

Title Page

Time to share: A simple guide to publication for nurses

Authors:

Di Lamb PhD¹

AF Brockie LLM²

EMM Bernthal PhD³

¹ Defence Professor of Nursing, Academic Department of Military Nursing, Royal Centre for Defence Medicine, Birmingham Research Park, Vincent Drive, Edgbaston, BIRMINGHAM, West Midlands, B15 2SQ

² Deputy Officer Commanding Nursing, Joint Hospital Group (South West), L3 Norwich Union Building, Brest Road, Derriford, PLYMOUTH, Devon, PL6 5YE

³ Chief Executive Officer, Release Your Potential Limited, 96, New Road, BROMSGROVE, Worcestershire, B60 2LB

Abstract

Aims and Objectives: To encourage novice nurse authors to more readily disseminate their work after gaining the necessary confidence and skills by following a number of simple steps.

Background: The literature is replete with guidance to encourage and support nurses to publish. However, despite it being widely acknowledged that such activity is essential for ensuring best practice and innovations in care are shared, nurses remain reluctant to do so.

Design: This is a discussion paper that considers the perceived challenges associated with publication to define a framework that will help to nurture a more positive culture for preparing and submitting manuscripts.

Method: The basis of the discussion is drawn from relevant literature related to the culture of nursing publication combined with the authors' own experience of teaching writing skills to newly qualified nurses.

Discussion: The barriers to nurses engaging in publishing their work are: a perceived lack of time, competence, knowledge about the process or fear of criticism and rejection. Therefore, to distil these perceptions a framework of manageable steps towards writing for publication has been compiled to enthuse the next generation of nurse authors.

Relevance to Clinical Practice: Nurses are making significant contributions to develop the science that underpins the profession by engaging in research and other quality improvement initiatives. However, to ensure ideas and innovations in practice are shared they must publish their findings. This paper outlines a publication framework based on the premise that a simplified process is likely to be much less daunting and encourage nurses to overcome the perceived challenges of scholarly writing.

Background

A culture that supports nurses to undertake research, service evaluation and audit as a legitimate activity within their primary role is less mature than that of other healthcare disciplines (Lamb, 2015; Houser, 2016). However, of nurses who are instrumental in generating innovative ideas to improve practice and enhance patient care, very few venture

down the path of publication to disseminate their work (Johnson & Rulo, 2019). During this poignant bicentennial year of Florence Nightingale's birth, many nurses have had cause to reflect on how far the profession has progressed since the time of this formidable leader's stewardship. During the many challenges that have accompanied the Covid-19 pandemic, some may have reflected on what Florence herself might have done to mitigate risk and assure best practice during such an outbreak. She was a prolific writer who captured the lessons of her experiences and compiled mitigation strategies in such areas as: hospital planning, formalised training for nurses, sanitation and infection control (Nightingale, 1860). Her ideas and approach are still being shared and continue to add value to this day. Therefore, Florence would most certainly have documented her experiences of this global pandemic and subsequent practice developments to share for the greater good. Pressure has constantly been growing for all nurses to be reflective in their practice and actively demonstrate its evidence base, and ever more so in the United Kingdom (UK) since the introduction of revalidation by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) in April, 2016 (NMC, 2017). This is a triennial process by which registered nurses must demonstrate their fitness to practice. Therefore, to assist them in this it is important that they "have access to the most current thinking in the field" (Clarke & Garcia, 2015: 286) rendering the nursing profession ever more reliant upon a willingness and competence to publish its findings.

It is evident from the literature that in the 40 years since the Briggs Report (1972) was published in the UK, which challenged nurses to make clinical decisions based on best evidence, influencing a change in practice was still reported as being problematic (Seers et al., 2012). This suggests more needs to be done to facilitate the exploration and exploitation of best evidence. There remains a need for a transformational change in which publication gains a higher priority and becomes an expectation for nurses within the clinical setting. An innovative and creative approach, within a supportive and collaborative environment, will help to generate a change in the nursing publication culture (Rees et al, 2015). However, to increase the potential for success the approach will need to be multifaceted, which involves an element of risk-taking in which the novice author may be placed outside of their comfort zone. This might initially seem quite daunting. Indeed, studies to investigate the impact of various interventions on publication rates have found additional training (Batcheller et al., 2012), mentorship (Derouin et al., 2015; Tyndall & Caswell, 2017) and support (von Isenburg et al., 2017) amongst the most successful.

Barriers to publication include a perceived lack of time or ability, a lack of knowledge about the process and fear of criticism and rejection (Tyndall & Caswell, 2017). However, nurses can improve healthcare delivery significantly by sharing their experiences. More nurses

willing to publish their work would raise awareness of the latest evidence to support best-practice beyond the local area (Saver, 2017). An often-overlooked benefit of doing so is the possibility of formulating networks, both nationally and internationally, with groups of practitioners who have a similar interest in the field. Some would argue that sharing quality improvement initiatives should be viewed as a compulsory requirement (Stevens & Marshall, 2014; Tyndall & Caswell, 2017) as it can significantly reduce the duplication of effort, broaden the accessibility to improved patient experiences and mitigate some of the perceived burden of finding the time to undertake further enquiry. By gaining momentum in this way, and with growing confidence, nurses can engage in policy development, which not only enables them to channel their voice but to lead change for the next generation of healthcare providers. This in itself is empowering and provides an excellent platform for raising the profession's profile in the national and international arena. Nurse leaders should mentor their juniors, which will increase their confidence to publish; this is no longer a '*nice to do*' but a '*need to do*' as a means of sharing innovative practice to benefit patients (Tyndall & Caswell, 2017: 34).

Creating a succession of small tasks and regular deadlines has been shown to maintain an author's motivation during the drafting of a paper. This provides an accessible route on what is frequently regarded as an intimidating journey (von Isenburg et al., 2017). Most will appreciate that small manageable steps, undertaken in the right order, will likely culminate in a satisfactory end product. The same can be said for most practical tasks that become quicker and less challenging with practice; a principle that applies equally to publication. There may well be a few challenges along the way but these can only help to build experience and are invaluable for future learning. Some general preliminary considerations when planning a manuscript are as follows:

Confidence – There are a number of common misconceptions surrounding the art of writing for publication that often deter a potential author before they have written a single word. Many believe that no-one will be interested in anything they might have to say or that someone else might write it better (Montoya et al., 2020). Having that initial confidence to share experiences, opinions or findings can be gained from a simple glance of the latest editions of professional journals. This will establish that articles do not only have to contain novel or ground-breaking approaches to practice, they contain a spectrum of content that reflects the vast array of professional nursing issues (Houser, 2016). Reading the work of others will also provide an insight as to what contribution might be made to the current body of knowledge (Yancy, 2016). Every nurse is exposed to a different clinical case-mix, is mentored and inspired by a different multi-disciplinary team and acquires different skill sets.

Therefore, every nurse has something interesting to add to the literature. Another factor that can influence an author's confidence is the perception that a certain academic writing style is required and theirs is unlikely to be good enough. This is also untrue. There is no particular style applied to academic writing; however, there are a few simple conventions. For example, sentences should be short, concise and without unnecessarily long words or complex structure. The temptation to use jargon or colloquialisms is to be avoided; this might cause confusion and detract from the aim of informing as opposed to entertaining. Therefore, an academic writing style is different from a journalistic style in that it is much more formal and objective (Gastel & Day, 2016).

Support – Many nurses new to publication fear criticism of their work (Ness et al., 2014). However, the more experienced authors relish objective feedback from peers or mentors as this can only help to improve the finished paper (Stevens, 2018). It is easy for an author to become blinded to what is written on a page when it has been repeatedly read, revised and re-read. Objectivity is often required with a fresh view from someone who can question the logical sequence and messaging of what has actually been written. This can often lead to only a minimal amount of revision so should be viewed as an opportunity rather than a threat. Therefore, seeking the support of a 'critical friend' is invaluable in helping to provide important constructive feedback. This person might be a work colleague whose opinion is respected and who is an advocate for the paper being successfully published (Hardiman & Dewing, 2014).

As with all practical applications, learning to write a manuscript for publication is a skill. Some healthcare organisations employ educators who work independently or as part of a Professional Development Team; they have a responsibility to support quality improvement and the sharing of best practice. These roles provide an excellent resource for the novice author who can gain the necessary skills and confidence from the publication workshops they facilitate. Workshops provide excellent opportunities to share ideas and learn from others who are more experienced. A small study by Kulage & Larson (2016) evaluated the effectiveness of a nurses' writing workshop that fostered collaborative learning by applying peer review to improve the quality of writers' manuscripts. This academic and peer support promoted a significantly increased publication rate amongst participants in peer-reviewed journals and was deemed instrumental in generating the confidence and competence to complete quality manuscripts. Whilst having access to such opportunities is likely to be beyond the reach of many novice writers a similar collaborative approach to drafting an article can be really helpful (Stevens, 2018).

Capacity – Interventions for developing writing skills also include writing workshops that are organised away from the workplace. These provide an immersive environment that is protected from the distractions of clinical practice and where academic support and mentoring are readily available to enhance learning opportunities (Kornhaber et al., 2016). Productivity is maximised by protecting the time and providing the freedom to concentrate on structuring opinions and findings into narrative whilst being mentored by colleagues and friends (MacLeod et al., 2012). Benefits have also been reported to extend beyond the workshop as the collegiate approach and networking opportunities that develop generate the motivation to continue drafting future manuscripts (von Isenburg et al, 2017). Being granted the time away from work by Line Managers also legitimises the importance of sharing best practice, which is pivotal to the successful nurturing of a positive research and quality improvement culture within the profession (Lamb, 2015; Stevens, 2018). It may be possible to identify time during shift changeovers when there is likely to be a higher number of staff in the clinical setting. This time might present the opportunity to negotiate the drafting of a paper with colleagues as a mutually supportive team, which can increase productivity, increase collaboration and also save time (Duffy et al, 2017).

Publication Framework

The evidence for a publication framework has been derived from the relevant academic literature and the experience of the authors from their numerous workshops delivered to newly qualified nurses. It is based on the premise that a number of small manageable steps can help to navigate the novice author along the path to publication; thereby, rendering the process a much less stressful or intimidating undertaking.

Preparation – Time is the resource that nurses declare to be most valuable but least available (Paliadelis et al., 2015). As with all tasks, the greatest time savings can be made in the longer-term if careful planning is undertaken from the outset. It is important that dedicated time for writing is assigned and protected from the rigours of the workplace and is a pre-requisite for sustaining the momentum to publish (Batcheller et al., 2012). If an author fails to prepare then they should be prepared to fail.

The primary decisions when acquiring a new skill are what to do and how to go about it. In publication the initial stage is deciding what to write about as this will determine the style and structure of the manuscript. There are many types of articles – these include editorials, opinion pieces, literature and book reviews, empirical research and discussion papers. This decision is important as it will determine the format of the paper and the associated word

limit permitted by the journal. The impact factor relates to how much a journal (rather than a specific paper within the journal) is cited (Oermann & Hays, 2018). It is tempting to target journals with the highest impact factor but these are likely to have a higher rejection rate and take longer for the paper to be published (Gustavii, 2017). Therefore, the novice author should not be distracted by impact metrics.

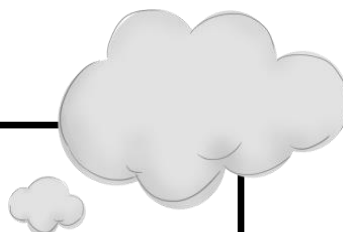
Once these initial decisions have been made a good starting point may be to revise a previous assignment (Montana et al., 2020), as a significant amount of effort will already have been applied to its completion. It may take some additional effort to mould the paper so that it has a relevant message for a particular journal as this may be very different from the focus required to answer the question posed in the original assignment. Alternatively, an audit that was recently undertaken or a reflection about a newly acquired skill, which significantly impacted upon the standard of clinical practice and thus the patient's experience, may be ideas equally worthy of development.

The next important step is to decide the audience to which the paper will appeal (Duffy et al, 2017). Deciding upon the journal to target is a vital step as it influences the writing style and content of the manuscript. A description of a journal's aims and scope can be found on their homepage and will help to establish which one would be best placed to convey the author's anticipated message. For example, readers who require a specific answer to a research question are likely to refer to a specialist journal, while junior nurses who have yet to specialise might prefer a more generalist approach to their reading material.

A useful tool to help determine an appropriate journal for a manuscript is the Journal/Author Name Estimator (JANE) (Curry, 2019), which is available at: <http://jane.biosemantics.org/>. By simply entering the paper's keywords, its title and/or the abstract, a number of journals will be identified that have an estimated applicability to the manuscript's intended message. This process reduces the focus to a few journals; their homepages can then be visited to determine which of them is the most suitable. Additional support can also be sought from Editors who readily respond to e-mail requests for advice as to whether an initial idea for an article would have relevance to their particular journal or any forthcoming special editions they might be planning. Opening such direct dialogue will provide appropriate guidance of how best to proceed and is worth consideration. This could save valuable time and effort in the longer term, particularly as a manuscript can only be submitted to one journal at a time (Houser, 2016). If the subject matter of a manuscript is inappropriate for a particular journal it will be rejected, creating additional work in preparing it for submission elsewhere (Oermann & Hays, 2018). Therefore, throughout the writing process the author should

constantly be reminded of their intended message, the writing style of the journal that they are targeting and its audience to ensure it remains relevant. Time can also be saved by writing references in the journal's preferred style (such as Harvard or Vancouver) from the outset.

If an article is being written by a team, it is important for the primary or lead author to be identified at the outset. The order in which authors are listed is determined by the proportion of work they undertake, not only in the project or study being reported but also their contribution to the article writing and editing process. Many journals request an acknowledgement of each author's contribution to the submitted manuscript (COPE, 2019) so prior agreement will reduce the likelihood of any potential future conflict. Key decisions during the preparation stage are highlighted in Box 1.



Box 1: Key Decisions

- What is the topic and intended message?
- What format and style of writing best suits the topic?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Which Journal is the most appropriate for the topic and audience?
- If writing as part of a team, who will be the lead author?

Organisation – Assembling the paper's component parts often makes more sense if they can be visualised; this helps to structure ideas and shape them into a definitive argument or message. Mind mapping is an example of visual thinking and has been used in various settings to connect a set of ideas so that information flows much more easily (Mammen & Mammen, 2018). All data associated with a primary research study should also be collated at this point to prevent distractions from the writing process by having to search through files or long forgotten folders. Any potential avoidance strategies should be removed so that the motivation to complete the paper does not diminish (Oermann & Hays, 2018). Important steps are outlined in Box 2:

Box 2: Important Steps

Set time aside and remove potential distractions

Structure ideas and the flow of information by following the 'author guidelines' of the targeted journal

Collect together all relevant data for inclusion



Structure – Signposts or sub-headings can be added to help develop the flow of the paper. This effectively divides the paper into sections, which makes them seem much more manageable particularly when the word limit quantifies the average length of each. For example, when a paper can be structured by eight headings and is limited to 3000 words, each one can be viewed as requiring approximately 375 words, which might make structuring the manuscript seem far less intimidating. Clearly some sections would need to be more detailed than others but this is a rule of thumb that can make navigating an entire paper seem more achievable during the early planning stages.

The structure of an article will vary depending on the type being written and the journal being targeted. However, original research, for example, would be structured using the following main headings: Abstract, Introduction, Literature Review, Methods, Results or findings, Discussion, Conclusions and References (Hoogenboom & Manske, 2012). Whatever the type of article being drafted the introduction section should clearly and concisely outline the problem being explored. It should provide a brief overview of what is currently understood about the topic and any gaps in knowledge that the article intends to address. This initial impression of the topic contrasts with the conclusion section that summarises the key points of the paper and how this will impact future practice. It is important to apply critical writing skills to the manuscript, which demonstrates a thorough evaluation of the different arguments and ideas posed within the reviewed literature. It will therefore be clear how the author has constructed the reasoning behind their own arguments, which is more likely to persuade the reader to accept the conclusions they have reached (Wallace & Wray, 2016). Critical writing is a skill in itself for which free resources are available to support authors, for example, via various academic institutions such as the University of Leicester: <https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ld/resources/writing/writing-resources/critical-writing>.

Box 3: Tips at a Glance

Add structure with signposts or sub-headings

Ensure conclusions are fully supported by the evidence provided

Carefully consider the key words to assist retrieval of the article once published

It is often helpful not to write in order of reading. For example, the introduction and conclusion may be written once the main body of the paper has been drafted. The abstract should be written last once the paper has been finalised and must summarise the key findings or messages included in the main body and excluding references. To increase the potential of a paper attracting the desired audience, careful consideration of the key words, title and abstract are required as these are the primary hooks that will grab the interest of a potential reader and encourage them to peruse the remainder of the article (Cals & Kotz, 2013). There may be a word limit for the title so brevity and clarity are the key components to predict the article's relevance to a particular reader. A title that depicts what the paper is about is far more likely to attract the reader's attention when they have the choice of a huge number of articles. Including some of the key words in the title will also assist search engines in locating it more easily. It is helpful to take an objective view from the perspective of the reader and think of the search terms they might use to retrieve the paper. Tips at a glance are outlined in Box 3:

The author guidelines can be found via the homepage of each journal and should be followed carefully to prevent amendments to the manuscript being requested that might otherwise have been avoided. The journal might require inclusion of 'key message statements' or 'what this paper adds' for example, which if added from the outset will reduce the number of potential amendments the reviewers might suggest.

Review – Time taken to let a manuscript 'cool' is well spent (Johnson & Rulo, 2019). This will provide a much more objective review process when it is read again with fresh eyes by the author and/or others. Watson (2012) encourages seeking out constructive criticism to

facilitate improvement once the first draft is written. It is easy to forget that the paper is being written for a wide audience as opposed to an examiner as is the case when writing an assignment. Therefore, this is an excellent opportunity to ask friends and colleagues to review the paper, who are trusted to provide a fair appraisal. Indeed, those that have previously published their own work are an invaluable source of knowledge and inspiration. Constructive criticism may include spelling and grammatical errors that are easily missed. This will avoid submitting a manuscript to a journal that contains fundamental mistakes and

Box 4: Key Considerations

Set the paper aside for a while and revisit with fresh eyes

Ask a critical friend for constructive criticism

Revise before submitting the finalised manuscript

so increase the chance of rejection. Examples of reasons for rejection or requests for major amendments include: a poor standard of English, inappropriate format, poor use of references, a lack of synthesis or understanding of the subject and failure to follow the journal's author guidelines (Cowell & Pierson, 2016).

Once a paper is ready for submission, it will need to be uploaded to the chosen journal's on-line editorial management system, for which guidance should be available on its website. This will then be peer reviewed, a process by which a submitted manuscript is evaluated by at least two reviewers, one associate editor and the editor(s)-in-chief, to assess its quality (Lederman & Lederman, 2017). This is often a double-blind process whereby the authors and reviewers are unaware of each other's identities to generate a fair and unbiased appraisal of the manuscript. This is facilitated by the title page being uploaded separately that includes the names of the authors, their affiliations and contact details. It is rare for a paper to be accepted without any changes but the reviewers often provide informative feedback that comprises suggested amendments that will ultimately improve the paper. This should be viewed as a form of academic mentorship, which is vital to support a novice author to get their work published (Tyndall & Caswell, 2017). Indeed, rejection should not be regarded as a negative outcome but as the beginning of the next submission (Watson, 2012). Key considerations in this final stage are outlined in Box 4:

Summary

This paper has reviewed the culture of nursing publication and provided a mitigation strategy for a simplified structured approach. This aimed to make potential authors feel better prepared for writing a manuscript and so be encouraged to have the confidence to publish. The art of writing for publication is a skill that can be learned and, like other practical processes, gets easier with practise and experience. Acquiring any new skill can seem daunting at first but by dividing it into smaller, more manageable parts, a budding author will gain the necessary confidence to succeed. The primary ingredient for success is time and being free from distraction so as to address all of the constituent elements of a quality manuscript.

Deciding what to write about is the first important step, which will determine the article's style and structure. The desired audience for the message being conveyed will establish which journal to target and the careful use of key words will attract the appropriate audience to read it. A paper must also reflect a balanced argument and outline a logical and evidenced path to its conclusions, which can be greatly enhanced by seeking the constructive criticism of a 'critical' friend. All that remains is to take the first step towards publication; by sharing lessons and innovations in practice that difference being made at the bedside can be shared more widely. This has never been so important than during an unprecedented global pandemic, one that has demanded a need for healthcare workers to learn lessons quickly and generate innovative solutions to extreme clinical challenges. Publication is not only essential in enabling others to learn from local innovation but it also creates an immense sense of achievement for the author.

What does this this paper contribute to the wider global community?

- A simplified stepped approach to compiling a quality manuscript will make the process seem much less intimidating to the novice author.
- The publication framework's simple structure can also be used as the basis for workshops within the clinical setting to increase nurses' knowledge, skills and engagement with the publication process.
- Calls for senior nurse leaders to assign legitimised time to the publication agenda, which would increase its priority and expectation within the clinical setting. This will help to nurture a more positive publication culture.

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