

Nurse Author & Editor

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Making Your Article “International”

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Roger Watson

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Most high quality journals purport to be “international” and seek to remind authors that they expect material to be submitted which is of interest to a global audience. Some journals offer specific advice about how to increase the international appeal of manuscripts (Hayter & Watson 2014). Many authors worry about how to make their study internationally relevant and, in my travels and workshops around the world, I find that this especially vexes authors from non-English speaking countries. However, any advice about making a manuscript globally appealing applies equally to authors from any country or culture.

Some authors believe that their work cannot be considered international as their study was only conducted in their home country and may not be relevant to those in other countries. They may be right and it is certainly true that some studies do not translate beyond the boundaries of the countries where they were conducted; if so, then they need to be published locally or nationally and there is no point in trying to make such a study "international" in its presentation. Authors should know from the kind of research they are conducting whether or not it will have a broad appeal and should be clear on this point as they are preparing manuscripts of these studies for publication.

However, every study has to be conducted somewhere and it is possible to raise the international relevance of many manuscripts by paying attention to a few simple points. Starting from the top, it is advisable *not* to include the country of origin of a study in the title of the article. It is increasingly a mystery to me why people do this. We have evidence at the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* that studies with titles including the country of origin are rarely, if ever, cited. Before you do include the country of origin of a study in the title of your manuscript, ask yourself: Why anyone would be interested in this? Are they more or less likely to be interested if they see the country of origin in the title? In most cases, the answer is that they will be less likely to be interested. There are some exceptions, such as in national surveys that are truly representative of the population, as these can be used as international reference points. In these cases, there is a point in naming the country as it will draw attention to the fact that the article is reporting a significant piece of work. For other studies, you have to declare the country of origin of the study somewhere and it is probably best to do this in the abstract; it will certainly have to be mentioned in the methods section. This is

not a problem as by this time—not having been discouraged by the title—the reader from any country is interested in your work. Now your challenge is to maintain their interest!

Beyond the title, there are several steps you can take to make the content of your manuscript internationally relevant. First, review and report the international literature on your topic—don't confine yourself to only the local or national research that has been done. This way, you can draw comparisons and contrasts between your research and that conducted elsewhere. This makes your manuscript more interesting to a wider audience and also helps to show how your work adds to the body of knowledge on a topic. In this sense, good systematic reviews are by their very nature international and this contributes to the fact that they tend to be more highly cited than other articles.

Second, make sure that any terms and expressions you use can be understood by a wide audience—especially one outside your own country. For example, in Australia, all nurses know what a NUM is; it's a Nurse Unit Manager, but the title and the acronym are not used everywhere and, while NUMs exist in other countries, they may not mean the same thing to readers outside of Australia. Therefore, you need to define the role such that people elsewhere will be able to understand it and equate it to similar roles in their own country, for example to "Charge Nurse" in the United Kingdom (UK). Similarly, unique to the UK, we have hospital "trusts." These are the organizational units of the UK National Health Service and may include one large or several smaller hospitals.

Third, in terms of describing research methods, the terminology used around

approval processes varies. In North America, Institutional Review Boards—abbreviated IRB—are the committees that review the ethical and organizational aspects of research. In Europe these are more commonly referred to as “ethics committees” and, in the UK there is an additional tier in the National Health Service of “research governance” which reviews the organizational aspects of research studies. The function of these bodies is probably self-evident from the description of their role in approving the study, but it is advisable to read over anything you have written to ensure that it is clear. It is also important, no matter what country you are in, to include information about the review and approval of your study by the appropriate board or committee—this is an international standard for the ethical conduct of research.

Fourth, politically acceptable language is also important and some expressions, still used in a few countries—especially when concepts get “lost in translation”—do not travel well. It is worth reading a few recent articles relevant to your topic to see how others have described key concepts. Examples of language that is considered unacceptable include “the elderly” instead of “older people.” Worse examples include describing people as “mentally retarded” in place of people with “learning disabilities” and using the words “mentally ill” as opposed to people who have “mental health problems.” A very recent change, from the American Diabetes Association (2016) is that the word “diabetic” should no longer be used when referring to individuals with diabetes, with the rationale that the disease does not define the person. It is acceptable to use the term “diabetic” as an adjective for complications related to diabetes (e.g., diabetic retinopathy) (p. S4).

Fifth, British and American spelling of English are different. If you are used to

one, say British spelling, then that is what you should use, even if you are sending your manuscript to an American journal. If your manuscript is accepted for publication, then the spelling will be changed to conform to journal style, usually at the copyediting stage. Thankfully, this is one detail you don't have to worry about, but you should still be careful to make sure the spelling and punctuation is correct and consistent for the version of English you are using.

Sixth, and finally, take opportunities to remind the reader about how your manuscript is relevant to and fits the international literature on your topic, using words such as “international,” “global,” “universal,” or “worldwide” wherever possible. This should not be gratuitous or exaggerated but, as I often tell potential authors: “Don't leave the reader guessing about the nature of your article and don't expect them to do the work of finding out.”

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