



Writing for publication: A practical Six Step Approach

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Abstract There is a tendency amongst nurses in clinical practice to view writing for publication as something beyond their requisite. However, as UK nurses in particular move towards an all graduate profession, the need for clinical nurses to nurture a culture of writing is becoming more evident. Apart from an opportunity to share best orthopaedic and trauma nursing practice and innovation, writing for publication can also provide personal satisfaction and professional growth.

The aim of this article is to inspire and encourage new authors in clinical practice to write for publication. The authors outline a practical Six Step Approach to act as signposts towards creating that first publishable journal article. This includes the need to read as preparation for writing, selecting an appropriate journal, planning and structuring the work as well as what happens after submission of the publication. The article also includes practical tips that will help the clinical practitioner to remain focused and committed towards writing for publication.

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Editor's comments

Have you read any good Orthopaedic or Trauma books lately? If so why not write a book review, as suggested in this article and get published. Contact Julie or Bryan as editors and let us know you are interested. This article offers a blue print for potential authors that will hopefully launch such novice writers into the rewarding world of publication whilst possibly prodding some 'old hands' to pick up their quills at the same time!

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Introduction

This article builds on a previous paper by one of the authors (Driscoll and Driscoll, 2002) and the personal reflections of a New Writer Award winner for the former Journal of Orthopaedic Nursing

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(Aquilina and Baldacchino, 2007). From this collaboration emerged the Six Step Approach to encourage orthopaedic and trauma nurses to write for publication. Collaborative writing refers to the process where two or more authors combine efforts to develop a single writing project (Keen, 2007). Whilst the authors acknowledge a bias towards publishing for *this* journal, they suggest the Six Step Approach has a general applicability for practitioners wishing to write for *any* nursing journal for the first time.

Why write for publication at all?

It is a sad fact that nurses in practice tend to view writing for publication as not part of their everyday work (Happell, 2008). Perhaps writing for publication might be considered an additional burden in relation to the extra time and effort required, rather than seem to present any immediate benefits. Conversely, such effort might be primary evidence of the continuing professional development of the practitioner as well as increasing his/her reputation in practice (Driscoll and Driscoll, 2002). It is interesting to note that for both authors of this paper, publication of their first articles (Aquilina and Baldacchino, 2007; Driscoll, 1989) not only enhanced their careers, but more importantly led to significant changes in their practice areas.

Meadows (2004) argues that writing for publication is an important means of communicating knowledge, skills and experience to a wider nursing population. By doing so, it may also improve patient outcomes on a greater scale. Dixon (2001) suggests healthcare professionals do not submit their work for publication because a project has not gone as planned and it is then perceived as not good enough for publication. She considers the following benefits of writing for publication:

- lessons learned about improving practice may be useful to nurses' working in different organizations or other countries;
- others can critically review the work and provide feedback to the author;
- journal publications can stimulate debate and suggestions for future development and innovation;
- a network of people doing similar work can be established.

Aside from the personal reward of seeing yourself in print for the first time and enhancing individual career opportunities (McConnell, 2004), writing for publication produces benefits on the way practice

is thought about (e.g. by constructing the article) and the way it is carried out (e.g. reacting to reading what is published by others). However, Andrew and McElhinney (2008) also stress the need to promote a writing culture amongst practitioners in addition to the 'usual suspects' found in print such as researchers, senior practitioners, and educationalists. This will become increasingly important for UK nurse registrants following the transition towards an all graduate profession from 2013 (DOH, 2009).

Preparing to write

A key premise of this paper is to offer practical support and encouragement for new authors to overcome some of the challenges faced in becoming published. As authors, we intentionally foster a sense that it really *is* possible for all types of nurses to become published. An immediate challenge is developing an inner belief that you already *do* have the ability to become published. Whilst there might initially be doubts about academic ability resulting in a lack of confidence (Redmond, 2002), of no doubt is that many practitioners reading this article already have, and use writing skills on a daily basis (Taylor et al., 2004).

One of the greatest skills in writing is to keep it simple. For instance, if as an author *you* do not understand what you are writing about, others reading your writing will be unlikely to understand the content. A good place to start to prepare an article for publication is to write about something you are already familiar with (Masterson, 2001, p. 195). Some examples of what you are familiar with in practice are:

- clinical situations which you have been involved in;
- critical incidents in practice in which there was significant learning;
- a personal reflection that challenged the way you work in orthopaedic/trauma practice;
- a practice development or innovation you were involved in.

The last one on the list inspired one of the authors to write his award winning article on the development of Pre Assessment Clinics (Aquilina and Baldacchino, 2007) following attendance at a conference. Not unusually, a conference provides a networking opportunity and a conducive environment to meet with like minded others. The motivational trigger to write for publication was a promise given to an editor to write about the project. Based on the authors' positive experiences of becoming

published, our own motivation was to produce a practical guide to inspire others to write for publication. We wonder what motivates you, the reader to now write for publication?

Wills (2000) in an excellent article, suggests identifying both *personal* (e.g. inadequate knowledge in writing for publication) and *situational* (e.g. lack of time and commitment to write) factors before writing for publication, as well as managing these as a first time author. You might wish to identify your own personal and situational factors and consider what needs to happen as preparation before you begin writing for publication.

The Six Step Approach is a strategy designed to handle your writing time more effectively, by breaking up the writing process into more manageable stages. In this way rather than writing the whole article at once, you can tackle smaller parts of the writing. Our own writing mantra as authors is:

... *when the going gets tough in writing, continue to visualise in your mind the benefits of doing so* ...

This might be a sense of achievement and pride in seeing your work in print, or in making a personal contribution to the development of orthopaedic and trauma nursing practice.

A Six Step Approach when writing for publication

Based on our experiences, we consider a Six Step Approach (Box 1), to be the main signposts when writing for publication. It is likely that the Six Step Approach might become a focus for future discussion and subsequent development. For instance, what are the 'strengths' and 'limitations' of using this method and did it form the basis of a future article by a new author who used it? Whilst the act of writing is an obvious part of becoming published, equally as important is the preparation time spent before the writing begins.

Box 1. A Six Step Approach to writing for publication

Step 1	Read to write
Step 2	Select the journal you intend to write for
Step 3	Avoid writing the article before you plan what you have to say
Step 4	Contact the editorial team
Step 5	Use the journal as a template for structuring your writing
Step 6	Prepare the final manuscript for publication

Step 1: Read to write

It is important to marry your own skills and writing preferences to a suitable journal. One of the ways of doing this is to read a range of journals before attempting to write for publication. Most professional journals have different sections within each publication (e.g. opinion pieces, literature reviews, research articles, case studies, etc.) and clear instructions on the writing format for authors to adopt. For instance, a narrative and reflective writing style is unlikely to be acceptable for publication in a scientific journal where a more technical, or academic writing style is expected. In this journal however, a broader cross section of writing styles is acceptable.

For new authors, Step 1 is about reading and examining different styles of journal writing and identifying the different patterns and sequences in which a professionally written article is structured. Visualising a suitable style through seeing different ways of structuring writing can provide a map for a potential author intending to write for publication.

Step 2: Select the journal you intend to write for

McConnell (2004) states that a new author always has the choice of writing an article first and finding an appropriate journal to have it published in afterwards. However once written, the article may exist in a form that is inappropriate to some journals. Whilst the effort might be good writing practice, in our view this is an inefficient use of author writing time. It is more preferable to select the journal you wish to write for and then begin to construct your article around those publishing requirements. In this way writing becomes focused on that journal style and the reader audience limiting the possibility of the article then being rejected (Pierson, 2009; Redmond, 2002).

It is possible to gradually build up your skills and confidence as a first time writer rather than attempt to write an article for publication. For instance, after having selected your journal, you could perhaps write a book review, a short opinion piece, a policy review or an overview/abstract of a conference you attended instead. If writing for this journal as an orthopaedic and trauma practitioner, researcher or educator, you will already have an idea of the readership, what topics are likely to be of interest and what is likely to be gained by that audience reading your article.

Step 3: Avoid writing the article before you plan what you have to say

This step is a key component of writing for publication in which again you do *not* write, but simply plan your article beforehand. Planning saves an enormous amount of actual writing time and is the stage when you begin to clarify your thoughts and construct the article in a more ordered and systematic manner. Cook (2000: 13) poses three broad questions to help define (and structure) the article:

- What am I writing about?
- Who am I writing it for?
- Why am I telling them this?

Our own worked example of the use of these questions for this article is outlined in Fig. 1.

Planning the article includes undertaking a literature search on the topic you are writing about. For instance, how satisfied are you with the theoretical evidence supporting the topic you are to write about? It is likely that a general search of the topic will uncover new aspects of the article to consider, as well as highlight gaps in the literature. It will also clarify your thoughts and help you become more focused on what you are going to write. A good way to start your search is to see if there is already a published literature review on your topic of interest. How to conduct a literature review is discussed elsewhere (Harvard, 2007), but any textbook on undertaking research will contain a chapter devoted to the subject of literature searching to help you. It is helpful to speak to a hospital/university librarian to refine your searches as they are a good source of feedback on planning what you want to say.

Step 4: Contact the editorial team

In our experience this stage is often a worrying one for potential authors. An editor will want to publish

well written papers that interest and excite the journal's readership. This, like other journals will wish to advance nursing knowledge and inspire ideas for future clinical work, yet remain consistent to the stated aims or scope of that journal (Dixon, 2001). Readers of this journal can find the *Guide for Authors* on http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/722406/authorinstructions.

As previously stated editors can motivate a potential author(s) to write. For this article the journal editorial team was supportive of an early draft. The authors were also made aware of the broader international base for the journal incorporating orthopaedic and trauma nursing. Therefore the article had to be redrafted to meet the aims of the new journal. In addition the editor suggested identifying and removing repetitive material (Julie Santy – personal email correspondence 4/2/10). Therefore informally contacting the editor produced a number of benefits, e.g. the topic was of interest and constructive comment made. This supports the emerging role of journal editors acting as writing mentors (Hawkins, 2009).

What new authors may not be aware of is the content of journals is planned over many months. It can be extremely disheartening to find an article rejected, not because of the standard of written work, but because a similar article has already been written and is due out in a forthcoming edition. It might also be worth considering that a conversation with one of the journal team will not only flag up your work to the journal, but may include agreeing a deadline to forward the completed manuscript. This happened with the publication of this article the turn around time being two weeks from speaking to the editor! It is wise to let the editorial staff know if you are unable to manage the deadline rather than just not submitting an article. Doing the latter might also suggest to an editor you are an unreliable writer.

What am I writing about?	Who am I writing it for?	Why am I telling them this?
Writing for publication	Orthopaedic and Trauma nurses who have not published before	To encourage new author / practitioners to write for publication
Overcoming barriers and challenges when writing	Experienced writers and readers of the journal to critique the 6 step approach	Give information about what to consider before writing for publication
Using a structured framework to get started in writing for publication		Provide a practical framework for becoming published based on our own experience(s)
The publishing process		

Fig. 1 Use of Cook's (2000: 13) planning questions in relation to this article.

Step 5: Use the journal as a template for structuring your writing

The journal you intend publishing in already contains a template within its pages for structuring an article for publication. What it does not contain is the content you intend to use. That content will depend on the type of article you wish to write and in which section of the journal is most appropriate. Each publication contains main headings and sub-headings in bold typeface. Examining these will help form the structure for your article. You might wish to review the layout of this article to help you. A starting point is to decide on what main headings and sub-headings to use for your publication. Using those headings will help maintain a focus with your writing.

It is helpful to know the wordage expected for your publication. For this journal it is between 3500 and 4000 words (excluding figures, boxes and references). For instance this 4000 article contained seven main headings and six sub headings. Identifying these sections as part of your planning makes the goal of writing for publication more achievable. Having decided on the main sections,

it then becomes a matter of expanding these into paragraphs based on the wordage you have allocated for each section. Paragraphs can be considered 'mini-signposts' within each section that supports the flow and structure of the article. Some additional writing tips that may be useful are included in Fig. 2. Once satisfied with the content of your final article which may take several draft forms, you are then ready to prepare for submission to the journal.

Step 6: Prepare the final manuscript for publication

Although the hard work would seem to have been done with the writing, it is tempting to just forward the manuscript to the journal (Webb, 2007). At this stage it is important to cross reference the *Guide for Authors* to give your article a final polish before submission. For instance, this journal is quite specific about the 'Presentation of Typescripts' and offers the following warning:

Authors are required to submit manuscripts according to the requirements of the Instructions

- Visualise in your mind how the finished article might look like and the benefits of writing for publication
- Decide on a specific date to work towards for completing your first draft and organise your time within this timeframe
- Let others close to you know you are writing for publication and ask their support in managing your work-life balance
- Consider finding a writing mentor to regularly review your work and offer feedback
- A well planned article makes for easier writing
- Find a journal that suits your own writing style along
- Speak to an editor about your ideas
- Seek permission from your manager if the intended article relates to your own practice area
- Speak to the hospital or university librarian for help with literature searching and obtaining materials
- Make a note of the full reference(s) as you read the literature
- Write within the wordage for each section heading, this can be edited at a later stage
- Do not expect to complete the finished article at the first time of writing e.g. not every sentence needs to be perfect in your first draft
- Remind yourself of the benefits of becoming published when the going gets tough and you feel like giving up
- Do not be put off by critical comment with your early drafts . . . your publication is likely to be read by hundreds of people
- Writing is a sedentary activity...try to fit in some exercise
- Reward yourself after submitting your work to a journal

Fig. 2 Writing tips for the new author.

to Authors. Please note that papers not formatted in this manner will be returned to the author for amendment before entering into the editorial and peer review process. (*International Journal of Orthopaedic and Trauma Nursing*, 2010)

Failing to comply will result in a significant delay to the article becoming published as the editorial and peer review process also takes between 6 and 8 weeks to complete. Key areas to address with the final typescript (article) are:

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Use of headings/subheadings (general articles)
- Specific headings for research papers
- Referencing format
- Tables, illustrations and figures
- Permission(s) to reproduce previously published work/photographs

In relation to this article and early editorial comment, the referencing format had to be reviewed to meet the journal requirements. Writing the abstract (last), within a 200 word limit proved challenging to adequately cover the article content. An abstract differs significantly from the main introduction of an article. The former is described by Cook (2000, p. 130) as a brief summary of all the publication sections (and appears at the beginning of the printed article), with up to six key words for indexing in publishing databases. The latter is a detailed review of the literature, for instance in this article we questioned the need to write and explored some of the barriers to overcome, before outlining the Six Step Approach.

In summary, the presentation of the final manuscript sent to the editors is as important in the attention to detail in meeting the *Guide for Authors* as the overall content of the article. Proof reading is essential in checking that all the references (and any tables and illustrations) are correctly cited and are contained in an accurate reference list. Incorrect spellings and grammatical errors and not seeking permissions beforehand to reproduce materials used, will further delay the manuscript being published.

With the increasing use of technology such as electronic mail it is becoming more unusual to need to send hard copies of the manuscript in the post. However it remains important to ensure you have enough postage to cover the parcel. It is also etiquette to spend time putting together a suitably worded accompanying letter to the editor with your final manuscript whether sent electron-

ically as an attachment or by hard copy in the post.

Beyond submission: the publishing process

Professional journals will normally send an acknowledgement to the main author within two weeks that they have received (not accepted), the manuscript for publication. An acknowledgement is just that and nothing more. The longest part of the process for authors is when the article is sent out to external reviewers and returned to the editor with comments. This may take between 6 and 8 weeks when the author is informed that:

- The article has been unconditionally accepted.
- The article is accepted subject to satisfactory amendments being made.
- The article is rejected on the grounds of failing to meet sufficiently high standards of presentation or content.

The amount of care taken with preparation and planning by the author(s) should normally ensure that the reviewing stage is straightforward. However, it is very common that some form of revision is required that can range from rewriting a section of the article to completing references fully. It is expected that any comments are not taken personally and dealt with professionally by the author(s), as with the journal reviewing team. To be asked for revisions is a positive sign that the editor does want to publish the article, subject to those amendments being satisfactorily made. The work of revisions is often minimal in comparison to the effort made in writing and submitting the original article for publication.

Subject to satisfactory revisions being made, a letter of acceptance is sent by the editor along with forms to sign over author copyright to the journal and the author's personal details. The first author is usually cited as the 'address for correspondence' by the journal readers, appearing on the first page of the publication. Signing over author copyright does not mean you cannot still reproduce the work elsewhere (e.g. as part of another article, or book chapter). What it does mean, is that you will now have to always seek permission of the publisher to do so and acknowledge that publisher as the copyright holder of your original work.

After the joy of the article being accepted for publication, it can seem (and often is), some weeks before the proofs arrive back to the author to be reviewed for the final time. A galley proof is how the article will look formatted in the style of the journal. Page proofs are single pages of text from the article in the style of the journal. Proof-reading is usually under a deadline condition of approximately 48 h and it is the last time that the article can be altered before being published in the journal. The purpose of proof-reading is to correct technical errors only, such as drug names, misspellings, references, etc. It is unusual to alter the content of the article at this stage. Following this, the proofs are returned to the editor for publication in the next issue of the journal. With many journals including this one, the editor will also forward a number of off-prints of the article as it appears in the journal.

For many authors, the satisfaction of seeing their hard work in print is reward enough, but can also be a time for reflection. Despite our own previous experiences of writing, both of us feel as authors that the process of being a writer is a continuous journey leading to further improvement in the craft of writing. Writing collaboratively and making sense of two individual perspectives has proved challenging but rewarding. For instance, this article has been in preparation for over a year, in which a section was completed and then left for some months and virtually forgotten, as it had to compete with our different commitments and changing email addresses. At times, it seems it can be easier not to write than put in that extra effort!

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to share our insights and experiences as authors to encourage new authors to write for publication. This collaboration has led to the development of what we consider to be a practical Six Step Approach in writing for publication. It might be that *you* as a potential new author after reading this article may be put off by the amount of planning and effort needed to write for publication. It is for *you* to now decide whether to take that first step and embark on the writing journey after having weighed the challenges against the rewards of doing so.

In our opinion, any orthopaedic and trauma nurse has the physical ability to write for publication. What is more challenging is overcoming the often self-limiting seeds of doubt and lack of confi-

dence to actually do so. It can be comforting to know that the entire editorial team have experienced what it is like to write for publication for the first time. We will be interested in your experiences of using the Six Step Approach and look forward to seeing you in print!

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