

# Writing for publication

Writing for publication is now unavoidable for healthcare professionals who want to progress their career. However, it can feel like a daunting process on top of the demands of the day job and home life. This first part of our writing for publication series, provides guidance on what you need to do before you even begin to write.

If you have never written for publication before, you may be wondering why bother? Or you may like the idea of writing but are unable to overcome one of the many barriers that first-time writers face. These include:

- Lack of confidence and self-belief
- Not having the time
- Not knowing what to write
- Not knowing how to start
- Not knowing what to expect from the publication process
- Having had a bad experience previously with rejection and negative feedback.

## Why write?

The benefits of writing for publication are well known. They enable the sharing of knowledge; an article can take your experiences, both successes and failures, and enable you to share them with your peers. They in turn may read your article and apply it to their own practice. Writing for publication can put what you do every day at work on the map and lead to communication with colleagues working in the same field; by sharing, you may benefit from the experience of others.

*Writing for publication is a way of forwarding your career; it shows that you are active in the development of your field and enables your peers to learn from your experiences.*

## Before you begin to start

There are a number of points you should consider before you begin to write. Doing this will save you writing time and energy in the long run, and will make what you write fit for purpose.

## What are you going to write about?

If you are thinking about writing, it's usually because you have a piece of work in mind. Often, it is a desire to get a publication out of a dissertation, or maybe to share a campaign that has worked really well so other trusts can benefit from shared knowledge. It may be that you have always wanted to write, but are not really sure what to write!

Take the time to think what it is you want to communicate to the reader; you should be able to boil the take-home messages into a few key point sentences that you can then refer back to throughout the writing process. For example; you may want to write a review of the current literature on a topic of interest to your work, where you have identified a gap in knowledge that you want to highlight. You may have had success in persisting with different

treatments for the management of a complex wound and want to share with others so they might benefit too.

Consider if there is a need for what you want to say; will readers learn and benefit from it? If so, then you are on to something!

### **Identify your audience**

It seems obvious, but before you write, consider who your intended audience is. For example, do you want to share ideas with other specialists, or do you want to disseminate/educate a more generalist nursing audience, for example, to inform them of the latest clinical guidelines in an area? Writing for specialists means you can assume a certain level of knowledge, whereas writing for generalists may mean you want to provide more practical advice to help them do their job. You may want to communicate to more than one audience, with a variation of the same article appearing in different publications, for different readers.

*Identifying your audience before you begin to write is key to understanding the direction your writing should take.*

### **Identify the desired place for publication**

Once you know who you are writing for, you can then identify the relevant journals for your audience. Select specialist journals for a specialist audience, and broader titles to reach more generalist nurses. If you want to publish original research, make sure the journal you target carries this sort of article, and likewise, don't send a topical news item to a high scientific research journal. Sending the wrong type of article to the wrong type of publication is a sure-fire way to see your work rejected.

*What you want to write about will influence where you submit your work. Make sure you target the right type of journal(s) for your work.*

### **Contact the editor**

Editors can often be viewed as being a bit intimidating and scary, and while there may be some like that out there, remember that most editors are like you; just getting through the day doing their job! As it is an editor's job to edit articles, remember, you have what they need to do it!

Once you have an idea of what you are writing and which journal it is going to, don't be afraid to contact the editor. This is advisable because:

- The editor can immediately advise you if the proposed article is of interest — before you write it!
- The editor will know if an article on a similar topic/with a similar message has been published recently, in which case they won't be keen to publish your paper anytime soon; you might choose to submit to a different journal where your work may be published sooner. Print journals have a finite number of pages and the editor must be very selective as to what is included to avoid repetition across the issues. Remember that no or delays in or rejections are personal, it may simply be a case of balancing the journal content

- The editor can expect your paper and schedule it for publication (subject to passing peer-review) in a future edition that suits your and their timelines... knowing that you have a deadline may help to keep you focused and add the pressure needed to finish the job
- The editor can give you the 'author guidelines' for the journal to make sure you write in the right style from the moment you touch the keyboard.

### **Author guidelines**

These may seem dictatorial, but really they are just for the benefit of editor and author alike. Simply, they exist to make sure what you send to the editor fits the journal style. Word count is simple maths; it keeps print journal articles to an ideal length that stops roughly at a full page; a maximum word count of 2,000 words for example, is to keep an article to a four-page length... write for 6,470 words, and your article will be rejected as too long or will be brutally cut; either outcome is a waste of your writing time. It is unusual to find an article that doesn't benefit from being concise. Adhering to the word count is a good discipline that should make you really think about what it is you want to say.

The referencing style/format guidelines are to stop the editorial team from having to delete two million full stops after every initial in the reference list, that you have also painstakingly typed!

There are, of course, always exceptions to the rules, so if you feel your writing genuinely fits outside the guidelines, speak to the editor about it — before you start writing.

### **Get started!**

So, now you know what you want write, for whom, and have your author guidelines, it's time to get started!

Coming soon — the second part of our writing for publication series will start you on your journey with guidance and useful tips on how to write up a case report.