

# Writing for professional publication.

## Part 2: Subject matter



**John Fowler**

**W**riting for publication is an achievable aim for any qualified nurse and also for most students, provided firstly you are motivated and secondly you choose the right topic. A student nurse would not be qualified to write an article based on a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in an intensive care unit, but that does not mean that they cannot write a different article.

Many people do not realize what their strengths are when it comes to potential publication. Take the example of the student nurse: obviously they haven't got the experience or knowledge to conduct or write about an RCT, but they have the unique perspective to write about their experience of their medical ward or community placement. I include some examples of this in chapters 2 and 12 of my book (Fowler, 2006), describing two students who each add a valuable contribution to a book on community nursing. One student nurse recounts her community experience and includes a section of tips for future students on community placements. The other student describes his apprehensions, a typical day, learning opportunities, and other interesting and useful information about his placement.

First-hand accounts like this offer perspectives on the community experience,

Dr John Fowler wrote his first article for publication as a staff nurse 30 years ago. Since then he has published over 50 articles in a variety of publications, edited seven nursing text books and is the series editor for 20 books in the Quay Books 'Fundamental Aspects of Nursing Care' series. He has supported over 40 nurses in their early writing for successful publication.

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### Abstract

**Motivation is the first step in writing for professional publication: the next question is, what should you write about? Whatever your area of practice or level of experience, your writing will be suitable for one of the wealth of journals covering all aspects of healthcare and nursing. In this second part of a series of articles, John Fowler, an experienced nursing lecturer and author, presents some tips and suggestions to inspire you as you take your first steps on the road to writing for professional publication.**

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which are interesting and important to new students prior to their placement. Their importance and relevance, and thus attraction to the editor, is that they are written by students in a book designed largely for students. The lesson is to write about what you know well to an audience who are interested in similar topics.

So whether you are a student or qualified professional, ask yourself, what is your particular focus on a topic? Do you know something about an unusual medical condition that with some additional research you could put together a useful article? Have you got experience of using a particular piece of equipment? Have you undertaken a literature review for a university course and formulated an interesting conclusion? Have you been monitoring discharge rates in your clinical area; if so, could this be written up?

If you don't think you could write an article, what about writing a letter? Think about the papers or journals you read that publish letters. Spend some time reading the letters page and I guarantee that you will soon come up with an interesting and useful perspective on at least one topic.

So how do you decide what to write about? Try thinking about one of the following areas:

- A topic that you have specialist clinical knowledge of. This may be as a clinical nurse specialist or as an experienced nurse in one area
- A topic that you have undertaken a detailed literature review on. This may be a medical condition, a physiological function, or an aspect of nursing/medical history
- An opinion on a topical subject. This may be a 'letter' or a short article
- A book review (more on these later in the series)
- A perspective on a topic that is unique to your position, e.g. the student nurse perspective, the staff nurse perspective, the feelings of a newly appointed ward sister, etc
- Work that you have undertaken as part of your clinical role. This may be an audit of discharge rates, equipment used, the development of a teaching pack, etc
- Organized and supervised research.

The key point is to write about something you know well and have a particular perspective or angle on that would be of interest to others. Future articles will help you put pen to paper or fingers to keyboard! **BJN**

Fowler J (2006) *Fundamental Aspects of Community Nursing*. Quay Books, London

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