

---

☰ Menu

---

3 WEEKS AGO    EDIT

## Writing and Publishing Advice

# Writing and Publishing Advice from Authors and Editors

Cynthia Saver and Leslie H. Nicoll

**NURSE AUTHOR & EDITOR, 2019, 29(1), 6**

*“The only thing to do with good advice is pass it on. It is never any use to oneself.”*

— Oscar

*Wilde*

Oscar Wilde had it right—good advice is meant to be shared. Based on our own experience, we know that nurse authors and editors have a wealth information about writing and are eager to share their knowledge. With that thought in mind, we recently sent out queries to elicit expert opinions and “pearls of wisdom” about writing and publishing in the professional literature.

## APPROACH

To gather information, two questions were asked:

- What is the best writing or publishing advice you have ever received?
- What is your best writing or publishing advice you would give to others?

The questions were disseminated through the International Academy of Nursing Editors (INANE) email update list, as well as queries to individuals in our personal networks. As this was not a formal study, IRB approval was not sought. Respondents answered voluntarily and knew that their comments would become the basis for an article in *Nurse Author & Editor*. Twenty-four people took the time to reply and we appreciate their thoughtful comments.

Although the original intent was to share the comments verbatim, upon review we found quite a bit of overlap but there were also unique perspectives. Thus we decided to synthesize the responses, in an effort to tease out the most relevant information for *Nurse Author & Editor* readers. With this approach, we were able to see that the comments ranged from “big picture” thinking to very specific “how to” advice, and covered the gamut from getting started with an initial idea to celebrating at the end and planning for the next successful publication. With that in mind, let’s get to the advice!

## **THE BIG PICTURE OF PASSION**

There were 16 comments that used the word “passion” in one way or another. “Follow your passion,” “Find your passion,” or “Write what you are passionate about,” are examples. Using passion can serve as inspiration help authors to enjoy the writing process, not feel obligated to write, and open new avenues to inspiration. Passion for a topic helps you to bring “your unique perspective and insights [and gives] a fresh focus to well worn topics.”

In addition to using passion for inspiration, respondents encouraged authors to write about what you know. “Remember, it is your paper and you know it better than anyone else.” Along those same lines, another respondent said, “To me, it does not make sense to write about something that I don’t know well,” while a third comment was, “Your best writing will come from something you know about...but most of all, from something you care about.”

## **BE PREPARED FOR INSPIRATION**

While it is important to be passionate about a topic, it is also imperative that you hone in so that it is something you can write succinctly about. Your passion might be a “big picture” idea so be prepared for inspiration to help you refine your ideas. “Being prepared” means keeping a pad close at hand—on your desk, in your purse, in your pocket—to jot down ideas as they come to you. “When you get a thought or construct a sentence in your head, write it down.” You can also use technology: “The iPhone has a feature where you can put your writing idea into a voice memo or even better, have it transcribed into the notes function. Then you have the start of your paper as well as an idea!”

“Mull over what you want to write about as you go about your life. Exercising, waiting in line, and other tasks are the perfect opportunity to reflect on your topic.” Writing in a journal helps you to see “the tangible results and progress.” “I know that my mind is formulating ideas, even when I am not actively thinking about writing.” Take advantage of your active mind and capture those thoughts so you don’t lose them—they are your inspiration.

## **GETTING STARTED**

“Just do it!” or “You can do it!” were repeated several times. “It’s more important to get some thoughts down,” followed by “Instead of agonizing over everything, just dive in and start writing, knowing that you will have plenty of time to refine what

you have written.” Similarly, one respondent said, “There is no correct order to write, just do it,” while another suggested, “When writing, you don’t have to start at the beginning of the manuscript.”

Several respondents suggested tricks or tips to get started and stay focused. We thought this one was pretty unique: “Put a makeshift seatbelt on your chair or tie yourself to your stand up desk as a reminder of your writing commitment.” More typical, but equally useful comments included suggestions to turn off your phone or other electronics; shut the door; and make an appointment with yourself to write. “Block time for writing and don’t check email, don’t put in laundry, don’t walk the dogs! Use the time only for writing.”

Many writers get stymied because they don’t believe they have enough time to write and the experts took that myth to task: “Break large things into small parts,” “Train yourself to write in 10 or 15 minute blocks. You can walk a mile in 15 minutes—you can certainly write a page!” Another suggestion was to “set writing targets, in words or time.”

## **USE AN OUTLINE**

Five respondents advocated writing an outline to get started and provide overall organization to the paper. “An outline gets you started and lets you write the parts you know best first. It is also pretty easy to do an outline because most journals give you a template of what needs to be included.” Many commented that an outline leads to organized thoughts and a cohesive paper. The initial outline can be brief but can be expanded upon as ideas come more into focus. The outline should contain “the article’s major topics and subtopics. Give yourself a word count on each of the subtopics and then begin work at any place on the outline.” “Make sure the sections of your outline are congruent.” “Start with an outline and fill in the blanks!”

## **A DRAFT IS JUST THAT: A DRAFT**

“A bad first draft is generally where all great papers start,” was a favorite comment of ours. “Sit down and write and do not edit yourself while you are writing.” “Recognize that your first draft is never your last draft.” “Writing takes practice. Don’t expect your first draft to be perfect the first time.” And finally, “Wait until you have at least a significant portion of your thoughts down and then rewrite.”

But once the draft is written and you are ready to revise, many respondents pointed out the importance of communicating clearly. “Every sentence should be necessary, succinct, and clear.” “Check each sentence to see if you can make it shorter or if you can state the point more clearly. Divide long sentences into two, if possible.” “Verbosity is not helpful. Detach from what you write.” “Revise, revise, revise. Put it down and pick it up again a couple of days later. Sentences or sections that need revision will be more evident when you look at it after a break.” As editors ourselves, we believe this statement is absolutely true: “The work an author sends an editor should be his or her best shot right out of the gate, without any expectation that the editor will fix issues with grammar, spelling, punctuation, or composition. Remember that the ‘fix’ that’s applied by the editor might just be a rejection.”

## **SELECT THE RIGHT JOURNAL AND FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES**

As editors, we know that many articles are rejected because they are not the right fit for the journal. This sentiment was echoed in many of the comments from respondents. “Do your homework and read the mission statement or vision of the journal.” If you plan to submit to a journal, “read other articles, the editorial mission, the types of articles accepted, as well as the author guidelines to aim for the best fit between your manuscript and the journal.” Another suggestion was to “Review 3 years of articles in that journal to see if your work could be a good fit.”

Once you have selected the appropriate journal then many respondents emphasized how important it is to read and follow the journal guidelines. “Develop the article according to the advice included in the journal.” “Read and follow the directions as it will save you a lot in revision and rewriting time.” “Follow the journal guidelines and submission checklist. This is a timesaver in the end.”

## **REVISING FOR RESUBMISSION**

Since very few manuscripts are accepted on submission, revision is an expected part of the process. If this bothers you, remember, “Know that you will have to revise and get over it. No paper is perfect and input from others can make it better.” What is the best way to approach suggestions for revision? “Remember the importance of keeping an open mind and accepting constructive criticism. This can be hard if you are passionate about the topic.” “If you are required to revise, read and respond carefully to the feedback.” At the same time, “Don’t give up on the process,” or put another way, “Do not lose a publication because of a comma.”

A good reminder for all of us, “Do not take reviewer comments as criticisms about you personally...Revise the manuscript and resubmit it.” Another question we often receive: what if you don’t agree with a reviewer’s comments? Here’s some advice: “If an editor/reviewer asks for a change that is incorrect or just plain wrong, you don’t have to make the change, but please be polite and professional when you explain your decision in your letter to the editor.”

If your manuscript is rejected, don’t give up. “Treat rejection as the start of the next submission.” “Don’t be discouraged if your manuscript is not accepted. Review feedback from the editor, talk with a writing mentor, and re-submit to another journal.” Also, keep in mind that “many, if not most articles (excepting studies with methodological flaws or ethical concerns) are publishable, but many authors won’t stay with the revision process to publication.” Don’t be that person. “Keep revising

and submitting until you find a home for your manuscript. It may require rethinking and reframing but persevere.” And remember, “There are hundreds of other journals out there.”

## **WRITING WITH OTHERS**

Having a co-author, coach, or mentor can be enormously helpful in the writing process. As one respondent said, “Write your first few articles in partnership with experienced writers and keenly observe their process.” Another: “Collaborate and co-author with others. It makes writing easier.” “Set a deadline and tell someone who will hold you accountable. Better yet, write with a friend so you’ll be accountable to one another.”

Several respondents suggested forming a writing team peer group. Bringing in experienced authors can be helpful, especially if that person is willing to be a mentor. “When part of a writing collaborative: openly discuss and plan authorship when writing begins, hold regular check-ins by phone or web conference, at the end of each meeting send everyone their assignments, and next meeting hold each other accountable. Have a timeline but be flexible.”

## **TWO LAST SUGGESTIONS: PRACTICE AND WRITE ALL THE TIME**

“The best writing advice I ever received was to practice, practice, practice.” “The adage, practice makes perfect, is still true.” Keep in mind that everything you write helps you become a better writer: “Yes, well-crafted emails and social media posts count as writing practice.”

“I think writing every day or almost every day keeps the mind engaged on the project at hand.” Even if you are busy, find time to write: “I am unable to write at

the same time each day since my schedule varies so much, but even so, I plan on writing every day.”

And finally, “DON’T be discouraged. Take a ‘no’ and turn it into a KNOW!”

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors thank the following women and men who shared their inspirations and advice:

Lucy Bradley-Springer, Julia Cowell, Marianne Ditomassi, Gloria F. Donnelly, Donna Marie Fick, Mary E. Fortier, Kathleen A. Gross, Christine Hedges, Vallire Hooper, Wendi A. Howland, Debra Hrelac, Marty Lewis-Hunstiger, Anne Katz, Christine Kovach, Linda Laskowski-Jones, Fidelindo Lim, Deborah Lindell, Cheryl L. Mee, Nicolette Mininni, Michelle L. Murray, Jamesetta A. Newland, Marilyn H. Oermann, Jackie Owens, Susanne Pavlovich-Danis, Meigan Robb, Judy Rollins, Rose O. Sherman, Catherine Spader, Lorraine Steefel, Jaynelle F. Stichler, Sue Turale, Roger Watson, Carol Toussie Weingarten, Krista A. White, Marie H. Wilson, Charlotte A. Wisnewski, Elizabeth Wood

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Cynthia Saver, MS, RN, is president of CLS Development, Inc. (clsdevelopment.com), which provides writing and editing services and education programs. She is editor of *Anatomy of Writing for Publication for Nurses*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed.; editorial director for *American Nurse Today*, the official journal of the American Nurses Association; staff writer for *OR Manager*; and an Author-In-Residence for *Nurse Author & Editor*. Contact Cynthia at csaver@clsdevelopment.com.

Leslie H. Nicoll, PhD, MBA, RN, FAAN, is Editor-in-Chief of *Nurse Author & Editor* and *CIN: Computers, Informatics, Nursing*. She is in the process of putting the



finishing touches on *The Editor's Handbook*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, co-authored with Peggy L. Chinn. It will be published this spring by Lippincott. Leslie lives in Maine where she very much enjoys staying inside and keeping warm when it is cold outside. No skiing for her! [You can reach Leslie via the contact form on this site](#) and she will respond to you directly.

[2019 29 1 6 Saver Nicoll](#)

Copyright 2019: The Authors. May not be reproduced without permission.  
Journal Complication Copyright 2019: John Wiley and Son Ltd.

✎ AUTHORSHIP



---

Leslie Nicoll

---

< Previous

---

Editor-in-Chief