

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### Transforming a Presentation or Poster into a Publishable Manuscript

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You have an exciting project, poster, or presentation that improved nursing care: this can facilitate writing a paper for publication because it provides the outline, organization, and summary. You have done much of the work and have identified the core content of the manuscript. The poster literature and problem and outcomes of the project offer the article foundation. If the group that developed the project, poster, or presentation will write the paper, discuss the order of authors with them. Current ethics indicate that the authors write the paper; others who helped with the project but do not participate in writing the manuscript are typically not given author listing but receive an acknowledgement. Determine author rank (the order of author names), associated writing load (who will write each part of the paper), and deadlines at the beginning. Typically the first author is responsible for the major writing of the manuscript. If you have an editor or a writing consultant, clarify early that offering editing and consultation does not qualify for author listing. Now, the challenge is to transform your poster or presentation into about a 16-page, double spaced manuscript for publication. Check the author guidelines for the page limits as some journals requires fewer than 16 pages and some allow more than that.

The first task is to determine if the topic, project, method, and outcomes are timely, useful to the journal's reader, and suitable for publication. Ask yourself if journal readers would be interested in what you did. The topic needs to be significant and relevant to the profession and include the perspective of the author. If you selected a topic that challenges nurses and a project to improve nursing outcomes, you can describe what you did and how it worked. Descriptions of change projects that improved the quality of nursing care on a unit are appealing to readers. Your paper needs to highlight your perspective—your point of view. Your paper should add new knowledge to the literature. For instance, if many papers are published on depression, you would be wise to focus on a specific aspect such as cultural differences, an age group, or the effects of your nursing intervention.

The second task is to match the purpose and type of article with the journal and readers and identify preferred nursing journals (Oermann & Hayes 2011). Reading nursing publications and browsing and looking at the table of contents and articles are useful. The journals cited in the articles you reviewed for the project can be possibilities. Asking colleagues who write or faculty members to suggest journals can be useful too. You will want to select 3 to 4 possible journals and read the author guidelines. For instance, if I select a journal that publishes change projects that improve nursing care quality, I need to make sure that my article matches the aims of the journal and explains how this change improved nursing quality. If the journal uses charts and graphs, then it is useful to display some of your outcome data in a chart or graph.

Criteria for selecting a journal include a reasonable time from acceptance of an article to publication,

the percent of unsolicited articles accepted, your target audience, and possibly a high impact factor. The impact factor is the frequency with which the articles in this journal have been cited in a particular period of time, suggesting the influence the articles in the journal have on the profession. If you are considering multidisciplinary journals, make sure they list nurses as first authors. Peer reviewed journals are preferred in academia and often by health care facilities because they have a scholarly review process for article selection. Often the author's guidelines provide information about readership, impact, and peer review. You also can email a query letter to the editor describing your article and asking about the time from acceptance to publication. If you selected 3 to 4 journals and sent a query letter to each editor, you could compare and rank order the replies. For example, if one journal had a 1-year lag time from acceptance to publication, accepted 50% of unsolicited articles, was interested in your topic, and was a good journal, it might be your first choice.

Read carefully the authors' guidelines and information found on the journal website. For an open access journal, make sure that you understand the review process and any charges to authors. Some open access journals may publish articles without peer review and may have high fees that they will charge you or your agency.

The next task is to use the outline to organize the paper and write each section from the poster or presentation that you will include in the manuscript. Often it is easier to write the problem and purpose, literature review or synthesis of the literature, methods, and outcomes first, and then add the abstract, introduction, and conclusion later. In general, aim for about this number of papers for each section: an introduction (1-2 pages); the problem, purpose, and literature review (3 pages); the methods section (3 pages); the outcomes (3 pages); and references (2 pages). If you have a critical variable in your project, you may have a section on a framework such as change theory or quality of nursing care. Methods should include what you did and how you did it, the reliability and validity of your instruments, and a description or characteristics of your sample (eg, your patients). Make your procedures clear so the reader could replicate your project. Often you also describe the context in general terms for the reader to understand if this is a rural or an urban setting, and the age and ethnicity of your patients, among other characteristics. You may have a section about lessons learned. The references should be recent (eg, within the past 4 years) and follow the authors' guidelines for style. If you have an abstract for the poster, you may use this and adapt it to the word count or space allowed for the journal. Select a title that contains the key words that will be indexed to identify your article. A good title is precise, useful, and interesting.

When you write, turn off your desire to edit each word. Draft the section and write another section, then edit it a day or so later. Many reference styles such as the American Psychological Association style require the active voice (eg, the nurse assessed or intervened rather than assessment was done). When you have a draft, then edit it or ask an editor to review it and make suggestions. Editing helps make your writing clear and concise, reduces redundancies, and enables you to emphasize major points. Ask a few colleagues to read the draft and keep it confidential; ask them specific questions: is it clear, are examples needed, are any sentences redundant, is it well organized, and does it flow? Are transitions needed? Do any terms need a definition?

Following are some writing rules to improve readability. In general a page should have 2 to 3 paragraphs, and each paragraph should have a topic sentence supported with other sentences and then a transition to the next paragraph. A sentence that is 4 to 5 lines long is probably easier to read

if it is two sentences. Avoid using jargon, and if you use a term most readers will not know (eg, psychoneuroimmunology), then define it. If you are making a major point, add a reference to highlight your scholarship. Make sure though that your perspective comes through—let the reader know why you surveyed nurses and how you got a high percentage of them to complete the survey. Tell the reader about the challenges you faced and how you enlisted the support of your staff or others who typically may be difficult to reach. It is also wise to eliminate “there is/there are” instructions, use parallel constructions when you create lists, and use the apostrophe for possessive nouns (eg, nurses’ ideas or nurses’ interventions). Once you have drafted, edited, and reviewed the article, check the references for accuracy and make sure you have not plagiarized or copied any text or charts without written permission from the copyright holder.

You are now ready to submit your manuscript to the journal (ie, upload it to their website). Make sure you only send the manuscript to one journal at a time. After the paper is reviewed, the journal editor may accept it as is, request revisions, or not accept it (reject). Typically the results of the peer review will identify the issues or problems with the paper and indicate revisions. If the journal asks you to revise and resubmit, let the editor know you will resubmit and make the revisions if they are reasonable. Revise and resubmit promptly, and add a summary sheet that identifies your revisions. You can copy their suggestions and indicate for each item what you revised. It is wise not to take the reviewers’ comments personally but to use them as suggestions to improve the paper. If you do not agree with a suggestion, explain why you did not make that recommended correction. If you decide the changes the reviewers suggest are not possible, you can discuss this with the editor or simply let the editor know you will not resubmit. Then you can revise and submit the paper to the next journal on your list. If the article is rejected, assess why, revise it, and consider sending the revised manuscript to a different journal.

Writing for publication can improve the literature, enhance the science of nursing, and allow you to share your expertise. Turn your exciting project, poster, or presentation that improved nursing care into a publication.

## References

Oermann MH & Hays J (2011). Writing for Publication in Nursing. Springer Publishing, New York.

## Additional Resources:

Fowler J (2011) Writing for professional publication. Part 10: publishing a project report. British Journal of Nursing 20, 371.

Poster E, Pearson G S, Pierson C (2012) Publication ethics: its importance to readers, authors, and the profession. Perspectives in Psychiatric Care 48(1), 1.

Richardson A, Carrick-Sen D (2011) Writing for publication made easy for nurses: an evaluation. British Journal of Nursing 20, 756-9.

Webb C (2009) Writing for Publication. Wiley Blackwell, Oxford.

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