Writing for professional publication. Part 7: structure and presentation

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Abstract
How to get your work published is the essence of this series on writing for professional publication. The previous articles focused on the preparation required before you start writing your article, ways to create interest in the reader’s mind, and the importance of writing a well-constructed abstract. In this article John Fowler, an experienced nursing lecturer and author, discusses the structure and presentation of a potential article and how this differs from an essay that may have been written as part of a university course.

Keywords: Publication ■ Professional development ■ Career development

So, what are the characteristics of an article written for professional publication?
■ Its purpose is to communicate new ideas in an informative and interesting way
■ It is well presented: paragraphs are usually quite short, and headings are used to guide the reader into the subject
■ Approximately 20% of the article will relate the work to the underpinning literature, while 70% will present new information or discussion and application of established knowledge.

The body
Having established the theoretical foundations of your work, you then need to identify the theme of your article. This should be introduced in a concise yet informative way that creates interest in the reader’s mind. They should be left knowing the exact details of what you are writing about. Use numbers and precise language, e.g. ‘a change of practice on a 10-bed unit after 3 weeks of planning’, or ‘the development of a multidisciplinary care pathway for 2000 respiratory patients a year.’

Having 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 woven through the body of your article. For example, if you were writing about the development of a care plan you may 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 depth and application to practice. These themes can be drawn together in your conclusion.

The conclusion and way forward
When writing the conclusion, ask yourself how does the body of your article relate to the relevant literature? What themes have emerged and been developed? How does this impact on practice? What are the challenges in taking this work forward? What are your views? The conclusion is the place to address all of these questions.

You can begin to see how an article differs from an academic essay. While both have a foundation of evidence as their base, their structure and presentation differ. Next time, we examine the importance of targeting your article to the most appropriate journal.