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Mythbusters: Society Membership and Publishing

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NURSE AUTHOR & EDITOR, 2018, 28(3), 1

Editor's Note: This is an article in an occasional series where the author will take on a myth that exists in writing and publishing and either “bust it” or confirm its veracity. If you have a myth that you would like us to tackle, [use the contact form](#) to send it to *Nurse Author & Editor* and we will get to work. Thanks in advance—I look forward to hearing from you!

“I am a member of X Nurses’ Association, therefore my manuscript will get preferential treatment if I submit to the association journal.”

“I had a poster at the annual meeting of X Nurses’ Association. The journal editor told me to submit a manuscript and she would make sure it was reviewed positively.”

“I know someone on the Board of X Nurses’ Association and she said to submit to the association journal—they really want manuscripts from members.”

In my years of facilitating writing workshops, and also my decade as being the editor of a society journal, I have heard variations on all of these questions. They all boil down to one point: as a society (or association) member, does an author have an extra advantage over other authors in getting a manuscript published? Unfortunately, this question does not have an easy yes or no answer. Let’s review each question individually to see what I mean.

PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT

Many people assume that because they are association members, this confers some sort of favored treatment in the review process. I think it is pretty safe to say this is not true, so this particular myth can be busted. Think about it for a minute: you submit the manuscript to the journal. The editor does an initial review. How would the editor know that you are a society member? Perhaps your name is familiar or you mention your association membership in your cover letter. You might even include a photocopy of your membership card (yes, people have done this; I don’t recommend it, however!). While these may be alerts to your member status, they are likely to be brief and not long-lasting in the editor’s mind.

More important, though, is when the manuscript leaves the editor’s desk and goes out for peer review, the reviewers will have absolutely no way of knowing that you are an association member. The majority of journals use some sort of blind review

—exactly how strict the “blinding” is can vary. Some journals want you to black out names of institutions or locations and ask you not to include your own name in any self-citations. Others (and I am in this camp) are okay with leaving this type of information intact. I figure that even if a reviewer is able to guess who an author is, that is still not going to influence the review. And, if a reviewer is able to guess who the author is *and* knows the author is a society member, is that going to change the review outcome? I think that is highly doubtful.

So, let's bust the myth that as a society member, you will receive preferential treatment in the peer review process. Not going to happen.

MANUSCRIPTS FROM CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS: INSTANT ACCEPTANCE?

Editors go to conferences and while we are there, we try to drum up manuscripts for our journals. This is part of the job! We always want to have sufficient numbers of manuscripts in the pipeline so that we can be looking ahead and planning journal content. While there are some journals that are widely known and receive many more manuscripts than they could ever accept, for most of us, we cannot simply sit back and wait for manuscripts to pour through the door. We need to do a little recruiting.

If an editor approaches you at a conference and suggests submitting to the journal, be flattered! It means that they have listened to your presentation or read your poster and see that there might be a fit for journal content. It also means that the editor is welcoming new manuscripts. But beyond that...don't read too much into the invitation. As with the prior question, the editor is not going to abandon the peer review process just because you became acquainted at a conference. If you mention in your cover letter that you met the editor at a conference and now you are following up with a submission, that might jog the editor's memory, but that's

about as far as it goes. It goes back to the preferential treatment issue, and this question is really a variation on that theme.

So, an invite from an editor at a conference—how do you parse that? My advice: be flattered, follow through with a submission, but expect the rest of the process to proceed as usual. Let's call this one a half-bust.

MEMBER MANUSCRIPTS IN GENERAL

The third question gets at the issue of manuscripts from association members, in a general way. If peer review doesn't single out members as part of the process, then is the editor/society interested in having members submit to the journal? Of course they are! Members are the lifeblood of any association and member-authors are extremely important. You just need to think strategically about the way you approach writing for the society publication(s).

First off, many society members are clinicians and may not have a lot of writing and publishing experience. Editors know this but they also know that clinician innovations may be extremely thought-provoking and valuable content for the journal. Therefore, they are interested in helping novice authors be successful. If this describes you, then contact the editor with your idea. Ask for guidance: Does the editor have suggestions for how you could focus your topic? Would it be best as a certain type of article, ie, research brief rather than a full research report? If the editor is encouraging, then reach out to your networks to ensure that your manuscript is as well written as it can possibly be. Ask colleagues for review and feedback, then revise your manuscript before submitting. Too many novice authors set themselves up for failure by submitting poorly written and edited manuscripts that don't meet journal guidelines. Don't be that person!

Also, many associations have multiple publications—make sure to do your due diligence and select the right one for your manuscript. For example, the National Association of School Nurses has two journals: *NASN School Nurse* and the *Journal of School Nursing*. Both are peer reviewed but *JOSN* is more research focused while the former is described as “the clinical resource journal.” This double- or triple-publication approach is common, so do your homework and select the correct society publication outlet for your proposed manuscript.

Last, when your manuscript is accepted and moves into the production process, make sure to include your membership information in the “About the Author” bio that you will be asked to write. You should also include any society-associated credentials, such as certification, after your name. Remember that the preferred order for listing degrees and credentials is:

- Highest earned degree
- Licensure
- State designations or requirements
- National certifications
- Awards and honors
- Other recognitions (American Nurses Credentialing Center, 2013).

So, for the member manuscripts in general question, I think it is safe to say that societies/associations definitely want to receive potential articles from their members—these articles benefit the society and its members so it is a win-win. Just don’t assume you are a “shoe-in” and make sure to do your homework to present the best article possible, tailored appropriately for the journal to which you are submitting.

CONCLUSION

Association membership confers many benefits, including the potential to be a published author in one of its official publications. But approach this opportunity with clear eyes and do not make any assumptions about an easier review or acceptance process. Keep in mind that maintaining a high level of quality for all publications contributes to the integrity of the association and its members—and that includes you!

REFERENCE

1. American Nurses Credentialing Center. (2013). How to display your credentials. Bethesda, MD: ANCC. Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/2hKtrG>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leslie H. Nicoll, PhD, MBA, RN, FAAN lives in Maine with her husband, three rescue pets, and two adult children close by. She keeps herself busy as Editor-in-Chief of *Nurse Author & Editor*, and *CIN: Computers, Informatics, Nursing*. She provides advice and consultation to both novice and experienced author who want to publish in the scholarly literature. Two days per week she works at the Portland Community Free Clinic. [Click here to send a message](#) directly to Leslie.

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