

# Nurse Author & Editor

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## Sharing Expertise to Increase Publication Success

### **We Are In This Together: Sharing Expertise as a Way to Increase Publication Success**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Publishing with the purpose of disseminating knowledge is a professional responsibility of nursing faculty and represents one of the nurse educator core competencies (National League for Nursing [NLN], 2012). Faculty who are seeking tenure and promotion are typically expected to publish in peer-reviewed journals. Fulfilling these responsibilities and requirements can be challenging for faculty. Challenges include maintaining an active research agenda while balancing teaching and clinical responsibilities, having limited scientific writing and

publication experience, and the lag time between data collection and dissemination of results. A co-mentoring approach, where faculty learn successful writing and publication strategies from each other, can be beneficial for providing support to nursing faculty in early, mid-, and late career stages (NLN, 2006). Providing leadership in an area of expertise, such as in mentoring colleagues in the writing and publication process, is one of the *Hallmarks of Excellence in Nursing Education*© (NLN, n.d.).

Recently, the faculty complement at the School of Nursing, University of North Carolina Wilmington, increased rapidly in number and included faculty from all ranks, lecturer through full professor, with a wide range of publication experience. Concurrently, there was a movement from being a historically teaching-focused university to one that also emphasized research and scholarship. As a result, faculty in tenure lines faced more rigorous publication requirements (i.e., one to two publications annually) and non-tenure track faculty members expressed interest in research and publishing. This shift created a need for training related to scientific writing and publication, and an opportunity for co-mentoring. Co-mentoring was envisioned as a way to guide faculty members in their commitments and responsibilities. This arrangement allowed faculty across the career continuum to learn from each other about developing manuscripts and being successful in having them published.

## THE APPROACH

In order to meet the need to support new and current faculty associated with a 40% growth over a 2-year period, the nursing faculty development committee developed a strategic co-mentoring approach. It involved a collaborative and cooperatively-based way for faculty to learn about publishing from their peers with publication experience. The initial unveiling consisted of a face-to-face interactive panel presentation with four faculty members at various ranks and an

academic dean who shared their experiences and specific recommendations around writing for publication. The panelists consisted of assistant, associate, and full professors who had varying levels of publication experience. Each panel member shared wisdom on a particular topic that aligned with their area of publication expertise and that would be relevant for faculty across the career span. Topics introduced during the session were:

1. Building your program of research;
2. Publishing your dissertation;
3. Sharing your work with colleagues;
4. Finalizing the draft and submitting to the journal;
5. Managing reviewers' comments; and
6. Gaining experience with target journals.

Because so many of the faculty members were new to research and finishing their dissertations, the panel felt it was important to first discuss the importance of building a research agenda.

### Building Your Program of Research

The foundation for a program of research should start during doctoral study. When beginning a doctoral program, a good strategy is to identify a solid focus area and to refine it over time. Concentrate on this focus area when completing assignments and writing in various courses. View all assignments as potential topics for publication. An approach adopted by many universities is the publication option versus the traditional five to six chapter dissertation (Robinson & Dracup, 2005). While format varies among institutions, an introduction and a conclusion chapter are generally standard (Baggs, 2011). One goal is to have multiple chapters of a traditional dissertation that stand alone and are eventually

adapted into a publishable manuscript (e.g. literature review, methods, and results papers). This can be a structured way to get early peer-review for multiple publications.

Regardless of the format choice and number of publications from a dissertation, remain close to your focus area. A common mistake that researchers make is exploring different interests simultaneously and veering off the path that should establish them as an expert in their area. In an academic setting, this mistake can impede the tenure process. Because one of the biggest challenges is converting doctoral work into a manuscript, it is important to consider some publication strategies specific to the dissertation.

### Publishing Your Dissertation

Preparing to publish your dissertation or scholarly project should begin during doctoral education. By requesting the mentorship from your dissertation chair or scholarly project faculty leader, a new writer can learn about scholarly writing from a seasoned mentor and receive critical feedback (Thomas & Skinner, 2012). Borrowing a concept from our business colleagues, the writer should adopt a strategy of understanding the current needs of a journal's readership and practice, and then target the publication to meet a current practice need (DeMers, 2014). When writing, communicate a core message that is valuable to your target audience. Most importantly, identify the most important core findings of your work in terms of adding to the literature; what is the "gold nugget" you want to share? Determine how to position your manuscript(s); do you want to focus on the methods, outcomes, or practical lessons learned? Identify several journals that publish articles in your content area. Use the journal due diligence process to determine the fit of the journal to your topic (Nicoll & Chinn, 2015). Remember, the audience for your work has now changed. Instead of meeting academic requirements for the final project, you are now targeting a particular audience and

probably want to focus on the translation of your findings to nursing practice or policy. Similarly, the format has changed, from meeting university requirements to preparing a manuscript that adheres to the journal guidelines (Nicoll & Chinn, 2015). Creating a poster presentation to streamline what you learned and how you can best disseminate your scholarship can be a helpful approach. Once you have completed the necessary homework to prepare your manuscript, it is time to engage with the journal you have identified for a potential submission.

### Sharing Your Work with Colleagues

Sharing your work can help you achieve clarity, flow, and readability of a manuscript for a broader audience. You can share formally through presentations at professional conferences and informally in research work groups or one-on-one with a colleague. Sharing with experts in your research area may help you identify gaps or next steps for your research, which are both beneficial when developing a manuscript. Welcome comments and questions, and consider them during manuscript development. These comments and questions identify areas requiring clarification or further development in the manuscript. Sharing your work with colleagues who are outside of your area of research is also valuable. Discourse with non-experts can help you to identify gaps, assumptions regarding content knowledge of the broader audience, and biases you may have developed due to intense immersion in your work. Explaining your work, from development to results, to an individual outside your research area can improve the clarity and flow of your manuscript. Appreciate the different perspectives and the contributions colleagues can provide through discourse. This pre-review of your manuscript can help prepare the faculty member for what to expect when the reviewer comments are received.

### Finalizing the Draft and Submitting to the Journal

Once you have received comments and feedback from colleagues, it is time to prepare the final draft for submission to the journal. Make sure to follow the “Information for Authors” to ensure your manuscript is formatted correctly. In particular, some things to look for:

- Abstract: number of words and format. Is it structured or narrative?
- Overall length in number of words or pages. Does this include or exclude non-text items, such as title page, reference list, tables, and figures? Is your manuscript within the limit?
- Headings: are specific headings identified, such as Introduction, Background, Methods, Analysis, Results, Discussion and Conclusion, or can you create your own, depending on the content of your manuscript? Make sure that the headings are styled and formatted correctly according to level (Watson, 2017).
- References: is a style guide, such as APA or AMA specified? Have you followed the formatting guidelines? Is there a limit on the number of references?
- Tables and Figures: check on requirements for formatting, number, and if these elements should be included in the manuscript or submitted as separate files.
- Cover letter: some journals require one and specify what needs to be included; for others, a letter is optional.
- Copyright Transfer Form: will be required at some point in the process (Nicoll, 2016). Check on details and obtain signatures from co-authors, if you need to include the form with your manuscript submission.

Once your manuscript is finalized, submit to the journal using their requested procedure. Most journals have an online submission portal. A few may request you send files directly to the editorial office by email. You should receive a

confirmation of your submission within a few days. If you do not, it is fine to email the editorial office to make sure your manuscript was received.

## Managing Reviewers' Comments

Once the peer review process is complete, the corresponding author will receive notification of the decision regarding the manuscript's fate. The decision can be acceptance, with or without revisions; declination/rejection; or a request for revision and resubmission. Receiving these comments can elicit a variety of feelings and intense emotions. Regardless of the decision, read the reviewers' comments from start to finish. Try to avoid taking the comments personally. Recognize the emotions, whether happy, sad, or angry, and then set the project aside for a day or two. After a brief time away, take appropriate action. Revisit the comments and use them to improve the manuscript. If revisions are required following acceptance or requested along with resubmission, make the necessary changes. Do not jeopardize your relationship with the journal editor by declining to revise.

Create a table that includes all reviewers' comments in one column and the revisions you have made in another. This ensures that you have addressed all of the reviewers' comments and ultimately, enhanced the manuscript. Those receiving a declination/rejection decision should also consider the reviewers' comments, because they will likely help you improve your paper. However, because you are sending to a new journal, you do not need to include the revision table, described above, with your submission. Search for a new journal that aligns with the focus of the manuscript and submit according to the author guidelines. Remember, reviewers can help an author improve clarity, address assumptions made during the writing process, and improve the overall quality of the manuscript; use their expertise wisely.

## **GAINING EXPERIENCE WITH TARGET JOURNALS**

Following the reviewers' comments, author guidelines, and reaching out to the editor with questions can ensure the paper is a fit for the scope of the journal can all increase the possibility of success with publication. However, gaining expertise with publication does not end with manuscript acceptance. Continue to gain experience with target journals by being a reviewer, joining an editorial board, and engaging with the editor. One way to practice being a reviewer is to review the work of colleagues using the author guidelines. You can have them return the favor when it is your turn to submit. Importantly, it is helpful to have a fresh set of eyes to refine a paper, identify points of confusion, and catch any typos by sharing your work in advance of the submission with colleagues.

Serving as a guest reviewer for a journal can be extremely valuable to see the types of papers submitted to a given journal. It is helpful to get a sense of how much detail is provided and the sections that are included. Reviewers also have access to the evaluation rubric used for determining the fate of manuscripts. Unlike being a guest reviewer, editorial board positions are usually appointed. You can get your foot in the door by serving as a reviewer. As part of an editorial board, you can influence the journal's vision, learn about submission and rejection rates, and recommend topics for special issues. All of these experiences can help you over time to enhance your writing and success with publication.

## **THE CO-MENTORING EXPERIENCE**

Lecturers, assistant, associate, and full professors with varying levels of publication experience participated in the session. Following the panel presentation, all in attendance shared their experiences with writing and publication and offered lessons learned and challenges faced during the process. The exchange of experiences and expertise allowed all participants to learn from

each other, which is consistent with co-mentoring. Participants identified colleagues whom they could help and those who could support them during the writing and publication process. Several participants initiated a collaborative writing project upon learning of their shared areas of expertise. The session successfully initiated co-mentoring relationships that have evolved over the academic year and ultimately, increased success with publication. The panel will reconvene the group in one year to discuss publication progress with all participants and to explore additional opportunities to extend co-mentoring into the next academic year.

## CONCLUSION

Meeting the requirements of publishing scholarly work in a fast-growing academic setting can be challenging. Nursing faculty have a professional responsibility not only to conduct and disseminate research but also, to support fellow colleagues in their scholarly endeavors. Initiating co-mentoring can be an effective way to fulfill these responsibilities. Each member of the panel brought something unique to the presentation, yet there were common underlying themes in the shared publishing experiences. These included starting to publish while in the doctoral program, working in collaborative teams, finalizing a draft and submitting to a journal, constructively navigating the peer-review process, and continuing to gain experience with target journals. Regardless of the amount of publishing expertise, participants learned something valuable from each other that can assist with publication success, and initiated co-mentoring relationships that continue throughout the academic year.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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