

Unlock Your Inner Author: 7 Tips for Getting Published

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Education is a core nursing value, and one effective way to educate clinicians and patients is by writing for publication. Nurses often view writing as a daunting task; after all, we're more accustomed to completing checklists or jotting brief notes in the electronic health record than crafting an article. However, writing provides nurses with the opportunity to share their knowledge. That knowledge can have a wide impact, ranging from helping our colleagues better care for patients to helping patients enhance their quality of life.

Like any skill, writing requires commitment and practice. Getting published also requires tenacity and a clear understanding the publication process. I have written many types of articles and am editor of the award-winning book, *Anatomy of Writing for Publication for Nurses*, 5th Edition. Drawing from my experiences and those of the 25 contributors to the book, here are tips to help you become a published author (Saver, 2024). The number seven is prevalent in our lives (consider the seven cervical vertebrae, seven days of the week, and seven colors in the rainbow), so these seven tips may be useful to you. Some tips focus more on writing for clinical and scholarly journals, while others apply to all types of writing.

Tip 1. Schedule time to write. Too often would-be authors put the goal of writing for publication on a general "to do" list, where it's soon crowded out by what are perceived as more pressing demands. Instead, schedule time on your calendar

for writing. It's usually best to schedule shorter, more frequent times, as opposed to longer, infrequent times, which can cause you to lose momentum, but find what works best for you.

Fit the schedule to a planned timeline. For example, if you want to submit the final manuscript by October, work backwards to determine how long you need to accomplish various tasks, such as writing the first draft and asking for others' input.

Tip 2. Find a writing partner(s)/mentor(s). A writing partner can be someone who also wants to write an article. The two of you can provide mutual encouragement and hold each other accountable for adhering to established timelines. An experienced author willing to mentor you can also be invaluable.

Your partners can also be coauthors for the article, some of whom may have writing experience. My first experience as a published author was with a team headed by a nurse who had previously been published. A writing team can save time but, if not managed correctly, it can quickly consume time. Hold a kick-off meeting to discuss key aspects such as timeline, responsibilities, order of authors, and, most importantly, how you will hold each other accountable. You don't want the entire schedule derailed because one person consistently fails to meet deadlines.

Written minutes from the meeting will ensure that everyone is on the same page. Schedule regular video meetings or email check-ins, keeping them short and not too frequent. The focus should be on writing, not meeting.

Tip 3. Focus your topic. One of the most common mistakes beginning (and experienced) authors make is trying to cover too much in a single article. For example, central venous catheters is a large topic; focusing on complications narrows that down. To focus, consider the purpose of the article (what you want readers to

come away with), the target reader (this includes how familiar the target reader will be with the topic), and the typical length of articles that the publication you are targeting publishes.

Write a summary statement of your idea; for instance, "This article explains complications of central venous catheters, including causes, treatment, and how critical nurses can prevent them." Another example is, "This article for cardiac rehabilitation nurses presents the findings of a study that compared the effectiveness of an app for monitoring adherence to a cardiac rehabilitation exercise plan to weekly phone calls by a registered nurse."

See if the statement passes the "So what?" test: Why would your target reader care about this topic and does it give them what they need to know rather than what is nice to know? Time is at a premium for nurses, so try to be concise, yet clear. The summary statement can serve as your GPS when writing the article. Everything in the article should relate to the statement, and all citations and references should be accurate and reflect the content.

Use the summary statement as the start for an outline. An outline will keep you on track, and, in the case of a writing team, it can be used for assigning content sections.

Tip 4. Adhere to Schramm's formula. Wilbur Schramm, a communications expert, concluded that two factors influence what people read: expectation of reward and effort required (Royse, 2021). That means authors have two jobs: increase reward and decrease effort. Focus on key information to boost reward. Avoid unnecessary jargon and ferret out complicated sentences that are difficult to follow to decrease effort.

Having others review your work can help you apply Schramm's formula. Be sure to include a reviewer who reflects your target audience. For example, if your article on suctioning is for nurses in home care,

ask a home care nurse (in addition to a nurse with suctioning expertise) to review the article. This approach helps avoid the “curse of knowledge,” which Steven Pinker, a Harvard University psychologist and author of the book *The Sense of Style: The Thinking Person's Guide to Writing in the 21st Century* (2015), defines as the “difficulty in imagining what it is like for someone else not to know something that you know.” You can also overcome the curse of knowledge by avoiding unnecessary technical terms, not overusing abbreviations, including examples, and briefly defining terms that readers may not understand.

Other ways to increase reward while decreasing effort include using tables, boxes, or sidebars to highlight key points, succinctly describe processes or points, and present data so that it's easily understood.

Tip 5. Follow the guidelines. The most common complaint I hear from fellow editors is that authors fail to follow their journals' guidelines. These guidelines (often referred to as information for authors) provide what is, in essence, the policies and procedures for the publication. Just as you adhere to the policies and procedures of your organization, you should do the same for the journal in which you wish to publish your article.

The guidelines are rich with information, including the publication's mission, the types of articles it publishes, length of articles, and how to submit an idea or manuscript. Each journal's guidelines differ slightly, so read each one carefully. Check to see if the editor accepts queries—short emails that describe a proposed article to determine if the editor is interested in the topic. A positive response to a query doesn't guarantee publication, but it indicates interest. If you fail to query, you may write the full article only to learn that the editor doesn't think the topic is a good fit for the journal or already has a similar article in the publication queue.

Many journals require authors to follow reporting guidelines that have been developed for certain types of articles. For

example, the Standards for Quality Improvement Reporting Excellence (ISQUIRE 2.0) are used for reporting quality improvement projects. Even if the journal doesn't require following the guidelines, they can be helpful for organizing your manuscript. The Enhancing the Quality and Transparency of Health Research (EQUATOR) Network has a database of reporting guidelines (equator-network.org).

Tip 6. Understand the review process. If the editor of a journal believes a submitted manuscript has publication potential, it is sent for peer review. (An editor may reject a manuscript without peer review.) The review is usually double-anonymous (previously referred to as double-blind), meaning that the author and reviewers do not know each other's identity.

Reviewers provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the manuscript and its usefulness for the journal's readers. Depending on the reviewers' comments and the editor's perspective, a manuscript may be rejected, accepted, or returned to the author for revisions based on the reviewers' feedback. After working hard on your manuscript, it can be difficult to read these comments. It may be helpful to review the feedback, then set it aside for a few days before returning with a calmer perspective. Remember that the goal of peer review is to promote the publication of a quality article that gets read.

When you return the revised manuscript, include information on how you addressed the comments. This can be presented in a table format, depending on the journal's requirements. If you did not make a requested revision, note the reason why.

In some cases, peer reviewers may recommend rejecting your manuscript. This outcome can be discouraging, but most authors (even prolific ones) have received rejections. If the editor is willing to share the review comments, you can use them to improve the manuscript before submitting it elsewhere.

Tip 7. Know what happens after acceptance. If the revised manuscript is ac-

cepted, it will undergo editing, then it will be returned to you for review and questions (“queries”). The editorial team knows what their readers prefer in terms of style, so it's best to accept their editorial changes unless an error has been introduced. After you return the manuscript, it will be laid out for publication. You may or may not see a PDF of the final article for review and approval.

Once your article is published, your work is not done. Promote your work on social media and encourage colleagues to do the same. Many editors now offer authors the opportunity to provide a short video about their work that is posted on the journal's website and sometimes shared via social media; take advantage of these opportunities. Notify your current employer and schools you have attended so your achievements can be reported online or in newsletters.

Most importantly: Congratulate yourself on your achievement and write again. ■



To know more, visit the *Anatomy of Writing* book using the QR code.

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