



## Writing for International Publication

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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. This paper is summarized an idea from Dr John Fowler's series of articles about writing for publication, aimed specifically at the clinical nurse.

### Part 1: Getting started

The implications of this diversity of journals are important when submitting a potential article. The process of reviewing an author's submission usually takes at least two months for most journals, or more depending on the subject area and volume of submissions. If you submit your article and then receive a rejection email months later you may very well feel so dejected that you want to give up. If you do manage to submit it to another journal, then you have another wait of between 2 and 3 months for a response. If you are a nurse working as an academic in a university then you may cope with this, as it is a common experience in that role. However, if you are a practising clinical nurse then you are unlikely to have the time or energy to pursue publication.

So, what is the first and most important step in getting your work published? **The most important factor in getting your work published is your drive or motivation to get it published.** If your motivation is low then the first knockback will stop you. If you can develop your motivation, the other articles in this series will help you to get published.

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## Part 2: What to write about

Writing for publication is an achievable aim for any qualified nurse, provided, first, you are motivated and, second, you choose the appropriate topic. Not many people realize what their strengths are when it comes to potential publication. If you don't think you could write an article, consider writing a letter. Think about the papers or journals you read that publish letters. Spend some time reading the letters page and you will soon come up with an interesting and useful perspective on at least one topic. You may want to write about a topic about which you have specialist clinical knowledge, a topic on which you have undertaken a detailed literature review, a perspective on a topic that is unique to your position work, organised and supervised research, etc.

The key point is to write about something you know well, and have a particular perspective or angle that would be of interest to others. This may be a clinical specialty, a topic viewed from an unusual perspective, a case study from a nursing perspective, a day-by-day account of the steps involved in discharging a patient—in fact, almost anything that you spend time doing as part of your daily nursing routine.

## Part 3: Following journal guidelines

The first thing to do is familiarise yourself with a few copies of the journals that are relevant to your area of practice. Just flick through some different journals and you will note the general style and variations in what they publish. Each journal is different. The next stage is to look at the specific journal guidelines and the easiest way to do this is online and it's important that you need to download and follow the journal guidelines

### What do the guidelines tell you?

- General advice: this includes the type of article that the journal publishes and the particular readership it targets. It will give you advice about headings, use of boxes, the referencing technique required and general layout of the article.
- Article structure: this includes the word length, type of headings required, style of language, and the identification of key words. These vary considerably from journal to journal
- Specialist journal advice: journals that target a particular topic will often have quite specific advice.



- Different types of papers: some journals are very specific regarding how particular papers are presented.

## Part 4: Unsupported statements

One of the first and most important lessons to learn when writing for academic study or professional publication are the avoidance of unsupported statements and using appropriate evidence.

### Avoidance of unsupported statements:

Unsupported statements are opinions or views stated with authority, but for which there is no supporting evidence. Such opinions and unsupported statements form much of our daily coffee-room conversations, and it can be quite therapeutic to vent our opinions. But there is a key difference: facts, opinions and discussions that appear in professional publications should be based on sources of evidence that are explicit and validated.

### Using appropriate evidence

The point of professional publication is to present something that is more than a coffee-room discussion for the benefit of others in your profession. When writing academically or for publication, it is important to write with authority that is based on evidence. The level of evidence will often determine the type of journal or book you are writing for, and the content of the article.

## Part 5: Creating interest

First, you want to capture the reader's attention, then you want them to start scanning the article, and finally you want to draw them into the main body of what you are saying. One way of doing this, once you have written your article, is to put it to one side for a few days and then look at it again, but this time from a reader's perspective, if it doesn't look interesting then refine it.





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## Part 6: Writing the abstract

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The abstract is even more important when people search for articles online. Often what appears on your screen when you click on an interesting-looking article title is the abstract rather than the full paper. It is important part because of three main reasons:

- It communicates the essential components of the article, both within the paper copy of the journal and electronically via the world wide web
- If the abstract is informative and interesting, more people will go on to read your full article
- The person reviewing the article for potential publication will form their initial opinion of the paper from the abstract.

### **When do you write your abstract?**

Although the abstract is the first part of the article that people read, it should be the last section that you write. Once you have finished writing the main body of your paper, you should put it aside for a couple of days and then re-read it, making notes that identify the key points covered and any interesting conclusions.

### **What should an abstract contain?**

Abstracts are generally a brief outline of the content of the article, with a short summary of the main findings and conclusion. Most journals also request three or four key words that act as key search words on the various literature data bases. The abstract should be between 150 and 200 words, although some journals allow a maximum of 250 or 300 words and a typical abstract for a literature review might include one short sentence on each of the following:

- Aims of the paper
- Data sources
- Review methods
- Dates of literature
- Results
- Conclusion
- Implications for future practice.



## Part 7: Structure and presentation

The purpose of an article in a professional journal is to communicate new ideas to someone who may, or may not, be interested in reading what you have to say. It is well presented and paragraphs are usually quite short. Headings are used to guide the reader into the subject. Approximately 20% of the article will reference the underpinning literature; around 70% of the article will be presenting new information or discussion and application of established knowledge. An article should be both informative and interesting to read.

### The literature

One of the big differences between writing for a course and writing for publication is how the literature is used and what percentage of the written work is given over to its review. In an article for publication, the section reviewing the literature is there to show the reader where this article ‘fits’ in terms of the established body of knowledge on the subject and establish the evidence base for the article. It will therefore normally be short—concise yet thorough. In an international journal it should reflect the international literature as well as the national. It should reflect a historical perspective and then locate the current thinking.

### The body

Having established the theoretical underpinning of your work you then need to identify the body of your article. This should be introduced the main theme of the article, you then need to say what it is that you have done, or discuss a different perspective on something that has already been written about. A good article will also have two or three sub-themes that weave through the body of the text. For example, if you were writing about the development of a care plan you might include as sub-themes some of the following: finance, ethics, change management, infection control or patient satisfaction. Having sub-themes to your article will help give it structure, depth, continuity and application. These can be drawn together in your conclusion, giving it structure, focus and challenge.

### The conclusion and way forward

How does the body of your article relate to the underpinning literature? What themes have emerged and been developed? How has this had an impact on your practice and what are the implications for other clinical areas? What are the challenges in taking this work forward? What are your views?



## Part 8: Targeting articles to specific journals

Custom and general publishing standards dictate that you do not submit your article to more than one journal at a time; so which one do you choose? The time between your submission of an article and the response you receive as to its rejection or acceptance, is on average 8–12 weeks. Thus, you cannot afford to keep submitting your work to random journals with the hope that one of them will eventually accept it. And beware of some online publications that charge you to publish your work. They may offer easy publication but the financial cost to you is often hidden in the small print.

One of the main skills of writing for professional publication is to be organised: assess what, why and how you are going to write, and then submit it to the appropriate journal. As with the ‘five rights (5 R)’ for medications, the right article content, at the right level at the right time in the right style submitted to the right journal will almost certainly achieve successful publication.

## Part 9: Using client case studies

Case studies are so important in professional nursing publications specifically at the clinical nurses because once you are genuinely interested in what you are reading, you will learn from it and it will motivate you to take what you are learning forward into action. There are the various ways that client case studies can be used in professional publications. Such as a snapshot of a specific time period in a client’s treatment, or an overview of the clients’ interaction with the health service throughout the duration of their specific medical condition.

The client case studies can have in communicating important aspects of nursing. Client case studies also give you, the author, the opportunity to include a number of interesting additions to the written word:

- Photographs of equipment, wounds or the general environment
- Tables with results from blood tests and various investigations, with explanations of any deviation from normal values
- Graphs or records of any significant factors e.g. blood pressure, admission rates, depression scores
- X-rays or ultrasound scans. These may be the real ones if the employing trust and patient agree or they may be examples of the condition from websites that make these available for reuse
- It may be possible to get the client or their relative to write a short insert for you, from the perspective of the client or that of the carer



- You could also include a short extract from other members of the healthcare team involved in the care of the client e.g. physio-therapist, medical doctor, specialist nurse, community nurse. This is very useful and can add an important multidisciplinary team perspective.

## ==== Part 10: Publishing a project report ====

There are a number of benefits to publishing an account of a project you have undertaken. If you have undertaken something that is unusual or innovative, then other units may be able to learn from your experience. Formally writing up a project can bring completion to the piece of work. Sometimes formally writing up a project helps you learn from the experience in new ways. The writing up and publication of a project can help in formal audits and quality assurance programmes as it demonstrates a high level of commitment and completion.

The following headings could be used for most project reports, although these will vary depending on the project:

- Aims and objectives
- Literature and evidence base
- What you did (including time scale, cost, permission required, how you measured outcomes, outcomes)
- Reflections on the process
- Future work.

Try not to think of publishing your project work as an after thought when it is completed. Take the aim of publication into the initial planning stage of the project. This will reinforce the focus of your work and increase its rigour and if you follow all of the guidance given in this paper, then you will almost certainly turn your ideas for a potential article into published work.



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