WRITING FOR PUBLICATION IN NURSING

SECOND EDITION
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To our students and readers,
whose enthusiasm for disseminating
the best of their nursing practice, research, and education
to the broadest possible audience
in the widest variety of formats
inspired the second edition of this book.
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Writing for publication in nursing is essential to disseminate evidence, share initiatives and innovations with others, provide new information to keep nurses up-to-date, communicate the findings of research studies, and develop the science base of the profession. Writing manuscripts is hard work, but the process can be simplified by understanding how to develop a manuscript and submit it for publication. *Writing for Publication in Nursing* was prepared for beginning and experienced authors, for nurses who want to learn how to write for publication, and for graduate students in nursing who need to learn how to write research reports, clinical articles, systematic reviews, and other types of articles.

The book describes the process of writing, beginning with an idea, searching the literature, preparing an outline, writing a draft and revising it, and developing the final paper. How to select a journal and gear the writing to the intended audience, submit a manuscript to a journal, revise a paper and respond to reviewers, and carry out other steps to facilitate publication are discussed in the book. A chapter is devoted to writing research articles to assist nurses in preparing their work for publication; strategies are included for developing manuscripts from theses and dissertations. Other chapters describe principles for preparing articles that disseminate the outcomes of reviews of research evidence, articles on clinical practice topics, case reports, and other types of papers. A new chapter in this edition guides authors in writing chapters and books.

The book serves as reference for students at all levels of nursing education to guide them in writing papers for courses. Many nursing programs expect students to demonstrate competency in writing as an outcome of the program. *Writing for Publication in Nursing* is a good resource for that purpose. Graduate students in particular can use the book to learn how to write for publication, an essential skill for advanced practice nurses, researchers, educators, administrators, and nurses in other roles to disseminate their work and for their career advancement.

*Writing for Publication in Nursing* can be used in conjunction with the style manual in the nursing program. While style manuals direct students in preparing citations, references, tables, and figures, and guide them on other aspects of style, these manuals do not teach students the process of writing nor how to prepare a paper for publication in nursing.

The book contains many examples and resources for writing in nursing and other healthcare professions. These resources make writing easier for both beginning and experienced authors.

Writing for publication in nursing is essential to disseminate the findings of research and evidence for practice, communicate knowledge and share expertise with other nurses, inform nurses of initiatives and innovations developed for patient populations and settings, and advance the profession. Chapter 1 introduces the steps the author follows in planning, writing, and publishing
manuscripts in nursing. The focus is on early writing decisions, such as generating ideas, selecting a topic, and deciding on the type of article to be written. The author evaluates if the ideas to be presented are worth writing about and are important enough to be published.

The next steps are to identify the audience to whom the manuscript will be directed and to select a journal that might be interested in publishing it. The purpose of the manuscript and how it will be developed guide the author in deciding on possible journals. The goal is to match the topic and type of manuscript with an appropriate journal and readers who would be interested in it. Chapter 2 discusses how to evaluate possible journals, select an appropriate one, and write a query letter to gauge the interest of the journals’ editors. Valuable resources in this chapter include a description of Web sites of directories of journals, checklists for determining the audience and the “right” journal, and a sample query letter.

Decisions about the focus of the manuscript, audience, and journal are important early in the writing process. Other decisions pertain to authorship; if these are not made before beginning the writing project, they may create problems and conflict among the authors later on. Each individual designated as an author on a manuscript or other type of paper should have contributed sufficiently to it. Chapter 3 addresses authorship and author responsibilities in preparing to write. Because many papers are written in groups, strategies are provided to facilitate this process.

Chapter 4 prepares the author for reviewing the literature and writing a literature review for a manuscript and other types of papers. Although literature reviews for research studies, theses and dissertations, course work, evidence syntheses, and other purposes vary in the types of literature used, their comprehensiveness, and how they are summarized for the reader, the process of reviewing the literature is the same. Chapter 4 describes bibliographic databases useful for literature reviews in nursing, selecting databases to use, search strategies, analyzing and synthesizing the literature, and writing the literature review. This chapter provides many resources to help nurse-authors with their literature reviews. Strategies to avoid plagiarism and information about obtaining permission to reproduce copyrighted material in a manuscript are included in the chapter.

Research projects are not complete until the findings are communicated to others. All too often nurses conduct important research studies but fail to disseminate the results of their work. Some nurses are not prepared for their role as an author and are unsure how to proceed; others may believe that their work does not warrant publication. However, rigorous research is important to communicate to others, regardless of whether the findings were anticipated or not. Research papers present the findings of quantitative and qualitative research based on original data. Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of how to report research using the conventional format of an introduction and literature review; a methods section, including design and sample, measurements, and analytic strategy; a results section; and a discussion. This basic structure of research articles is known as IMRAD, i.e., Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion. Examples are provided of quantitative and qualitative research articles for authors to learn how
to write different sections of these manuscripts. Ethical considerations when writing research papers include deciding the appropriate number of articles to write from a single study and avoidance of redundant or duplicate publications. Authors should take care to protect the privacy rights of their subjects and to avoid defamation of other members of the research community. The chapter concludes by describing pitfalls to avoid when reporting research findings and revising academic papers as research manuscripts.

Nurses in all clinical settings require the most current and complete evidence of effective approaches to guide their decision making and practice. The evidence should be based on a critical appraisal of studies that answer a specific clinical question or examine best practices and the synthesis of findings from across these studies. The preferential use of such approaches is known as evidence-based practice (EBP). With EBP, nurses rely on the review and synthesis of evidence from multiple studies rather than the report of one original research study. Methods are now available to nurse-authors for reviewing and integrating individual studies and summarizing the evidence from them to answer a clinical question or explore a topic of interest. These review methods include integrative reviews, systematic reviews, meta-analyses, and metasyntheses. In addition to review papers, nurses also prepare manuscripts on research utilization, which focus on the structures, process, and outcomes of transferring research knowledge and findings into clinical practice. Manuscripts on EBP address the effectiveness of new approaches or changes in practice as well as the resources needed for implementation and the process used by nurses in a clinical setting to engage in EBP. Chapter 6, a new chapter in this edition, presents guidelines for preparing articles that disseminate the outcomes of reviews of research and other types of papers related to EBP in nursing.

Chapter 7 presents strategies for writing articles about clinical practice. There are many opportunities for preparing these manuscripts: nurses can write about their innovations in practice, unit-based initiatives and projects, updates on clinical topics, new directions in patient care, and research studies and quality improvement projects done in the clinical setting. Considering the wealth of clinical journals in nursing, these publications provide a venue for nurses to share their work with others. General guidelines for writing clinical articles are presented in the chapter including writing research reports for clinical journals and preparing papers on quality improvement projects.

Although research and clinical practice articles are primary formats for nurses to present knowledge to readers, other forms of writing are equally important. Some articles address emerging issues that affect nursing practice, education, or research. These articles may include case reports; descriptions of theory development; commentaries on policies, ethics, or legal aspects of nursing; innovative research methods; historical studies; editorials; and letters to the editor. Nurses also write book reviews and articles for consumer and non-professional audiences. These other types of writing differ in the purposes they are trying to achieve, their format, and often their writing style. Yet all are similar because they address non-trivial topics, provide original insight, and have implications for advancing health and well-being. Chapter 8 describes these other types of papers and provides many examples to guide these forms of writing.
Writing a book or book chapter is different from an article because the author has more opportunity to provide background information and discuss related content, with more pages allowed, than in a manuscript for a journal. Whereas articles generally focus on one topic, books address multiple but related content areas and also require a significant time commitment. Chapter 9 provides information for nurse-authors who are interested in writing a book, including contacting a publisher, developing the prospectus, responsibilities of the author and publisher, the process of writing the book, and working with contributors in an edited book. There also is a section on writing a book chapter.

At this point in the process of writing, the author has identified the type of manuscript, the purpose of the paper, potential journals, and the audience to which the paper will be geared. The author has obtained author guidelines from the target journal, has conducted or updated the literature review, has completed other preparations for writing, and is now ready to begin writing the manuscript. Chapter 10 focuses first on preliminary questions to ask before starting to write and on organizing the content into an outline. Next, the chapter describes how to write the first draft of the manuscript. Finally, the chapter describes the steps in revising the content and organization of the paper and then revising the writing structure and style. Some principles are provided for improving how the paper is written.

Most papers written for publication in nursing include references. The references in the manuscript document the literature reviewed by the author who prepared the paper and provide support for the ideas in it. In Chapter 11 the focus is on citing the references in the manuscript and preparing the reference list. Journals have different reference formats, and the author must prepare the references according to the journal guidelines. Examples are provided of how to cite references in the text and on the reference list using different reference styles.

Tables are essential when the author needs to report detailed information and numeric values. It is often clearer and more efficient to develop a table than to present the information in the text. Figures are valuable for demonstrating trends and patterns, and for some manuscripts the author may include an illustration of a new procedure or a photograph of a patient. Not every manuscript, though, needs tables and figures, and whether to include them is a decision made during the drafting phase of writing the paper. Chapter 12 provides guidelines for deciding when to prepare tables and figures and how to develop them. Examples are included of different types of tables, presenting information in a table and as text when text is preferred and when a table is preferred, and developing figures for a manuscript.

When the author has completed the revisions of the content and format of the paper and prepared the references, tables, and figures, the author is ready to submit the paper to the journal. Prior to submission, the author has some final responsibilities to ensure that the manuscript is consistent with the journal requirements and contains all the required parts for submission. The manuscript is then ready to send to the journal for review. Chapter 13 describes the steps in preparing all elements of the final paper to submit to the journal and details...
associated with this submission. Examples of these elements are provided in the chapter, and a checklist is included for authors to ensure that all items are submitted with the manuscript to avoid delays in its review.

Chapter 14 presents the editorial review process from the point at which the paper is received in the journal office through the final editorial decision. The roles and responsibilities of the editor, editorial board, and peer reviewers are discussed, and examples are provided of criteria used by reviewers when asked to critique a manuscript for publication. Peer review is not without issues, and some of these are examined in the chapter. Manuscripts submitted to a journal may be accepted without revision or accepted provisionally pending revision, may be returned to the author for a major revision and resubmission, or may be rejected. Each of these editorial decisions has implications for the author and how the author responds to the editor: these are presented in the chapter. Resources for readers include sample peer review forms and sample letters to send with revised manuscripts.

When the manuscript is accepted for publication, the paper moves into the publishing phase. The author has some responsibilities here, such as answering queries and correcting page proofs, but most of the work is done by the publisher of the journal or by the group or individual responsible for the publication. Chapter 15 describes the publishing process that begins with the acceptance of the paper through its publication. Publishers have different ways of handling the manuscript editing phase and forms of the manuscript that they return to the author for proofing. The publishing process is described in the chapter, but the author should recognize that it may differ across journals. Copyright also is presented in the chapter.

Many individuals have contributed to the preparation and writing of this book. The authors extend a special acknowledgment to Margaret Zuccarini who recognized the need for this resource for nursing authors and students and encouraged us to prepare this second edition. Her enthusiasm for writing in nursing is contagious.

*Marilyn H. Oermann and Judith C. Hays*
Section I

PREPARING TO WRITE
GETTING STARTED

Writing for publication in nursing is essential to disseminate evidence, share initiatives and innovations with others, provide new information to keep nurses up-to-date, communicate the findings of research studies, and develop the science base of the profession. Writing manuscripts is hard work, but the process can be simplified by understanding how to develop a manuscript and submit it for publication.

Chapter 1 introduces the steps the author follows in planning, writing, and publishing manuscripts in nursing. The focus of chapter 1 is on early writing decisions, such as, generating ideas, selecting a topic, and deciding on the type of article to be written. These are important decisions because they guide the author in selecting potential journals, which is addressed in chapter 2.

**REASONS TO WRITE**

Writing for publication is an important skill for nurses to develop. By communicating initiatives and innovations in clinical practice, findings of research studies and evidence-based practice projects, and new ideas, nurses direct the future of their practice and advance the development of the profession. As nursing attempts to build its evidence base, it is increasingly important for nurses to write about studies they are doing in their clinical practice: the findings of these studies provide the evidence for practice. Writing for publication cannot be considered the responsibility of only nurses in academic settings, for clinicians have a major responsibility to describe the effectiveness of their nursing interventions and the innovations they have developed for patient care. Nurse educators, administrators, managers, and researchers have a similar responsibility—to share knowledge and ideas for the benefit of others.

There are five main reasons to write for publication: (1) to share ideas and expertise with other nurses; (2) to disseminate evidence and the findings of nursing research studies; (3) for promotion, tenure, and other personnel decisions; (4) for development of own knowledge and skills; and (5) for personal satisfaction.
Section 1  Preparing to Write

Share Ideas and Expertise
Writing for publication provides a way of sharing ideas with other nurses. Through publications, nurses can describe best practices; innovations developed for patients, staff, and students; and new techniques they are using in clinical practice, teaching, management, and administration. Publications keep nurses abreast of new developments in nursing. McGaghie and Webster (2009) identified the opportunity to share knowledge with others as an intrinsic motive to write for publication.

Disseminate Evidence and Research Findings
For nurses involved in research studies and evidence-based practice projects, writing for publication is critical: disseminating research findings and the outcomes of projects to evaluate the effectiveness of nursing interventions are essential to build the knowledge base of nursing, provide new evidence for practice, and develop studies that build on one another. Many clinicians are engaged currently in evidence-based practice projects. Some of these projects are to review and synthesize the available evidence to decide on best practices or if a change in practice is warranted. In other settings nurses are studying the effects of nursing interventions, contributing to the evidence base of nursing. However, those contributions are not realized unless nurses disseminate the findings of their studies and projects. Carlson, Masters, and Pfadt (2008) emphasized the need for clinicians to share their research findings not only within the clinical agency but also to a wider audience; that requires publishing in professional journals.

The essence of a discipline is its body of scientific knowledge, the values and ethics that guide practice in the discipline, and its worth to society (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2006). In practice disciplines such as nursing, an added responsibility is the use of research findings and other evidence to guide decisions about patient care. Research findings can only be applied to practice if they are published and made available for use by other clinicians and nursing professionals. All too often nurses conduct important research without disseminating the findings of these studies to others.

Meet Promotion, Tenure, and Other Job Requirements
For nursing faculty in colleges and universities, writing for publication is required for promotion, tenure, and other personnel decisions. Not all articles carry the same weight in these decisions. Typically, databased papers, which report the findings of a research study, published in peer-reviewed journals are highly valued and more important in tenure and promotion decisions than other types of publications such as non-databased articles, chapters, and books. McGaghie and Webster (2009) suggested that articles that report original research data (databased) and are published in peer-reviewed journals are the “gold standard” for faculty in academic settings.

Peer-reviewed journals, also called refereed, use peer reviewers to critique the manuscript as a basis for the acceptance decision. Peer reviewers are experts,
Chapter 1  Getting Started

external to the journal staff, who provide an independent, critical assessment of the quality of the manuscript, including the scientific process (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors, 2009). Although the responsibilities of peer reviewers differ with each journal, in general, they critique the manuscript, identify areas for revision, and give expert opinions on the quality of the paper. With some journals, the peer reviewers also suggest to the editor if the manuscript should be accepted, revised and resubmitted, or rejected. The peer review process is discussed in chapter 14 of the book. Publishing an article in a peer-reviewed journal is important in tenure and promotion decisions because it indicates that the quality of the paper was assessed by experts based on standards. Most nursing and healthcare journals are peer-reviewed although the process and standards vary for their reviews of papers.

The importance given to writing chapters and books varies across institutions. Most chapters are not peer reviewed and thus do not carry the same weight in tenure and promotion decisions as does an article in a peer reviewed journal. Completion of a book requires a significant amount of time, and prior to the tenure decision, that time might be better spent writing papers for journals. Because the standards for tenure and promotion vary widely across schools of nursing, faculty should be well informed about this process in their own institutions.

While nurses in clinical settings are not faced with tenure and promotion decisions, writing for publication is often a requirement for job mobility in that setting and career advancement. Whether or not the article is databased or published in a peer reviewed journal is less important than writing for journals read by nurses who need this new information and perspective to guide their practice.

**Expand Personal Knowledge and Skills**

Another reason to write for publication is the learning gained in the process of preparing the manuscript. Rarely is the nurse able to write a manuscript without completing a thorough review of the literature. This literature review and the thinking that is done in developing the manuscript contribute to the knowledge base and understanding of the author.

Writing skills are useful in many settings as nurses fulfill both professional and personal roles. Writing about a topic facilitates understanding it and oneself. A good writer, i.e., a well-practiced writer, brings a valuable skill to endeavors that range far beyond writing for publication.

**Gain Personal Satisfaction**

Writing also gives the nurse a sense of personal satisfaction in sharing expertise with other nurses and contributing to the development of their profession. Most journals do not pay authors for their manuscripts; however, writing for publication is personally fulfilling. Winslow, Mullaly, and Blankenship (2008) suggested that through publications, nurses share with a wider audience their stories about personal and professional challenges they experience in the work setting on a daily basis and their satisfactions.
Section 1  Preparing to Write

**BARRIERS TO WRITING**

Writing is time consuming, and authors may be frustrated as to their progress in preparing the manuscript. Developing a publishable paper requires practice, and the more writing the author does, the easier will be completion of the manuscript. Similar to the development of clinical skills, writing improves with practice. Some of the barriers to writing are a lack of understanding of this process, writer’s block, lack of time, and fear of rejection.

**Lack of Understanding of How to Write for Publication**

Many faculty members have had limited experience in writing for publication and are unsure of the process but need to publish in their academic settings. Similarly, clinicians may be reluctant to assume the role of author because they too are unsure of the process of manuscript development and have never been prepared for this role in their nursing education programs (Carlson, Masters, & Pfadt, 2008).

Before beginning any manuscript, the author needs to first understand the writing and publishing processes. Often, students believe that the A+ paper they completed as a requirement in one of their nursing courses is publishable; this may or may not be true. Papers prepared for a course may be at too low a level for readers of a journal who have specialized knowledge and more advanced understanding of the topic. Or, the course paper may not be in an appropriate writing style for the journal to which submitted: the paper may be too theoretical or the literature review may be too long. Or, the paper may not contain material that is original or represent an added value to readers. An understanding of how to write for publication and a particular journal and its readership helps the author avoid situations such as these.

Rickard et al. (2009) evaluated the effectiveness of a one-week writing for publication course for nursing and other faculty followed by a monthly writers’ support group. Submissions of manuscripts to peer reviewed journals increased from 9 to 33 over a two-year period. Participants reported that this preparation and continued support from colleagues increased their confidence in and satisfaction with the process of writing for publication. Regardless of whether nurses take courses in writing for publication or use a book such as this one, learning how to write for publication in professional journals and other venues is critical for success.

**Writer’s Block**

Some authors experience writer’s block that keeps them from writing. This may occur from anxiety about the project, uncertainty as to how to proceed, and past unsuccessful experiences with writing. It is important for authors to be clear about the topic and intent of their writing project—recording these on paper before beginning, discussing them with colleagues, and “presenting” ideas to others often help to avoid writer’s block. Brainstorming, identifying alternate ways of approaching the topic, and diagramming or outlining ideas are strategies...
that can be used to overcome writer’s block. Another strategy is to draw a concept map of the topics in the manuscript and how they relate to each other, providing a visual representation of the ideas and encouraging thinking about how best to proceed.

If these techniques are not effective, authors can review the literature, prepare the references, and engage in other activities that do not require the same degree of creativity as does writing. Often a short break from writing and use of some of the strategies identified earlier will resolve writer’s block, but if not, authors should seek a mentor who can guide them through this process and completion of the paper.

**Lack of Time**

The extensive time for preparing a manuscript is another barrier to writing. Time is needed for preliminary work such as developing the idea and reviewing the literature, for preparing the draft and rewriting it until suitable for submission, and for subsequent revisions suggested by the editor and reviewers. In a qualitative study of 16 novice researchers, many viewed writing as complex and demanding, particularly when considering their other responsibilities; they identified barriers such as a lack of time, procrastination, and anxiety, among others (Shah, Shah, & Pietrobon, 2009). Time for writing is a problem encountered by both novice and experienced authors.

**Fear of Rejection**

One other barrier to writing is fear of rejection (Oermann, 1999b, 2010). In submitting a manuscript, the author is open to criticism and possible rejection; for some nurses this is a barrier to writing for publication. Having a manuscript rejected is part of the writing process and may not be related to the quality of the writing. The manuscript may be rejected because a similar one has already been accepted, or the information in the manuscript is not new enough for publication in that particular journal. Rejections for reasons such as these do not mean that the ideas are questionable or poorly presented. Even if the manuscript is rejected because of criticisms of the research design, ideas in the manuscript, or format, the author can use this feedback as a way of learning more about the writing process, for developing writing skills further, and for revising the manuscript for submission elsewhere. Reflective scholars use these rejections and feedback from the critiques to revise and resubmit their work (McGaghie & Webster, 2009).

**PERSONAL STRATEGIES**

Writing manuscripts requires set dates for completion and personal strategies to keep on target, meet deadlines, and use wisely the limited time available. A manuscript can be doomed to failure if the author does not manage the time allotted for writing and completing other aspects of preparing the manuscript for submission to a journal.
Set Due Dates

First, a due date should be set for completion of the manuscript, whether it is a journal article, chapter in a book, research proposal, or other writing project. The due date for completing the final copy should be realistic considering work and personal responsibilities and should not be altered; modifying the due date for completion of a manuscript often becomes a pattern, and the manuscript is never finished or takes too long to complete.

Second, after setting the due date for completion of the final manuscript, the author can divide the content areas into manageable parts and identify dates for completing each of these. In this way smaller content areas are viewed as separate writing assignments with individual due dates. If the author is working from an outline, which will be discussed in a later chapter, dates can be assigned to different sections of the outline. Third, in addition to dividing the manuscript into sections, each with its own due date, the author can assign dates to complete other activities related to the manuscript, for example, preparing the references and registering at the journal’s website. It is important not to waiver from these due dates because with busy schedules, delays are difficult to make up later.

Even with firm dates, some writers have difficulty getting started and others have difficulty finishing. Viewing the manuscript in terms of smaller writing assignments and completing a few sections of the content often provide sufficient momentum and reinforcement to continue writing until the manuscript is completed.

Identify Prime Time for Writing

Authors should identify their prime time for writing, when they are most productive and creative, and protect that time (Oermann, 1999a, 2010). For some people, a large block of time is most effective, but for others smaller segments of time are easier to allow for in a busy work schedule. For example, authors might set aside 1 to 2 hours a day for writing plus the weekend or 3 to 4 hours a few days of the week. Heinrich (2008) recommended allowing 15 minutes a day to write and dividing the writing project into segments that could be written in that short time period.

The author should avoid interruptions and distractions during the time allotted for writing. Checking emails and answering the phone, even if they take limited time, affect concentration and distract the author from thinking about the topic and how best to present it to readers. In addition to removing distractions, the author should have a comfortable chair, good computer screen, and writing resources at hand.

Steps in Writing for Publication

Every article written for publication begins with a planning phase; progresses to writing a draft, revising it, and submitting the final copy to the journal; and
concludes with its publication. These phases, which provide a framework for the organization of the book, are discussed in more detail in later chapters.

**Planning Phase**

Prior to writing the manuscript, the author proceeds through a series of steps. These steps are important to assist the author in selecting a topic that is publishable, choosing an appropriate journal with readers who are interested in the topic, and gearing the content and format for the journal. The unpublished document submitted to a journal for review is called the manuscript or paper (American Medical Association, 2007). Once that document is published, it is referred to as an article.

**Identify Purpose of Manuscript**

The first step in the planning phase is to identify the topic and purpose of the manuscript. In some cases the purpose is to present research findings, describe evidence-based practices, and explain how practice changes were made based on a review of the evidence. The intent of other manuscripts may be to present new nursing interventions and approaches to managing patient problems, describe nursing interventions for patients with particular health problems, analyze trends and issues in practice, and present new directions in nursing education or management.

For some manuscripts, identifying the purpose is easy because the author has a specific goal in mind at the outset such as presenting the findings of a project done in the clinical setting. Other times, though, generating the idea for the manuscript or deciding how to develop it is more involved. Every manuscript needs a primary message that is communicated to readers; this message directs how the manuscript is then developed.

Before proceeding, the author should be able to answer these questions: What is the purpose of writing the manuscript? Why is this information important for readers? What difference will it make in clinical practice, teaching, administration, and research? The author should be able to answer these questions clearly and succinctly.

Once the purpose of the manuscript is clearly thought out, the author should record it somewhere, for example, on an index card or as a document saved in the computer, and keep it in view during the writing phase. This helps to stay on target as the writing proceeds. Often novice writers have enthusiasm about a topic but conceptualize ideas that are too global. A useful strategy in the early planning phase is to write the purpose of the manuscript in one sentence to confirm it is clear and focused.

**Decide on Importance of Topic**

After deciding on the purpose of the manuscript, the author needs to ask if the ideas to be presented are worth writing about. Will the paper present important information that readers need? The goal in this step in the writing process
is to avoid preparing a manuscript that has a limited chance of being accepted for publication. Exhibit 1.1 presents questions the author can ask to evaluate if the manuscript is worth writing and if the content is important enough to warrant publication. The author should answer these questions before spending any more time on the manuscript.

**EXHIBIT 1.1**

**Assessing Importance of Content of Manuscript**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the manuscript present new ideas?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the topic already in the literature?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If so, how does the planned manuscript differ from the existing literature?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the content is not new and articles have already been published on similar content, what is different about the manuscript to be worthy of publication?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What new perspective is offered?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>If the manuscript is published, how important is the message?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will it make a difference in patient care?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will it change nursing practice, education, administration, management, or research?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is the audience, and will readers be interested in the topic?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this a manuscript a journal would be interested in publishing?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Search for Related Articles**

In generating ideas for a manuscript, the author should keep in mind that journals are interested in publishing new ideas and communicating information to readers that they may not already know. If the topic or idea is not new, then the question is whether it presents a unique perspective or a different way of looking at a well known topic.

To determine this, the author should do a literature review on the topic and related content areas. The literature search may reveal that the topic is indeed new to the nursing literature or at least to the readers for whom the manuscript is intended. An article may have been published for the general nursing audience, but the intended manuscript focuses instead on how the content would be used by nurses in a specialty area. Or, the articles are research-oriented and the intended topic is related to clinical practice or professional issues. If there have been articles published on the same topic, they may have been in other journals than those targeted for the manuscript being planned, or the focus at present will add to what is already known about the topic.

The goal in searching the literature at this point is to scan articles to determine if others have been published on the same topic. Authors should not spend much time with the search in case the decision is made not to write about that topic because it has already been addressed in the literature. If the author finds, though, that the manuscript will present new information,
this beginning literature search may be used later as the manuscript is developed. For this reason, the author should record complete information about the articles and other publications reviewed for ease in returning to them at a later time.

The next steps in the process of writing for publication are to identify the audience to whom the manuscript will be directed and select a journal that might be interested in publishing it. These steps are discussed in the next chapter. The goal is to match the purpose and type of manuscript with an appropriate journal and readers who would be interested in it.

Identify Type of Article to be Written

The purpose of the manuscript indicates the type of article to be written. While there are many ways of categorizing articles in the nursing and healthcare literature, one way is: research; evidence-based practice including integrative literature reviews, critical appraisals of research studies with implications for practice, and reports on evidence-based practice projects; clinical practice; and other forms of writing such as case reports and editorials. These types of manuscripts differ in their goals, format, and writing style, and frequently reach different audiences. Often manuscripts are rejected because they do not match the type of articles that the journal publishes. Identifying the type of manuscript, therefore, helps the author make a decision about possible journals for submission. Nurses also prepare manuscripts and other documents for patients and non-professional audiences, which require careful writing to avoid using technical terms and to be at a level that readers without any healthcare background can understand; chapters; and books.

Research Articles Research (databased) articles present the findings of quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative research papers typically follow the IMRAD format, Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion, or an adaptation of this depending on the journal and type of research. There is no one style, however, for presenting qualitative research findings because the format necessarily depends on the purpose of the research, methods, and data (Sandelowski, 1998). Blignault and Ritchie (2009) indicated that qualitative research papers may be written in the first person, which differs from the usual style of reporting research.

With some manuscripts, the intent is to present the original research study, with less of a focus on its clinical implications. For example, Nursing Research reports quantitative and qualitative studies, the latest research techniques, and methodological strategies. Although articles in that journal may present clinical research studies, the focus is more on the research itself rather than translating the findings for use by clinicians. Many clinical journals also publish papers on research studies in their area of practice, and these generally emphasize the clinical implications of the research findings and are written for clinicians as readers. In a study of 768 articles published in clinical journals, nearly a third of those articles were reports on original research studies (Oermann,
Journals in other areas of nursing, such as nursing education and administration, often publish databased papers but expect authors to emphasize the implications of those studies for teaching, administration, and other areas of practice.

**Evidence-Based Practice Articles** Many nurses are engaged in projects to critically appraise evidence to answer questions about their practice and to evaluate the effectiveness of using those new approaches in patient care. In an integrative literature review, the author completes a comprehensive review of the literature on a topic, critiques the research, and then draws conclusions about the findings. The review of the literature is guided by a research question or problem to be solved, and the author may generate recommendations for practice based on the review. In evidence-based practice, nurses identify a clinical question or problem for which more information is needed, search for evidence to answer that question, critically appraise studies and assess the quality of the evidence, and make decisions about the use of the evidence for practice. Outcomes of these reviews are potential manuscripts for publication in nursing and other journals. In clinical settings nurses are using evidence to change practice and evaluating the effectiveness of those new approaches. The findings of those projects also can be prepared as manuscripts.

**Clinical Articles** Another type of manuscript addresses topics in clinical practice. Clinical articles may be written for nurses across specialties or for nurses practicing in a particular clinical area. The goals of the *American Journal of Nursing* (AJN) are to disseminate evidence-based clinical information and original research, discuss relevant and controversial professional issues, and promote nursing perspectives to the healthcare community and public (AJN, 2009). In contrast, articles in journals such as *Cancer Nursing* are more focused on specific patient populations and health problems.

The format for writing clinical articles differs with the journal but usually includes a description of the patient problems and nursing interventions, with an emphasis on the clinical implications of whatever topic is presented. Some journals have different departments each of which has a certain format for its articles.

**Other Types of Articles** Nurses write many other types of papers for publication. For example, case reports provide new information on nursing practice or care of patients with particular health problems through the presentation of an actual case. These manuscripts often begin with why the case was selected and its importance to nursing practice and continue with a description of the case and related care by nurses and other disciplines. Manuscripts also address topics in nursing education, administration, management, and other non-clinical areas. Articles may describe innovations, new practices, and issues in teaching, administration, and management. Other papers may focus on policy, ethics, legal aspects, historical studies, theory development or testing, issues affecting nurses in an area of clinical practice, and editorials. Nurses may respond to an article in a letter to the editor and complete book reviews for publication in a journal, both of which provide valuable experiences for a novice author.
Writing Phase

The writing phase involves preparing the first and subsequent drafts of the manuscript, completing the final revision, and submitting the manuscript to the journal. The steps in the writing phase include:

- Develop a formal or an informal outline to guide writing.
- Write the first draft focusing on presenting the content rather than on grammar, spelling, punctuation, and writing style.
- Revise the first and later drafts continuing to focus on the content of the manuscript.
- Then revise the manuscript for grammar, spelling, punctuation, and writing style.
- Prepare tables, figures, and the references paying close attention to the journal’s format for references.
- Prepare the final version of the manuscript, accompanying materials required by the journal, and the submission or cover letter, and
- Submit the manuscript to the journal.

Publishing Phase

The final phase in writing for publication occurs after the manuscript is submitted to the journal. The manuscript is critiqued by peer reviewers who have expertise in the topic or methodology and can assess its quality. Peer reviewers provide feedback to authors on needed revisions to strengthen the manuscript and to the editor on the suitability of the manuscript for publication in the journal. It is through this process that the best papers are accepted for publication, ensuring quality of the information and meeting ethical standards.

Editors of nursing journals are nurses who have expertise in the content area of the journal. The final decision on acceptance of a manuscript is made by the editor, considering the peer reviews, the editor’s own assessment of the quality and suitability of the paper for the journal, and other factors such as how many similar papers have been published or are in the queue to be published and upcoming themes planned for the journal. Different editorial decisions are possible ranging from acceptance of the manuscript without revision or pending revision; a request that the manuscript be revised and resubmitted, in which case the paper will be peer reviewed again; to rejection. If the manuscript is rejected, the author should revise the paper using feedback from the peer review process and submit it to another journal. With the wealth of nursing and other health-care journals, if authors are willing to revise their papers, it is likely they will find a journal interested in their manuscript. Writing for publication requires perseverance and a willingness to use feedback and guidance from others to craft a paper that is appropriate for a particular journal and audience.

The publishing phase also includes responsibilities of the author once the manuscript is accepted for publication. At this point the author answers queries from the journal or production editor, reads carefully and corrects the page proofs, and returns promptly all materials to the publisher.
SUMMARY

Writing for publication is an important skill for nurses to develop. By disseminating new initiatives and innovations in clinical practice, research findings, and other ideas about nursing, nurses direct the future of their practice and advance the development of the profession. There are barriers to writing, but the nurse can overcome these by setting due dates for completion of writing projects, meeting these deadlines, and using wisely the available time for writing.

Every article written for publication begins with a planning phase; progresses to writing a draft, revising it, and submitting the final copy to the journal; and concludes with its publication. The manuscript or paper is the unpublished document submitted to a journal for review; once published it is referred to as an article. The first step in the planning phase is to identify the topic and purpose of the manuscript. After deciding on the purpose of the manuscript, the author needs to assess if the ideas to be presented are worth writing about. Will the paper present important information that readers need? To determine this, the author should do a literature review on the topic and related content areas. The literature search may reveal that the topic is indeed new to the nursing literature or at least to the readers for whom the manuscript is intended.

The next steps in the process of writing for publication are to identify the audience to whom the manuscript will be directed and select a journal that might be interested in publishing it. The goal is to match the purpose and type of manuscript with an appropriate journal and readers who would be interested in it. While there are many ways of categorizing articles in the nursing and healthcare literature, one way is: research articles, review papers that disseminate the outcomes of a synthesis of individual studies and articles addressing evidence-based practice, clinical practice articles, and other forms of writing such as case reports and editorials.

The writing phase involves preparing the first and subsequent drafts of the manuscript, completing the final revision, and submitting the manuscript to the journal. The final phase in writing for publication occurs after the manuscript is submitted to the journal. The manuscript is critiqued by peer reviewers, who have expertise in the topic or methodology, and can assess its quality. Peer reviewers provide feedback to authors on needed revisions to strengthen the manuscript and to the editor on the suitability of the manuscript for publication in the journal. As the manuscript proceeds through the production process, the author answers queries about the paper and reads carefully the page proofs.

Writing for publication is hard work, but the satisfaction gained from completing a manuscript and making a lasting contribution to the literature outweighs the effort and time. Writing is a skill that can be developed with practice. Once a manuscript is completed, the author should begin planning the next one.

REFERENCES


