

# Writing for professional publication.

## Part 3: Following journal guidelines

John Fowler



### Abstract

Recognizing your motivation and identifying the content of your potential article are the first two steps in writing for publication. However, you will almost certainly receive a rejection letter if you do not plan and structure your article to meet the style of the specific journal you intend submitting to. In the third part of a series of articles, John Fowler, an experienced nursing lecturer and author, highlights the importance of downloading and reading carefully the author instructions which are found on the websites of nearly all professional journals.

**Keywords:** Publication ■ Professional development ■ Career development

In the first two articles in this series we examined the motivation that drives nurses to publish in professional journals, and then the importance of choosing a topic on which you have a particular expertise or perspective. When I talk to potential authors they are usually quite passionate about these first two steps; they are full of energy regarding what they want to write about and why they want to publish it. However, when I tell them that they need to download and follow the journal guidelines their enthusiasm begins to wane and I can see them thinking 'we won't bother too much with that bit'. All too often these enthusiastic nurses skip this important step and just start writing. Sadly, what they produce, although at times interesting, is totally unsuitable for the journal they may eventually send it to. Not only have they wasted their time, but they will become demoralized when

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the rejection letter eventually arrives. Why do so many people make this simple mistake?

Nurses, particularly clinically-based nurses, tend to be very action orientated people: they see something that needs doing and they get on and do it. These are admirable qualities, but ones that need just a little holding back if you are to achieve successful publication. Think of it like planning patients' care: a little time spent assessing needs and planning the way forward will produce better quality and more efficient practice and patient care. It's the same with publication. The time spent finding, reading and implementing the author guidelines will help you produce a better quality article in a more efficient way. It will produce an article which is much more likely to be accepted for publication than if you had just jumped in and started writing without doing that preparation.

The first thing to do is to make yourself familiar with a few copies of the journals that are relevant to your area of practice. Just flick through a few 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 at the journal or publisher's website.

### What do author guidelines tell you?

The author instructions provided by journals can be loosely categorized as follows:

- **General advice:** This includes the type of article that the journal publishes and its target readership. It will give you advice about headings, use of boxes and images, the referencing technique required, and general layout of the article. Have a look at the *BJN's* Instructions to Authors, which are particularly useful: <http://tiny.cc/366zn>
- **Article structure:** This includes the word count, the type of headings required, the style of language and the identification of key words. These aspects vary considerably from one journal to another
- **Specialist journal advice:** Journals which target a particular topic will often have quite specific advice for authors. The *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, for example, has a large section on ethical guidelines: <http://tiny.cc/q3711>
- **Different types of papers:** Some journals are very specific regarding how particular papers are presented. The *Journal of Advanced Nursing* has different guidelines on 11 types of papers, including systematic reviews, clinical trials, concept analysis and discussion papers: <http://tiny.cc/729rj>.

Later in this series we will discuss the importance of choosing the appropriate journal to submit your work to. As a general rule, the journal that you find most useful and interesting to read is the journal you should aim to publish your first article in. Picking the wrong one and not following the author instructions will almost certainly result in a rejection letter. Do not let this important planning stage of writing dampen your enthusiasm for publication. A little time spent choosing the appropriate journal and following their advice is time well spent.

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