When I was in college, we all used Turabian (1961) and as far as we knew, there were no other choices for referencing systems. Then came graduate school and the confusion began. I was introduced to APA style (*Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*) and required to master another system.

Now we authors and editors have a virtual alphabet soup to master: APA (2010), AMA (American Medical Association, 2007), MLA (Gibaldi, 2009), Chicago Style also referred to as Turabian (2007), and Harvard Style (2009), as well as the Council of Science Editors Style Manual (2009), and the National Library of Medicine (2009) Index Medicus guide to journal title abbreviations. The experts in professional organizations and academic institutions preparing these guidelines insist on issuing new editions at about the time we think we might have mastered at least one style. To make matters even more confusing, among the many journals for which the primary target audience is nurses, there is no consistency in editorial requirements for manuscript preparation and referencing styles. When authors have manuscripts rejected, rewriting might require a change in writing and referencing style, as well as attention to the comments and suggestions of the editor and reviewers.

For nurse authors and editors, authors in particular, the existence of several sets of guidelines for format and referencing can be enough to stifle any dreams they might have had of writing for publication. As a mentor to many neophyte authors, I have found that these would-be authors sometimes view author guidelines and style requirements as insurmountable barriers. New authors find it daunting enough to consider writing for publication, never mind having to wade through a one to three inch thick style manual for the subtleties and vagaries of some committee’s idea of what a particular style should look like. Does the period come before or after the quotation marks? Should the author use one space or two after a comma, period, or question mark? If there are more than six authors, should the author list all six, use et al. (noting that only al. requires a period) and under what circumstances does the author apply the rule for listing all authors? In the text, in the reference list only, in both, or neither? What style requires first person, active voice, passive voice, forbids or permits anthropomorphisms, and if so, under what circumstances?

By now readers are probably asking “so what?” The confusion wrought by these very disparate style manuals underscores our responsibility if not obligation as editors and/or experienced authors to provide mentorship to new and struggling nurse authors, as well as students as early on in their careers as possible. Nurses who are mentored so they can successfully navigate the intricacies of the
various style manuals may be more likely to consider careers as faculty members, clinical leaders, or other positions whose expectations include publishing.

In my ideal world, we as editors and seasoned authors might attempt to reach consensus on one style manual for all publications whose primary target is nurses, or at most two: one for historical works and another for articles on clinical, educational, and research topics. Such consensus building would also have to include publishing companies whose audiences might be much broader than just nurses. Each publishing company is invested in the style it requires because of on-line submission, review, and production systems. Programmers and other information technology experts have replaced production specialists who translated manuscript pages produced on typewriters into printed and bound pages. I can only imagine what Edith Patton (Pat) Lewis would have to say about this in one of her inimitable editorials. (Lewis, 1980).

REFERENCES


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