

# Nurse Author & Editor

Leslie H. Nicoll, PhD, MBA, RN, FAAN Editor-in-Chief

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## Writing for The Conversation

### Writing for *The Conversation*

Roger Watson

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If you have not heard of [The Conversation](#), I would urge you to check their website before reading on. *The Conversation* is an online newspaper but with a specific authorship; it is written exclusively by academics. The motto of *The Conversation* is “academic rigour with journalistic flair” and this describes the contents of *The Conversation* perfectly. In this [podcast](#) you can hear how the editor of *The Conversation* describes its mission. The aim of *The Conversation* is to provide a platform for academics to write articles that the public can and will read. Access to the contents is free and *The Conversation* is supported by universities, industry, and individuals. There are different versions of *The Conversation* for different countries: Africa, Canada, Australia, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and a global. The veracity of the credentials of those who write for *The Conversation* is assured as they should possess a valid university email address.

Anyone—even if you have not written for *The Conversation*—may put up a [profile](#) where you can add a photograph, describe your interests and provide links to your web profile and social media links.



There is no limit to what can be written about in *The Conversation* and some choose to highlight their own work and some comment on current affairs. The articles in *The Conversation* appear as blog-like entries; they are concise, readable, and informative. Readers of *The Conversation* can register for a daily email bulletin; this is supplemented by a weekend bulletin. There is also a periodic, well produced, entertaining, and informative podcast called “The Anthill” which allows editors to explore some of the more topical subjects covered in *The Conversation* in-depth and by interviewing authors.

As an editor, I have used it to promote interesting articles from the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. It is an effective way to publicize recent work. “Hits” on *The Conversation* are tracked and will contribute to [Altmetric](#) scores of articles and may even increase citations. I think authors and editors should be paying more attention to *The Conversation* and at the *Journal of Advanced Nursing* we specifically encourage authors to consider promoting their work this way. Towards that end I produced a [YouTube](#) with some guidance about writing for *The Conversation*.

The process of writing for *The Conversation* begins with “pitching,” which involves writing and submitting a structured piece about your topic. In the pitch, you indicate the topic area, its currency in terms of importance and why it will be of interest. The pitch will then be sent to a specialist editor who will decide whether your pitch is worthy and, within a few days, you will have the outcome. Don’t expect to have your first few pitches accepted—you may be lucky—but my

experience and that of colleagues is that it takes a few attempts to get past the pitching stage. While the rejections may seem brutal, the editors offer helpful comments on why the pitch was declined and how to improve a pitch in future. One way of increasing your likelihood of acceptance is to consult someone who has already been published in *The Conversation*. If you use the search facility on *The Conversation* webpage you can then find others in your university who have published with *The Conversation* and who may be able to give you advice. Once you have a profile you will receive monthly updates on *The Conversation* statistics for your university.

If your pitch is accepted then you will be given a relatively short deadline to write your piece; this will be accompanied by specific instructions on the length of your article and how it should be written. *The Conversation* aims for high readability at the level of an educated school leaver and to achieve that you are advised to avoid jargon and acronyms, to use short words and short sentences and not to end with the old academic refrain of “further research is needed.” You should provide weblinks to support your main points. If you have any presentations such as podcasts or YouTubes to support your story then these should be provided. You may be asked to suggest an informative image to head your article. Once written you can submit and check the readability score; there is no reason why this should not be 100%.

The piece will then be edited and fact-checked and, be warned, the subject editors really are experts. The piece will finally be checked by the editor of *The Conversation* prior to publication. Once published it is easy to promote your piece using social media as links are provided. You should let the publicity and media office of your university know about your article. The process does not end there as there is the facility on *The Conversation* webpage for readers to comment. The comments are not always complimentary but any insulting or inappropriate

comments are moderated and removed by an editor. However, when people have commented, especially in the early days after publication, you should take time to respond. You should always respond with gratitude that the person has taken the time to read and comment. If the comments are adverse or negatively critical, do not lose sleep over this; if you can refute the points but do so politely. If unable to refute the points, simply concede that this may have been a point you should have considered or will consider in future.

*The Conversation* editors are very keen to meet academics and they will visit your university and run workshops and meet individuals to discuss ideas. Check with your media team to see if they plan any *The Conversation* visits; if not, then you may wish to suggest one.

In conclusion, *The Conversation* is an interesting forum in and of itself, but it also provides authors and editors new avenues for writing, sharing expertise, and promoting their publications.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Roger Watson, PhD, FAAN, FRCN is Editor-in-Chief, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*; Editor, *Nursing Open*, and Professor of Nursing, University of Hull, UK. He is also a member of the Authors-in-Residence for *Nurse Author & Editor*. Contact Roger by email: [r.watson@hull.ac.uk](mailto:r.watson@hull.ac.uk) and follow him on Twitter: @rwatson1955. His ORCID ID is [orcid.org/0000-0001-8040-7625](http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8040-7625)

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