

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### Chunk It: How to Turn Large Written Projects into Articles

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Do you want to turn your thesis, capstone project or dissertation into an article? If you're unsure where to begin, you're not alone. As a writing consultant, I find that recent graduates' desire to publish often exceeds their readiness. Considering how few advanced degree programs teach students to trim large written projects into publishable products, it's no surprise that some graduates give up without trying. Others submit manuscripts that are rejected because, according to journal reviewers, they read like "school papers" (Hall-Johnson, 1991).

Such was the case for a faculty cadre of recent graduates from master's, DNP and PhD programs who asked me to facilitate a "Dissertation Chunkers" workshop for them. This article shares the three simple steps they learned for chunking large written projects into manuscript-sized topics: brainstorm possible topics; assess each topic's eye-glitter quotient (EGQ); and, select the topic that makes your eyes glitter most. Amy's Story is an exemplar drawn from recent graduates' experiences that illustrates each step in this process. As you read how Amy goes about chunking out her writing project, keep a writing implement close by so you can chunk your own.

### **Amy's Story**

Amy had been out of her PhD program for a couple of years and her first manuscript from her dissertation had been rejected by two different journals when she emailed asking about a one-on-one consultation. I requested that she come to our exploratory, phone session with a list of wishes and fears and concerns regarding her proposed publication project (Heinrich, 2011). Amy's wish was to publish from her dissertation; her fear was that her dissertation research would go unpublished. To give Amy the self-confidence, skills and support she needed to chunk her dissertation into a manuscript-sized topic for a publication project, we agreed to embark on a "Scholarly Intensive." These Intensives are a series of consultative sessions in which nurses get hands-on experience with "best scholarly practices" that help them complete a pre-determined product, be that a proposal, project, presentation and/or publication.

### **Step I. Brainstorm Potential Topics**

Like many nurses, Amy had never taken the time to jot down all the possible publishing topics derived from her dissertation. When asked to list them during our first session, Amy was amazed at how easily these three rolled off her pen:

1. Five Nurses' Stories About Influencing National Health Care Policy: Tales from the Political Front
2. A Curricular Intervention That Turns Undergraduate Nursing Students Into Politically Interactive Graduates

### 3. Ten Ways To Increase the Political Savvy of Your Nursing Students

Amy's first two topics were drawn from her dissertation while the final one shares lessons learned from her experiences as a doctoral student and as an educator. Notice what happens as you record the list of potential topics drawn from your large written project. Do your topics come as fast and furiously as Amy's did? Or does it take a few days/weeks for them to percolate? Either way, allow your list to become a work-in-progress by adding new topics as they present themselves.

#### **Step II. Assess The Eye-Glitter Quotient for Each Topic**

Amy's next step was to assign an eye-glitter quotient (EGQ) to each topic on her list (Heinrich, 2008). After visualizing a continuum that runs from 0 to 10, with 0 being no eye-glitter and 10 being glitter galore, Amy gave each topic the EGQ noted below:

**10/10** Five Nurses' Stories About Influencing National Health Care Policy: Tales from the Political Front

**9/10** A Curricular Intervention That Turns Undergraduate Nursing Students Into Politically Interactive Graduates

**10/10** Ten Ways To Increase the Political Savvy of Your Nursing Students

Try it for yourself by picking a number that reflects your EGQ for each of your topics.

#### **Step III. Go for the Topic With The Greatest Glitter**

Assigning an EGQ to each of your topics can be as revealing as it is fun. Using EGQ scores to re-order her topics starting with the one that most excited her publishing urge, Amy was surprised to see that her manuscript about nurses influencing health care policy in the national arena, despite two rejections, still headed her list:

**10/10** Five Nurses' Stories About Influencing National Health Care Policy: Tales from the Political Front

**10/10** Ten Ways To Increase the Political Savvy of Your Nursing Students

**9/10** A Curricular Intervention That Turns Undergraduate Nursing Students Into Politically Interactive Graduates

See what you discover as you prioritize your topics by EGQs. In the event that several topics share the same EGQ, order them by the strength of your desire to transmute them into a publishable product.

#### **What Amy's Next Step Means for You**

Now you know how to chunk your large writing project into manuscript-sized writing projects by brainstorming possible topics, assigning each topic an eye-glitter quotient (EGQ), and going for the topic with the most glitter. If your experience is like Amy's, the pleasant surprises may not end with choosing the topic with the greatest glitter. Once Amy re-committed to her manuscript describing stories of five politically influential nurses, I wanted to make sure that the second journal had actually rejected it. When she forwarded that editor's email message, I noticed that the statement

following "...this paper is not suitable for publication at the present time" offered Amy a second chance. It read, "Should you decide to resubmit your manuscript with substantive revisions, please be aware that it will be subjected to a second full review process without guarantee of acceptance." Once Amy understood that this was an invitation for revising and resubmitting her manuscript, she was thrilled. Amy is currently updating her literature search as she readies her manuscript for resubmission.

## Conclusion

This article introduced a three step process called chunking that can help you translate any large written project ~ be it a thesis, capstone project, or dissertation ~ into an article(s). Whether you're going it alone or being mentored by a seasoned author, chunking large written projects into manuscript-sized topics paves the way for publishing success. As you order topics by eye-glitter quotient and take pleasure in turning them into manuscripts that reviewers compliment and editors are eager to accept, a lengthening list of publications will seal your career success.

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**Kathleen T. Heinrich RN, PhD**, is the author of *A Nurse's Guide to Presenting and Publishing: Dare to Share* (2008). This twice-tenured professor turned consultant shares her "can-do" publishing strategies with nurses to enhance their careers, renew their passion for the profession and foster zestful workplaces.

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