

# Nurse Author & Editor

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### Getting Published for the First Time: Tips for New Graduate Students

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New graduate students often have no experience in writing for publication. In many cases they have not yet conducted a research project, although they may be planning to undertake a study as part of their graduate program requirements. Even without research findings to write about, graduate students should gain experience in writing for publication early in their academic programs. With a good idea and some guidance in the writing process, students can have their work published.

#### Choice of Journals

There are a wide variety of nursing journals, each with its own mission and intended audience. It is important to ensure that your idea fits with the journal's mission and readership. Some journals are research oriented, some are clinically oriented, and others may fall somewhere in between. Manuscripts that are inappropriate for a journal's audience are a major "pet peeve" of some editors (Pierson 2010). The journal's audience affects the content and your writing style, and already-published articles in the journal can act as a guideline when writing your paper. The more journals in which you have read articles, the better an understanding you will have of the differences among them.

Before starting to write, you should plan your article; part of this planning involves taking into account the author guidelines of the target journal (Driscoll & Aquilina 2011). While you may end up submitting your manuscript to other journals, keeping the author guidelines in mind can help you to avoid a major revision further along in the process.

#### Types of Articles

As a new graduate student, you likely have not yet conducted original research and thus are not in a position to write a research paper. However, there are several other options to consider. Regardless of the type of manuscript, you should write about a topic that you know well and that is relevant, useful, and timely to a journal's audience (Alspach 2004).

#### ***Literature Reviews, Book Reviews, and Papers on Clinical Applicability of Research Report***

Literature reviews can be systematic, using explicit selection criteria and critically appraising the quality of research articles (Happell 2008). While there are a number of guidelines available for preparing systematic reviews, this is likely a daunting undertaking for a new graduate student. An

alternative is a non-systematic (sometimes called a narrative or selective) literature review, which gives a comprehensive evaluation of the literature on a specific nursing practice topic (Happell 2008). You should have a clear purpose, create a novel synthesis from multiple viewpoints and sources on a topic, and emphasize the relevance to nursing practice (Happell 2008).

Book reviews are another option (Driscoll & Aquilina 2011), but you first should identify a journal that publishes book reviews and the editor of that journal. Some clinical journals publish manuscripts that summarize and comment on the clinical applicability of a single key research or review article. Your review should highlight the information that is most relevant to the journal's audience and offer your own ideas regarding practice implications.

### ***Clinical Practice Articles***

Clinical articles may involve a synthesis of existing knowledge or best practices, accounts of innovative clinical practices, approaches to clinical or ethical dilemmas, and patient education strategies among others (Baker 2010, Happell 2012). The topic chosen should be interesting and relevant, and the manuscript should be submitted to a journal with a clinical rather than a research focus. The article should explain the rationale for the intervention or practice approach you are presenting, context, implementation guidelines, outcomes for evaluation, and implications for practice (Happell 2012).

### ***Case Studies***

Baker (2010) encouraged nurses to consider using a clinical case study for their first manuscript, as they are relatively easy to write and are of interest to readers. Case studies can be based on a specific case you have dealt with, or you can develop a new case based on different situations you have encountered. For case studies based on real patient experiences, it is important to ensure that patient confidentiality is maintained, and permission is obtained from the patient to publish the case study (Baker 2010). There are other requirements in publishing case studies, and the student should seek guidance before beginning this type of manuscript.

### ***Personal Opinion and Reflection Papers***

Options for papers expressing your personal views include letters to the editor, opinion pieces, and personal reflections that have had an impact on your practice (Happell 2008, Driscoll & Aquilina 2011). It is important to ensure that the delivery is not offensive, and the claims you make are substantiated by evidence (Pierson 2009). A balanced presentation of the evidence and multiple viewpoints will do more to convince readers than an emotional argument (Pierson 2009).

### ***Use of Student Papers***

You may be tempted to submit course assignment papers for publication. However, student papers

are generally not acceptable for publication without substantial revision (Pierson 2009). Papers for assignments generally have constraints different from those applied to journals, and in assignments you often write to demonstrate knowledge of the topic rather than to engage a journal audience (Pierson 2009). You should also consider that student papers typically focus on the content of the existing literature, whereas an article for publication will offer a novel discussion on application of the established knowledge base (Fowler 2011).

Rew (2012) outlined several steps involved in converting a course assignment into a publishable paper. These steps include ensuring there is a clear purpose to the article with a logical flow of ideas, identifying the intended journal and audience, and making revisions based on the journal's author guidelines. While reader interest is generally not a primary consideration for student papers, it is key for publication; the introduction in particular should be compelling (Rew 2012).

## Preparing the Manuscript

You have selected a journal and topic of interest, and planned your article; now it's time to write. While strategies for effective writing are beyond the scope of this paper, there is extensive literature available to guide you through the writing process. Briefly, there are a number of pitfalls to watch out for. In a survey of journal editors, Pierson (2010) identified several "pet peeves" including lack of adherence to author guidelines, plagiarized material, inappropriate word choices, wordiness, and poor organization. You should do your best to avoid these when preparing a manuscript. You also should be prepared to receive feedback that revisions are necessary, and rather than giving up, you should persevere and resubmit the manuscript after making the recommended revisions (Happell 2012).

## Conclusion

Writing does not belong solely to experienced researchers or clinicians with advanced degrees under their belts. New graduate students should consider beginning to write for publication early in their programs and careers. There are several types of papers that can be written without having conducted original research, which are based instead on existing evidence and the author's experience. It may be easiest to start with a letter to the editor or a personal reflection in order to gain confidence; from there, the sky is the limit.

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