

Putting Practice into Print

Publishing both fascinates and frightens us. We are fascinated with reading the latest updates in nursing practice and applaud our colleagues who appear to publish effortlessly. However when invited or expected to write for publication many nurses are gripped with a sense of fear.

It is important for nurses to write for both personal and professional reasons as it is a means to share information, expand nursing's knowledge, and achieve recognition. The good news is that writing is a skill that can be easily learned.

Pick a Topic

To begin, find a topic you want to write about. What are your passions? Think about new practice trends in your specialty area. What could others learn from you? Perhaps you recently presented a poster that could be expanded into an article. These are all great places to start brainstorming your topic. Remember the goal is to bring value to those who read your work.

"Nursing journals provide a venue for expression of current ideas, a lasting record of past practices and discoveries, and an essential source for education of nurses of the future."

Kearney & Freda, Nursing Outlook, 2006

Once you have picked a topic you are ready to identify your audience. Are you writing for staff nurses or nurse executives? Do you expect critical care nurses or home health nurses to read your article? Understanding who you want to reach with your information will determine whether to write a clinical article, research paper, case study or literature review article.

Choose an Outlet

Select a venue (journal, newsletter, newspaper, etc) that fits your topic and targets the audience you're trying to reach. For example, if your article is focused toward nurse educators then a journal whose regular readers are nurse administrators may not be your best choice. Instead select a publication widely read by nurse educators.

In addition, all nursing journals provide author guidelines that describe how articles should be written and submitted. The guidelines will describe the length of articles, reference system to be used, formatting style, and other useful information. Be sure to follow these guidelines carefully.

Structure

All articles consist of an organized format that includes a beginning, middle and end. Make the lead – the beginning of your article – interesting. Think about what

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nurses will learn by reading your article. The body of the article represents the bulk of your work. The body can include examples, statistics, and details you want to share with the reader. Wrap-up your article with a conclusion that leaves the reader satisfied. Your ending may include a quote, challenge, or glimpse toward the future.

As you're writing there are several technical elements to keep in mind. First, keep paragraphs short and use transitions to help them flow smoothly. Second, keep a consistent order or point of view throughout the article. And third, repeat key terms along the way.

Finishing Touches

Before submitting your article for publication take some time to review it and make sure everything is in order. The title should be short and to the point, yet informative. In other words, the title should offer enough information to help the reader choose whether or not to read the story. Be sure your abstract is written so that it provides an accurate description of the article. Finally, double check the references.

Submit Your Manuscript

Now you're ready to send off your manuscript. Submit your work electronically following the journal's guidelines. Don't forget to include all the required forms.

Writing can be a daunting process but with a little support and guidance it can become a professionally satisfying endeavor.

Writing References

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