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Guest Editorial

How to get your research published

Of the research studies that are conducted, many are never published. The purpose of this paper is to share the experiences of beginning and established researchers who have succeeded in collectively publishing over 230 refereed manuscripts. For early career researchers, there are tips on writing common sections of a research paper, writing a protocol paper, establishing a writing community, managing collaborators and students, choosing a journal and identifying reviewers. For more experienced researchers there are tips for responding to reviewers, conducting reviews of a research article, and tracking numerous papers under review. Increasing research publications will increase chances for promotion and tenure, increase nursing visibility, foster the movement of evidence into practice, and ultimately improve patient care. Not often publicly shared, these strategies come straight from the trenches.

1. Why publish?

For many, increasing research publications is required for promotion and tenure. In addition, increasing research publications in nursing will increase nursing visibility. Moreover, increasing research publications in nursing will foster the movement of evidence into practice and ultimately improve patient care.

2. So what is the problem?

At this point you have completed a research study, analyzed the data, and presented at a conference. Good for you! But then the paper languishes and you just cannot motivate yourself to move it forward. While the research process has been given considerable attention in the literature, the final and arguably most important step of research, dissemination of findings, has not been well described (Funk et al., 1989; Gopen and Swain, 1990). For researchers, writing skills can be learned and are essential for the ability to effectively disseminate findings through publications, which is a key to academic success. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to share pragmatic strategies from the trenches by a group of beginning and established researchers who collectively have succeeded in publishing a total of 230 peer-reviewed manuscripts.

3. Getting started

Anchor Your Writing to a Conference Presentation: Nurses often present their work at conferences, but subsequently fail to publish. Draft the paper in advance of the conference and obtain feedback from the audience. Then, immediately go home from the conference and finalize the paper.

Establish Time to Write: A common comment is: “But I do not have time!” Indeed, the greatest barrier to writing is establishing the time to do so. Since writing requires a great deal of think time, blocks of time of at least four hours are needed. These blocks of time need to be set aside (put on your calendar, just like an appointment) and guarded at all costs (Chase et al., 2013).

Write When You Are “In the Flow”: All of us have had those moments when we sit down to write that manuscript and are stuck staring at the screen because nothing comes to mind. When this happens do another activity (e.g., take a walk) that will allow your mind to relax and let the ideas bubble around in your head. Give yourself permission for this “think time.” Then come back and write the ideas down. These ideas do not have to be perfect and will likely change as you continue developing and refining the manuscript. Once you are in the flow, avoid the “interruption of your flow” that occurs when other “priorities” are forcing you to do other things.

4. Types of papers

There are many different types of papers including editorials, opinion pieces, debate papers, empirical reports, and review papers (Mantzoukas, 2009). The type of paper you write depends on what you want to communicate. Here we focus on empirical reports which may include quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method research studies. There are reporting guidelines, which may guide the structure of your paper. For instance, randomized controlled trials often adhere to the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) checklist, (Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (Consort), 2010) while qualitative studies may follow the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) reporting guidelines (O’Brien et al., 2014).

5. Writing the sections of the manuscript

In Appendix A, we provide a useful guide on how to write each Section of a manuscript. In this brief paper we cannot cover these sections in depth. However, we can identify some common pitfalls and solutions to writing these sections.

Introduction/Literature Review: Unless it is a systematic review, the Introduction/Literature Review should be short (three to six paragraphs). Do not quote study after study, but instead,

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summarize the state of the science. Combine studies with similar and supportive findings and identify gaps in the literature that "make the case" for each area where more research is needed. End this Section with the purpose, objective, or aims of the paper.

Methods/Results: In the Methods section, clearly delineate the design (e.g., cross-sectional, randomized controlled trial), sample procedures, measures, and analysis sections. If the measures are commonly used, there is no need to give complicated psychometrics, just reference the instrument. The Results Section should go from the least complex to the most complex analyses (e.g. univariate, to bivariate, to multivariate analyses). Depending on the journal, avoid duplicating the tables in the text. Tables should be clearly labeled and stand on their own. Keep tables to a minimum (about three).

Discussion: The Discussion Section can be challenging because it requires application, but often, quite frankly, by then the authors are just plain tired of this paper. While the Results Section is written from least complex to most complex, the Discussion Section is often (but not always) written in the opposite direction starting with a discussion of the most complex finding working backwards to the least complex. Each finding should be stated and then followed by application to the literature or practice. For example, start with "The most interesting finding is that the multivariate analysis found . . . This agrees with some studies . . . However it conflicts with others . . . " The next paragraph could state, "while XX was significantly different in the bivariate analyses, it was no longer significant in the multivariate analyses. This might be because XXX . . . " In the next paragraph you may discuss the description of the sample. Make sure you relate the discussion back to your aims.

Strengths and Limitations: Towards the end of the discussion section, one usually discusses the Limitations or as we prefer, the Strengths and Limitations of the study. One way to approach this Section is to write a sentence for each Section of the methods. For example, "This was a cross-sectional *design* and therefore could not control for changes over time. The *sample* was large, but was a convenience sample of XXX and therefore may not be generalizable . . . Quit rates were by self-report, but there was no cotinine validation (*procedures*). *Multivariate analyses* included a large number of covariates, but were unable to control for socioeconomic status . . . "

6. Write a protocol paper

If you have a funded grant, many journals will publish the protocol of the research proposal, which provide specific details about the way it is to be conducted. Moreover, since the grant was already peer-reviewed, the journals that publish protocol papers often do not send them out for review. Hence, time to publication is very quick. Protocol papers are published mostly in open access journals (described below).

7. Choosing a journal

While several authors suggest choosing the journal before starting (Bowling, 2013; Driscoll and Aquilina, 2011; Wachs et al., 2010), waiting until the paper is drafted is also an acceptable approach. Either way, there are several ways to identify a journal. If you present at a conference, ask if there are any editors in the audience that would like to publish this paper. Look at the reference list of your article and see if there are journals that fit your topic. Paste your abstract into the website Journal/Author Name Estimator (JANE) (The Biosemantics Group, 2007), which will give you a list of journals that might want to publish this article. Consider submitting only to journals that are peer-reviewed and indexed in major indices (e.g., Pubmed, CINAHL, Sociolit).

Once you have a list of potential journals, examine the tables of contents to see if they have published similar articles. Make a table of potential journals for your manuscript. Prior to submission, it may be helpful to send a query letter to the editor with your abstract attached to determine his or her interest. See Appendix B for sample journal list.

After identifying a journal for your paper, locate previous publications in that journal that resemble yours, as writing is easier when there is a template to follow. These exemplars will provide ideas about how to approach your paper. For example, a qualitative paper could have statements that describe what procedures were followed to ensure rigor in coding that can guide your approach.

8. Paid access versus open access journals

As an alternative to traditional paid access journals, open access journals have recently flourished. Open access journals remove restrictions to accessing articles, but require authors to pay article processing charges if their manuscript is published, which may be expensive (several hundred to several thousand dollars). If you choose to avoid open access journals, remember that others do too, so competition is steeper in paid access journals, albeit submissions to open access journals are increasing. Consider that many open access journals publish quickly and are highly rigorous, scholarly, and professional.

9. Predatory publishing

An unintended consequence of open access journals is the proliferation of predatory publishers who publish papers without peer review for the sole purpose of gaining profits. Some of these "published" articles may actually disappear from the web, in which case the article is lost. These journals prey on more vulnerable junior faculty who are anxious to get their papers published and should be avoided at all costs. Some ways of identifying predatory publishers include: 1) receipt of flattering emails requesting your article (e.g., Dear Esteemed Author); 2) journal names and logos that are similar to highly regarded journals; 3) promise of rapid review; and 4) grammatical errors (Kearney, 2015). Beall's List of Predatory Publishers 2015 can be found at: http://scholarlyoa.com/2015/01/02/bealls-list-of-predatory-publishers-2015/(Beall, 2015).

10. Journal impact factors

Journal impact factors are scores based on citation analysis, calculated annually through Thomson-Reuters' Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) and published in the *Journal Citation Reports (JCR)* each June for the preceding year (Polit and Northam, 2011; Reuters, 2010). The impact factor is calculated approximately by dividing the number of citations in the JCR year by the total number of articles published in the two previous years. Journals with higher impact factors are considered more important than those with lower. For those journals that are indexed, impact factors have been calculated since 1975. Unfortunately, in some fields, (e.g., nursing) journals do not have high impact factors in part because they were not indexed until later or are not often cited by other fields. Depending on where you are employed and therefore where you are evaluated, it may be important to publish in high impact journals, but some fields would rather you publish in their journals. A mix of high and low impact journals in your specific field generally works well. While impact factor is an important consideration, you should also determine the journal scope,