished writing an article it is often tempting, at this moment of pleasure and relief after your labours, to click on the send button and submit it to your chosen journal straightaway. However, it is worthwhile pausing for a few moments to check that everything is in order before committing yourself.

Some things are best left until the main part of the article is written. It is often easier then to decide on the title, construct the abstract, add the keywords and insert the references. But even if you have done these in the process of writing the main text, it pays to have a final look at the journal’s author guidelines and particularly to check these points.

The title
This should be concise and informative, but contain the essential words that will grab readers’ attention and let them know what your article is about. It is probably best to avoid jokes, puns or catchphrases as it is easy for these to be misunderstood or misinterpreted, especially by readers whose first language is not English. There should be no abbreviations in the title and a shorter title is preferable – a maximum of 10 words is normally enough.

The abstract
Journal styles for the abstract vary, so again it is essential to check the precise guidelines for your chosen journal. For example, some require a structured abstract (with subheadings), while other may ask for bullet points. A maximum number of words will also usually be specified. Whatever the format, the abstract should give a succinct summary of the content of the articles so that readers are rapidly informed of its content. But it is also important to note that when articles are being placed on computerised databases it is the first 40-50 words of the abstract that are first accessed. Therefore, this first part must be carefully worded to ensure that it gives an accurate message about the content of the article.

Keywords
The choice of keywords is also important for computerised searching purposes. People who need to access your article to inform their own writing or research will only be able to do so if you use keywords that indicate the essential aspects of its content. For example, you may need to give keywords for:
- the patient/client group who feature in the article, e.g. children, carers, older people
- the setting that is applies to, e.g. acute care, community, nursing homes
- the type of paper, e.g. concept analysis, literature review, instrument validation
- the research design or methodology, e.g. randomized controlled trial, grounded theory, survey
- the research approach or methods used, e.g. discourse analysis, questionnaire
- the professional group involved, e.g. nurses or nursing, midwives or midwifery

References
As you are writing the article, it is vital to keep a record of the exact details of all the sources you cite (articles, books, chapter, theses, etc). Again, journals vary in the format they use for references and so it is essential to follow the author guidelines closely. The main variations are the Harvard and Vancouver systems, but even within these, journal styles may differ slightly. Double-check all details of the reference list, even if you have used reference management software – you may have entered details incorrectly in your database! A previous article in Nurse Author and Editor at http://www.nurseauthoreditor.com/article.asp?id=61 is a salutary reminder of how easy it is to make mistakes! It is worth asking a colleague to check the references too, as it is often easier for an outsider to spot errors.

Check that:

- The references in the main body of the article and in the references list march exactly the format stated in the journal’s author guidelines
- All details of the references are correct in both places, e.g. spelling of names, publication details
- The references in the list are the same ones that you have cited in the article. Make sure that you do not have any in the list that are not mentioned in the text, and conversely that all those in the text appear also in the references list.

If you are sure that all these details are a good as you can possibly make them, the click on the ‘send’ button and wait for the hoped-for positive response from your journal editor!

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