

Nurse Author & Editor

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Revise and Resubmit

Revise and Resubmit . . . or Maybe Not: An Essay

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It is the best of news; it is the worst of news. An editor or peer reviewers (or both) are interested in what you have written. They find much in it commendable and of interest to their readers and subscribers. Your ideas and information are persuasive and valuable. However, there are some things in your manuscript that they think need more work. Maybe there are problems with language usage. Maybe there is a lack of clarity. Maybe there are minor lapses in reasoning or argumentation. Maybe there are gaps in the background literature or data. Maybe sections or paragraphs require further

elaboration or development. *Revise and resubmit.*

Revise and resubmit was on my mind in the summer of 2015. Cheryl Beck and I have a book contract with Oxford University Press to co-author an academic and professional writing handbook for nursing students, with book series editors who have been reviewing and requesting revisions to our various chapter drafts. I have had two book chapters accepted for publication but also in various stages of editorial development. And my preliminary draft of an annotated bibliography of writing by and about nurses in American literature (for *Oxford Bibliographies Online*) has come back to me with requests for more work. Summer is the season of revise and resubmit. Not surprisingly, the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is on my mind: *Fear and Trembling*. Or maybe, more candidly, the American gonzo journalist Hunter Thompson: *Fear and Loathing*.

Discussing the phenomenon with me, Cheryl pointed out that feedback from editors and reviewers is sometimes conflicting and inconsistent, with those editors failing to synthesize and adjudicate among different readers' reports. We both remarked that once we finish a manuscript and submit it, after a delay of months or even one or two years we have moved on to other projects and other ideas. Returning to the manuscript may seem, if not stale at least not as intellectually interesting any more. On more than one occasion, I've also felt that I had said all that I wanted to say in the original manuscript (even though, as one editor told me, "I think you have more to say" and invited me to add up to 2,000 words).

Because I've been mindful of and gauging my own hesitation, resistance, avoidance, and procrastination with some of these projects (I'm writing this

article when I should be working on them!), I've been thinking about the larger phenomenon of revision and resubmission, including the psychic obstacles that we allow, preventing our successful completion and publication of manuscripts. And I'm an experienced writer and editor. In my role providing writing support services to the University of Connecticut School of Nursing, I also see the difficulty that some doctoral students and faculty colleagues have in bringing their writing into home plate.

The phenomenon has not been well researched. A search of CINAHL using the terms *revise* AND *resubmit* only identified nine articles, most of them in the "how to" genre.

How frequently do authors fail to follow up with revisions and resubmission? I brought that question to the listserv of the International Academy of Nurse editors, and, while not a systematic survey, the results were telling in several respects.

Eight editors responded to my questions: *Would you tell me if you have any data on the percentage of authors in a given year who are invited to revise and resubmit a manuscript to your journal but do not follow through with either? If you don't have documented data for your journal, what is your best estimate?* The answers ranged from only a single manuscript in the past year, to 1% or 2% or 5% in the past year, and even to 25% and 30%.

Having been a journal editor, I can understand editors' mixture of shame, irritation, and frustration with this "attrition" rate. On the one hand, you and your peer reviewers have spent considerable time, thought, and effort in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscripts, looking forward

to bringing it to the attention of your readers in its best form. On the other hand, your generous time and expertise (often unremunerated) seem to have been rejected without an explanation from the author.

One theme that emerged from nursing editors' responses to my query is the proliferation of submissions by novices, particularly doctoral students, whose skills may be weak and whose investment in publication and its rewards, tenuous. Many of these students are now required by course instructors or their degree programs to submit a manuscript, although they are not required to publish the manuscript. One editor observed that all the authors who refused to revise and resubmit were DNP students who were required to submit a manuscript to a journal, many of whom did not reply to her follow-up email query on the status of the requested revisions. One executive of a major research publisher suggested that assigning submission (but not requiring publication) in partial fulfillment of a course or degree requirement placed journals' editors and reviewers in an unfair position when the students have little investment in seeing the work through to completion. In other words, the editors and reviewers were unwittingly working without pay, or even recognition, for the doctoral program. Students check "Submit manuscript" off their to-do lists. They complied with the submission requirement. For doctoral students who are serious about publishing, Heather Carter-Templeton (2015) offers a concise guide to turning your project into a publishable manuscript in a recent article in *Nurse Author & Editor*.

A second theme that emerged is that weaker researchers may move on from an initial, more demanding journal to a "safety" journal in the hope of less rigorous expectations. As the publishing executive recounted to me, one of

his editors reminded him that “eventually every manuscript finds a home.” Authors may keep submitting a manuscript unrevised until they discover the path of least resistance in a journal of lower expectations. Nowadays, a proliferation of online open-access journals, flourishing in almost mycological abundance, ensures that an author can eventually publish, either by spending the time and effort in revising or by paying the publishing fee for an open-access journal.

Editors may sometimes either stunt or nurture the probability that an author will revise and resubmit. One of the editors who responded to my query told me that, when she asks for revisions, she does so by framing her letter to an author by saying, “I am pleased to accept the manuscript contingent upon the following revisions . . .” In other words, the author knows that the manuscript has been accepted even though it’s not yet ready for publication. Other editors made it clear how important it was for them to synthesize, not simply summarize, or even worse cut and paste, the different readers’ suggestions. Finally, editors must educate their anonymous peer reviewers for their roles. Very few of us learned this essential professional activity in graduate school.

At this site, there is a [page with resources for reviewers](#), which includes a link to the newest version of Charon Pierson’s guide, [Reviewing Journal Manuscripts](#). The International Academy of Nurse Editors suggests a variety of [resources for peer reviewers](#) at its website. In addition, its editors have compiled [a treasury of resources for writers](#).

Revise and resubmit. Good news and bad news. Novice authors need to understand that even experienced authors are asked to do it. Mentors need to guide and encourage their protégés in the practice. Ultimately you will

produce work of greater clarity and impact.

REFERENCE

1. Carter-Templeton, H. (2015). [Converting a DNP scholarly project into a manuscript](#). *Nurse Author & Editor*, 25(1), 2.

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