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WRITING FOR INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION IN NURSING JOURNALS: A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE (PART 1)

G. Hussein Rassool¹

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The number of printed and electronic (Internet) academic nursing publications in Brazil and around the world highlights the importance attached to publishing in the field of nursing. Internationally, journals are ranked according to their professional merits and peer review orientations. Financial institutions increasingly value publications in renowned journals as one criterion for granting funds for research. One important reason why many scientific articles do not meet the requirements from international journal reviewers, especially those submitted English, is the result of poor and literal translation of the text. The challenge we are facing in Latin America is to encourage the development of articles for publication in internationally reviewed journals. Co-authorship is a potentially stimulating model for researchers and postgraduate students to publish. This task can be undertaken through the help of international supervisors and researchers, supervisors or postgraduate students with good command of the English language. This article aims to demystify the publication process and present some guidelines on how to publish in international journals.

DESCRIPTORS: nursing; periodicals; research

COMO ESCRIBIR PARA PUBLICACION EN ENFERMERIA: UNA PERSPECTIVA PERSONAL (PARTE 1)

El número de medios de divulgación académica impresos y electrónicos (Internet) de enfermería de alcance nacional e internacional destaca la importancia de publicar entre enfermeros. Alrededor del mundo, las revistas están siendo categorizadas con relación a sus méritos para la profesión y evaluación de los pares. Cada vez más, las instituciones de financiamiento de investigación prestan atención a la publicación en revistas de prestigio académico como uno de los criterios para la concesión del mismo. Un factor importante a ser considerado entre los motivos por los cuales muchos artículos científicos fallan en cumplir los requisitos de evaluación de los revisores de revistas internacionales, principalmente aquellas de lengua inglesa, es la traducción pobre y de manera literal. Nuestro desafío en América Latina es fomentar el desarrollo de artículos para publicación impresa o no en revistas con revisores internacionales. La co-autoría ofrece un modelo potencialmente alentador tanto para el investigador como para el alumno de postgrado publicar. Esa tarea puede ser emprendida con la ayuda de supervisores internacionales e investigadores o estudiantes de postgrado que dominan la lengua inglesa. Este artículo intenta desvelar el proceso de publicación y presentar algunos principios directivos de como publicar en revistas internacionales.

DESCRIPTORES: enfermería; publicaciones periódicas; investigación

COMO ESCREVER PARA PUBLICAÇÃO INTERNACIONAL EM ENFERMAGEM: UMA PERSPECTIVA PESSOAL (PARTE 1)

O número de meios de divulgação acadêmica impressa e eletrônica (Internet) de enfermagem de abrangência nacional e internacional destaca a importância de publicar entre enfermeiros. Ao redor do mundo, as revistas estão sendo categorizadas em relação a méritos para a profissão e avaliação por pares. Cada vez mais, as instituições de financiamento de pesquisa estão atentas à publicação em revistas de prestigio acadêmico como um dos critérios para a concessão do mesmo. Um fator importante a ser considerado entre as razões para que muitos artigos científicos falham no preenchimento dos requisitos de avaliação dos revisores de revistas internacionais, principalmente aquelas de idioma inglês, é a tradução pobre e de modo literal. Nosso desafio na América Latina é incrementar o desenvolvimento de artigos para publicação impressa ou não em revistas com revisores internacionais. A co-autoria oferece um modelo potencialmente encorajador tanto para o pesquisador como para o pós-graduando publicar. Esse objetivo pode ser empreendido com a ajuda de supervisores internacionais e pesquisadores, orientadores ou estudantes de pós-graduação conhecedores da língua inglesa. O presente artigo busca desmistificar o processo de publicação e apresentar alguns princípios norteadores de como publicar em revistas internacionais.

DESCRITORES: enfermagem; publicações periódicas; pesquisa

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a personal narrative of my experiences as a learner, author and editor and my academic attachments for the last two years with the Department of Psychiatric Nursing and Human Sciences at the University of São Paulo at Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing, Brazil. This is the first part of how to write for international publication. The second part of the publication will follow. These papers derived from a number of presentations delivered at the University of São Paulo at Ribeirão Preto, the Federal University of São Carlos-SP, the Federal University of Florianópolis and the Federal University of Minas Gerais⁽¹⁻⁴⁾. In addition, I also presented a five-hour accredited course to the members of Rho Upsilon chapter of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing⁽⁵⁾.

Dissemination of knowledge and research findings of evidence-based practice, in a local, national and international context, is increasingly acknowledged as a necessity for improving the quality of care. Engaging in the scientific publication process can be for both altruistic and egotistical reasons; publication advances the state of scientific knowledge while advancing your institution and your career⁽⁶⁾. In Latin America, there are many good research studies that, in my opinion, would meet the criteria and acceptability of international peer-reviewed journals published in the English language. These papers, unfortunately, never get published or never reach the destination of a publisher. We have the potential but often lack the skills to adapt our paper to the international nursing context or the cultural context of the language of publication. I have learned from my colleagues and peers the maxim to "Think Globally, Act Locally" and this is very significant here in Latin-America. The aims of this paper are to demystify the process of publication and to present some guiding principles and outlines of how to publish. In addition, some commentaries are presented, in the context of publications in this region, with implications for nursing.

WRITING AND PUBLISHING

How to write and get published are two different sets of questions and they demand different strategies. Part of the writing and publication processes

is the ability to be clear and focus. The importance is to have the motivation to get through several barriers from the initiation of an idea or theme to printed publication. You have to reflect on several questions:

- What do you want to write?
- Why do you want to publish?
- Why do you want to publish in a particular journal?

Does the journal cover your educational, managerial or clinical specialties?

The potential for writing and getting published extends from writing a short opinion letter, an account of a conference attended, a book review, a literature review, a meta-analysis, a research study and a book. This menu of publication provides us with choices and enables us to decide what to write about. Perhaps as novice writer, it would be a good idea to write shorter pieces, as they are easier to get published. The writing could be an innovation in clinical practice, a new development that has been evaluated, a case study about a patient you have provided care and treatment to and any other nursing activities in clinical, managerial and educational fields. Examine your clinical or educational activities and identify some of the areas that need some further investigations. However, searching for themes and concepts is a very painful process, as both novices and experienced writers are familiar with. It is a process of learning, which sometimes is underestimated by undergraduate students. At some point, you need to have some clarity of what you are going to write about and, at least, have a working title. The title of a publication sometimes gets modified a few times through the process of writing. Examination of concepts or key words would provide us a sense of direction to develop the themes further. Table 1 presents a list of activities for potential publication.

Table 1 - List of Activities for Potential Publication

-An opinion letter
-A new clinical condition
-A critical incident analysis
-Innovation in clinical practice
-A care or case study with nursing implications
-A book review
-A factual account of a conference
-A brief literature review
-A paper on history of nursing
-A concept analysis
-Development and innovation in educational practices
-Ethical and philosophical debates
-Meta-analysis of research studies
-Research Paper
-A book

Before attempting to delve into writing a comprehensive essay on the particular themes, it would be valuable to think of:

- Who I am writing for?
- Which journal?

There is a need to be clear about the audience you are writing for. This would enable you to meet one of the demands of a particular journal you choose to publish in. The decision on where to send your article for potential publication should be an early priority. Some research on journals that you potentially might submit work to needs to be undertaken. Consider about two potential journals and check out the typical articles they accept (e.g. is it literature review? research based?); the submission details (length, style, review process, etc.); do they accept short reports, book reviews, letters and research papers? Check out the average time you will wait between submission and reviewing of articles, and publication. Many journals now provide guidelines or instructions for authors and a pre-submission checklist. Which journal you submit your paper to ultimately depends on the matter of aims and scope of the journal to match your paper's theme. Having knowledge of the market for publications and where to publish is added value in improving the chance of getting published. This type of paper does not need to be particularly original, but they should address a need within the publishing market (for example SARS, health concerns or other topical issues).

Throughout the world, journals are now being ranked in order of professional merits in publishing good quality papers to advance nursing knowledge. The high-ranking journals have international perspectives and are typically more likely to be double blind (referees review articles without knowing who the authors are or where they come from) or single blind refereed. Journals of this excellence are often associated with professional associations or educational establishments. Professional colleagues and research funding institutions see publishing in those journals as prestigious. A typical ranking order of journals⁽⁷⁾ is found in Table 2.

Table 2 - A Typical Ranking order of Journals

Double blind	Refereed International.
Double blind	Refereed British.
Single blind	Refereed International
Single blind	Refereed British
Refereed	International
Refereed	British
Other journals	Current and more popular - Weekly journals

Source: Moreland (2004). Writing for Publication: Some Guidelines.

IMPACT FACTORS

An important consideration in deciding where to publish is the level of credibility attached to the journal. Most readers will be familiar with the process of peer review but another way to determine the quality of the journal is through the level of Impact Factor* accorded to that journal. A journal impact factor is a measure of the frequency with which the 'average article' in a journal has been cited in a particular year. Some journals' prestige and acceptability are based on having a high impact factor. Readers who are interested in further details about impact factors may find this in an editorial⁽⁸⁾ published in an earlier edition of the Latin American Journal of Nursing.

LITERATURE REVIEW (RESEARCH YOUR TOPIC)

Once you have decided on a topic, begin by doing a literature search. The Internet provides you some access to relevant and appropriate material but it should not be the source of your primary literature search. The main purpose of your search is to use reputable sources and original literature and research from peer-reviewed journals either in a library or on the Internet. The most frustrating thing for potential readers of the journal is the inability to get access to the references due to lack of reference details or obscure journals. A summary of literature review is presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - Summary of Literature Review

Give details of how the literature was done:

- Databases
- Search Terms
- Restrictions - Dates, Languages
- Number of articles searched
- Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
- Hand Searching
- Analysis of Literature
- Critique of literature
- Use tables to summarise articles included

During the literature search, compiling a list of references is a must. The consequences would be that you might spend many hours re-searching the references, especially during the editing process of

* Institute for Scientific Information. Impact factor. In Information for New Users, ISI Journal of Citation Reports. Institute for Scientific Information. 2001
http://jcrweb.com

your paper. There are guidelines and checklists provided for references' styles (see below). In Brazil, as compared to some developed countries, individuals with the Internet have access to primary sources materials from international peer-reviewed journals. In October 2004, the Portal Brasileiro da Informação Científica (Periódicos Capes)* offered about 8131 periodicals with complete texts and over 25 nursing and midwifery journals, as well as other healthcare science journals relevant to nursing. In effect, we are fortunate to have access to this database and can no longer make excuse for using non-primary sources in nursing publications!

CREATE AN OUTLINE

Novice or inexperienced writers sometimes have difficulties with the creation of a logical framework for their writing. It is worth doing a "brainstorm" and writing on a piece of paper as many aspects of the theme you can think about. Write out your thoughts in no particular order and then compose a flexible outline. At this stage, a rough plan with headings and sub-headings would be valuable. At different times throughout the literature review, try to fill in some content under the different sub-headings. It is not important at this stage whether the areas are relevant or appropriate. You can change this at a later stage. For those who have carried out research studies, the workload for an outline is lessened, as they already may have a written research proposal or protocol. Use and keep referring to the outline during your research and writing, selecting relevant and important themes or concepts. This outline or draft is very essential, as it can ultimately become the manuscript you submit to the journal.

STYLE OF WRITING

The simple fact about writing style is to have confidence in your own style and keep your writing simple and clear. Whatever type of journal you are

writing for, explain all abbreviations at first mention in the text and avoid the use of clichés, jargon and parochialisms. Have a good dictionary and a good thesaurus. Use English spelling and terminology unless you are writing for an American journal. However, keep examining the contents of the latest journal and familiarise yourself with the style of the publication for which you are writing. In Table 4, a list of writing style⁽⁹⁾ is presented.

Table 4 - Writing Style

- Short words
- Short sentences
- Writing in the first person
- Plural
- Gender neutral
- International readers
- No Jargon
- Explain abbreviations
- Cross out the many "the's" as possible
- No thesaurus

Source: Webb C. (2004). Journal of Advanced Nursing, Oxford. UK

The misuse of language is reflected in publications that are very complex to read and digest because of their lack of clarity and applications. It has been argued that "we surely have sufficient confidence in nursing scholarship now that there is no need for ideas and research to be wrapped up in long words and sociological jargon"⁽¹⁰⁾. Complex scientific language can also be made accessible to general readers. Crick and Watson's paper in Nature in 1953, although introducing nothing less than the first discovery of the double helix, has been regarded as a 'model of clarity and brevity' which all academic writers should strive to follow⁽¹¹⁾.

The simplicity and power of language is presented elsewhere⁽¹²⁾.

This is the end of the first part of the paper. Part 2 will cover Journals' styles and referencing, a framework for writing, the publishing process and a discussion of the issues and challenges for nursing in the development of publications' skills.

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* Periódicos. Capes o Portal Brasileiro da Informação Científica www.periodicos.capes.gov.br oct.2004

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