

## **Helping Students Get Published: Tips from Journal Editors**

### **A White Paper developed by the INANE Student Papers Work Group**

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#### **Introduction**

A recent study by editors of nursing journals revealed mounting concern about problems with manuscripts submitted by students. Editors reported that writing was an issue and manuscripts often lacked detail, were not well organized, and sources were often not identified. Submissions were not appropriate for the journal (Kennedy, Newland, & Owens, 2016). The study also revealed that responding editors accept the responsibility for advancing authorship skills among future nursing leaders but call on faculty and other mentors to partner in the endeavor. The Student Paper Work Group (Work Group) of the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE) developed this *White Paper* to assist faculty and mentors in guiding students towards successful publication.

#### **Background**

Members of INANE gather annually in person and communicate regularly electronically. A recurring problem discussed over the years has been a concern about scholarly writing among students. Because of the concern, INANE members have prepared numerous publications that are available at *Nurse Author & Editor* (About Nurse Author, n.d.) as guides to scholarly writing. Informal sharing at the INANE meeting in 2014 led to the formation of the Work Group. Discussions revealed that the issue was complicated by the increasing number of academic programs requiring students to submit manuscripts for publication as a requirement of their academic programs. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Essentials includes outcome expectations that demonstrate knowledge dissemination in both the Masters Essentials (AACN, 2011) and Doctoral Essentials for Advanced Nursing Practice (AACN, 2006). In addition to the AACN requirements, specialty organizations such as the National Organization of Nurse Practitioner Faculties (NONPF) have built oral and written communication into expected graduate competencies (Thomas et al., 2014). To meet the AACN Essentials and specialty requirements, colleges of nursing have included various requirements ranging from submission of query letters to full manuscript submission.

The focus on clinical nursing communication such as record keeping does not promote writing skills for scholarly publication. Faculty who guide student authors may not have experience in publishing. Since the AACN Essentials documents focus on outcomes and there are no required curricular threads for scholarly writing, faculty are responsible for guiding development of students' skills in writing for publication. Thus, the Work Group aims were to clarify issues around student publications, disseminate the findings concerning the issues, and develop a resource to assist faculty.

#### **Survey**

The Work Group conducted a survey of nursing editors in 2015 to specify issues associated with student paper submission. The survey contained 3 Likert-type questions identifying: 1) frequency of student submissions, 2) type of academic programs represented among the submitting students and 3) a listing of problems that editors experienced with the submitted papers. The results of the survey were recently published (Kennedy, Newland, & Owens, 2016).

There were optional open-ended questions to expand on the survey, gathering respondents' descriptions of problems and opinions about the requirement of submitting manuscripts as part of a program. Responding editors were also encouraged to identify their practice of requiring authors to report if the submission was a course or program requirement. Another open-ended question was designed to ascertain the kinds of responses provided to student authors whose manuscripts were rejected. Respondents were also asked what role they thought faculty should play if manuscript submission was a requirement and finally, to list any issues that were not included in the survey (Kennedy, Newland, & Owens, 2016).

## **Resource Development**

The responses to the open-ended questions provided some clear direction to guide development of a resource for nursing faculty and mentors guiding students' publication efforts (see Table 1). Six themes emerged from the content analysis and were used as a guide to develop this table of resources to assist faculty in guiding students through assignments related to scholarly writing. Submissions often failed to follow author guidelines; in fact, many editors reported that they often received the academic papers that were not adapted to the manuscript format. Student submissions had common characteristics such as excessive use of quotes and the presentation of theories or conceptual frameworks that were not operationalized or guiding the work. Literature reviews were found to lack synthesis or narrative describing how the review could advance practice. Manuscript organization and clarity were a problem in many cases. Small sample size was also described as a common problem in research papers.

Comments were made that student author behavior regularly lacked professionalism as demonstrated by the failure to follow through with the publishing process. The Work Group was surprised that in many cases faculty behavior was not supportive of student manuscript preparation even when faculty were included as co-authors. There was concern that, at times, there was violation of authorship ethics. The Work Group identified communication strategies used in communicating with student authors. They also reported that journal's publication guidelines provided direction for their actions. Some editors rejected manuscripts outright while others provided clear rationale supporting their editorial decisions. Many respondents reported that it was clear when faculty acted as mentors in the publication process. They offered suggestions that provided direction to faculty mentors. See Kennedy, Newland, and Owens (2016) for a complete description of the analysis and findings.

## **Summary**

The results of the survey and responses to questions illustrated the need for faculty resources to guide assignments related to students' scholarly publication. Several broad categories were underscored. First is the issue of students with poor, general writing skills accepted into programs where writing for publication is an expected outcome. To address this issue, faculty must construct experiences and assignments that develop basic skills such as sentence and paragraph construction, organization of thoughts into coherent arguments, and improving the ability of students to follow guidelines for submitting papers to scholarly publications. Basic resources for such strategies include using online writing laboratories (OWLs) and other existing university programs designed to help students who struggle with writing or English language proficiency.

A second general problem identified relates to the differences between writing for the faculty audience in a class assignment and writing for professional peers in scholarly literature. Faculty should not add requirements to assignments that confuse students, such as requiring a theoretical framework if one is not indicated in the proposed article. A general resource for helping students learn how to approach writing for professional journals is the free web-based course, [Writing for Professional Journals](#), at the

University of Utah. Faculty can download the entire course as an export package and include it in their course materials. The course is licensed under a Creative Commons Non-commercial Share Alike license.

A final general problem is related to ethical and professional conduct, which can be addressed in a variety of ways. Faculty can create ethics modules and professional conduct exercises throughout the curriculum in several different classes. Many survey respondents believed faculty who assign projects, such as submission of an article to a journal, have ethical and professional responsibilities to mentor students appropriately so that students will have a positive experience with scholarly publishing. Editors should not be considered the arbiters of student projects either by providing responses to submission by a certain date, or by acting as the first reviewers of students' scholarly work. Through the careful creation of writing assignments, students can learn how to write and be more successful in producing scholarly work for the broader nursing community.

Nursing journal editors have experience in scholarly writing and many are or have been nursing faculty or clinical nursing leaders with scholarly publication experience. Based on scholarly publication experience and the results of the work of the INANE Student Paper Work Group, Table 1 provides resources addressing a myriad of publication problems that faculty face in working with student authors. Table 2 is a listing of additional resources, including books and websites, with a particular focus for nurse authors.

## References

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Table 1. Resources for Faculty to Use in Mentoring Students in Scholarly Writing

Problem	Examples	Possible solutions	Resources
Poor writing skills, lack of English language proficiency	Incomplete sentences, poor grammar and word choice, poor paragraph construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make use of existing online writing labs (OWLs)</li> <li>• Assign student self-assessments from OWLs</li> <li>• Assign video lectures from OWLs for specific problems</li> <li>• Work with student resources on your campus to provide similar experiences</li> <li>• Assign students to take a writing course if available</li> <li>• Assign ESL students to appropriate campus resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">The Top 5 Online Writing Labs</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lists the top 5 OWLs and compares their strengths</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Guide to Grammar and Writing</a></li> <li>○ <a href="#">OWL at Excelsior College</a></li> <li>○ <a href="#">Writing at CSU</a></li> <li>○ <a href="#">Purdue Online Writing Lab</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Consider exploring each for their strengths and possible use in teaching specific to your students' needs,</li> <li>• Look specifically for faculty resources to use in your courses</li> </ul>
Poor organization, inappropriate format	No logical flow to the paper, poor understanding of formal paper format, essential vs non-essential content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider assignment of mind mapping to help students organize thoughts</li> <li>• Ask students to search Equator Guidelines for format appropriate to the type of manuscript envisioned</li> <li>• Require use of guidelines appropriate for the type of manuscript in process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">What is Rhetoric and How it Can Help You as a Writer</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Teaching and Learning with Mind Maps</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Introduction to Pre-Writing (Invention)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Equator Network</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Enhancing the Quality and Transparency of Health Research</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Poor use of references	Secondary sources rather than primary sources used, non-peer reviewed sources such as Wikipedia, commercial websites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider requiring the use of reference formatting and bibliographic databases</li> <li>• Work with librarians to incorporate the tools supported by the libraries, ask librarians to do a class or online module for the students</li> <li>• Consider short writing assignments to help students understand the differences between primary and secondary sources, such as research a question</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Reference and Citation in Writing</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Research and Citations</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Sense About Science</a></li> </ul>

		related to a controversial topic (eg, vaccines and autism, chronic fatigue and mercury fillings) with evidence-based resources and justification as to why the resources are reliable and what makes the other non-scholarly	
Plagiarism	Mosaic or hybrid plagiarism and text or paper recycling most common	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require submission of all papers to online similarity matching program such as Turnitin, SafeAssign, Writecheck, or equivalent</li> <li>• Recognize that some sources will not be included in these resources because they are behind paywalls so faculty should also look for grammatically poor writing, or writing that sounds like it comes from a different voice</li> <li>• Assign video from Plagiarism.org on 10 types of plagiarism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Avoiding Plagiarism: Overview and Contradictions</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Avoiding Plagiarism (Excelsior)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Grammarly Plagiarism Checker (free)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Plagiarism.org</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ <a href="#">Webcasts from Plagiarism.org</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">Resources from TurnItIn</a></li> </ul>
Lack of synthesis of ideas	Students catalogue or report findings without adding any original thoughts to demonstrate mastery of the topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider a brief writing assignment requiring synthesis of research findings about a single topic. Supply students with a list of 6 good articles on a single topic, or ask a PICO(T) question and require students to write up their research and answers</li> <li>• Grade for synthesis of information</li> <li>• Require submission to plagiarism detection software with submission of assignment and use feedback to show students what is unacceptable recycling to text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Common Expressions in Academic Writing</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Medical Literature Searching Skills (PICO)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">PubMed Clinical Queries</a></li> </ul>
Lack of expertise, lack of understanding of the topic, lack of in-depth research on the topic	Students unable to summarize information in their own words because they lack basic understanding, tend to use quotes or plagiarize sentences by substituting only a few words with synonyms, topic is something already published in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make writing assignments that build on prior knowledge, eg, refine purpose statement based on students' summaries of a clinical issue or situation that piqued interest in the topic. Consider assignment of reverse outlining of difficult source material.</li> <li>• Consider assignment related to reviewing content on the selected journal website with a brief write-up of how the student's idea differs from what has been published to date in the target journal.</li> <li>• Consider requiring that students find related</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Reverse Outlining</a> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ An exercise for taking notes and revising your work</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="#">UTSA Library Databases</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">UTSA Library Research Guides</a></li> </ul>

	the target journal	literature outside the biomedical/nursing field for appropriate assignments. Encourage searches in multiple databases or use library databases at your institution to design specific search queries.	
Failure to follow journal guidelines	Use of incorrect referencing system, exceeds word limits, formats project incorrectly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require submission of the author guidelines along with the completed paper</li> <li>• Require student to make a checklist of key points in guidelines and use it for their assignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Form a faculty group that reviews all papers and decides which papers should be submitted for publication.</li> <li>• Provide alternative opportunities for dissemination of projects such as research poster or presentation day, publication of abstracts of all papers in course shell, and have students provide critique of all the projects in a specific format. Critiques should focus on journal author and reviewer guidelines for the target journal.</li> </ul>
Inappropriate topic for selected journal	QI projects targeted to a research journals, project done with staff nurses targeted to NP journals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider a preparatory writing assignment to locate 3 possible target journals for submission and ask students to write out justification for each choice along with a summary of how the article should be focused to appeal to that target audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Nurse Author &amp; Editor/INANE Directory of Nursing Journals</a></li> <li>• Journal Due Diligence in Nicoll &amp; Chinn (2015) (begins at location 1373 in the ebook).</li> </ul>
Inappropriate authorship	Unclear who has contributed to paper or what the contribution was	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Require students to review ICMJE authorship declaration, explain completely who has contributed which portions to the manuscript, and review CASRI contributor roles taxonomy.</li> <li>• For students working in groups require feedback from group to individuals as well as overall confidential feedback.</li> <li>• If faculty are to be considered authors require that the students ask faculty specifically and justify the author role.</li> <li>• Require that students ask anyone who is a contributor for permission to list them as such.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">ICMJE Manuscript Preparation Guidelines</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Casrai Contributor Guidelines</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">How to Handle Authorship Disputes: A Guide for New Researchers (from COPE)</a></li> </ul>

Cowell, J.M., & Pierson, C.A. (2016). Helping Students Get Published: Tips from Journal Editors. A White Paper developed by the INANE Student Papers Work Group. *Nurse Author & Editor*, 26(4), 6.

Table 2. A List of Suggested Books and Websites for Information on Scholarly Writing

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- [Directory of Nursing Journals](#), a collaborative effort between Nurse Author & Editor and INANE
- [Writing for Professional Journals](#), Free online course on writing for publication

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