

Nurse Author & Editor

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Reporting Guidelines

Reporting Guidelines: Tools for Preparing your Manuscript

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Your research is not complete until you disseminate the findings in the peer-reviewed literature. By reporting your findings, they are available for others to critique and, if appropriate, to use in their own settings. Dissemination is critical to build evidence for clinical practice, teaching, and policy, among other areas. Your findings should be disseminated even if they are contrary to what you expected.

WHAT ARE REPORTING GUIDELINES?

The research report you prepare for dissemination is the key for others to understand what you did and found. Your manuscript needs to accurately report the study and to be complete, including the specific methodology you used. Yet

research shows that many published research articles are not complete, and because of that, they limit readers from evaluating how the research was done and the reliability of the findings (Simera et al., 2010). Reporting guidelines have been developed to improve the quality of research reports submitted to peer-reviewed journals. These guidelines help ensure you include in your manuscript all key areas about your study, do not omit critical information about the methodology, and present the findings with enough detail for others to interpret accurately. Reporting guidelines indicate the minimum information and order to present it for a complete and clear report of methods and findings (EQUATOR Network, 2017). Reporting guidelines are typically in the form of a checklist, list of content areas to include, or flow diagram, so you write “a clear and transparent account of what was done and what was found in a research study” (Simera et al., 2010, p. 2).

Reporting guidelines are used in addition to the Information for Authors for a nursing journal. Some nursing journals list specific reporting guidelines to use when preparing manuscripts for submission to the journal. For example, the *Journal of Nursing Care Quality* indicates that SQUIRE (Standards for Quality Improvement Reporting Excellence) should be used when preparing a manuscript on a quality improvement (QI) study. Even if the Information for Authors of a journal does not specify using reporting guidelines, you can still refer to them when preparing your manuscript. The guidelines will remind you about essential information to include and in what order.

THREE IMPORTANT GUIDELINES FOR NURSE AUTHORS

Over the years many guidelines have been developed for reporting different types of research. Three guidelines that I think are essential for all nurse authors to be aware of are:

1. **CONSORT** (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials). CONSORT is an evidence-based set of recommendations for reporting randomized controlled trials. At the CONSORT website ([click here](#)), you will find a checklist and flow diagram to guide you in preparing your manuscript.

2. **PRISMA** (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). PRISMA includes a checklist for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses. There also is a flow diagram for use in reporting the review process and studies included at different steps of the review. At the PRISMA website ([click here](#)), you can download a template of the flow diagram in Word for use in documenting the review process. While PRISMA was intended for systematic reviews and meta-analyses, it can be used for integrative and narrative literature reviews. More journals are regularly asking for a complete report of how the literature review was conducted, my recommendation is to use PRISMA for all literature reviews. Your manuscript may not be a review paper, but if you include a literature review section, you should report how you conducted that review: the databases searched and years covered, search strategy, process and criteria for selecting studies to report, numbers of studies at various phases of the review, and so forth. Conduct the literature review following the PRISMA guidelines and prepare a flow diagram of the review so you have it if needed.

3. **SQUIRE** (Standards for Quality Improvement Reporting Excellence). The SQUIRE guidelines were developed for preparing manuscripts on QI studies. They are valuable when planning the study as well as reporting the findings. Every student in a doctor of nursing practice program should be aware of and use SQUIRE if they are doing a QI study for their scholarly project. You can find information about SQUIRE at the website ([click here](#)).

THE EQUATOR NETWORK

There are literally hundreds of reporting guidelines now available. My advice is to search for guidelines at the EQUATOR website ([click here](#)). This is a portal with 377 reporting guidelines for easy access by authors. The website also includes a library with links to articles on health research reporting, toolkits on writing research papers and selecting appropriate reporting guidelines, courses you can take, and information for peer reviewers and editors.

Reporting guidelines can be used when planning a study to ensure you consider key components and record the specific information you *may* need later. They are also valuable when writing the manuscript so it is complete and accurately reports the study. Bookmark the EQUATOR website so it is handy for your next project.

REFERENCES

1. EQUATOR Network. (2017). Reporting guidelines for main study types. <http://www.equator-network.org/> Accessed September 24, 2017.
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