

Essential principles for getting your work published

Ian Peate, Editor in Chief, *British Journal of Nursing*

The publication process in academic journals such as the *British Journal of Nursing (BJN)* is designed to ensure that the content is both relevant to health care and valuable to readers, who are typically professionals in the field. Healthcare articles follow a specific structure that help the author to effectively communicate their message to other nurses and health professionals. By adhering to this structure, the author can present their work in a way that is clear and useful for nursing practice. This article emphasises the importance of careful preparation in writing an article.

I have often been asked to provide guidance on getting published, focusing on nursing and healthcare journals, as well as books and book chapters. These presentations attract a broad audience, from novices to seasoned professionals, highlighting that publishing is within reach for everyone, not just a select few.

Many participants attending these presentations have yet to publish their first article but are enthusiastic about developing the necessary skills. The feedback on the advice shared during these sessions has been positive and it has been distilled into 10 principles in this article. These principles are intended to assist individuals in navigating the publication process within health and care sectors and aim to make publishing more accessible to a broader range of professionals.

The importance of a rigorous approach to writing and publishing

The more rigorous and well prepared the article is, the greater its chances of being accepted for publication. This means that attention to detail and thoroughness in the writing process can significantly enhance the likelihood of the article being published. Publishing contributes to the body of knowledge, with the goal of enhancing care.

BJN is a highly regarded publication

known for its commitment to excellence in nursing scholarship. It consistently publishes high-quality articles that are of value to all areas of nursing, serving as a useful resource both nationally and internationally. The journal is recognised for its rigorous peer-review process (Peate and Gardner, 2024) and its role in advancing nursing practice, education and research on a global scale.

Principle 1. Learn from the work of others

By reading a wide range of academic articles by a wide range of authors you can gain valuable insight from the strengths and weaknesses of others' work. Examining well-executed studies, for example, helps you understand what makes research effective, whereas reviewing poorly executed studies can teach you what pitfalls to avoid. This practice helps you to improve your own writing by learning from the successes and mistakes of others in the field.

Developing critical skills early is essential. Joining journal clubs to collectively analyse and critique articles, for example, fosters valuable critical dialogue. A journal club is a group of individuals gathered together to assess in a critical way the clinical applications of articles published in professional journals (Valizadeh et al, 2022). Participants usually express their views in a critical assessment framework regarding the methods used, the suitability of research plans, statistics applied, weaknesses and strengths of results and clinical relevance that may lead to new research or clinical applications. Journal clubs are a valuable tool for academic and professional development, encouraging a culture of continuous learning and critical evaluation.

Additionally, reading and evaluating at least one or two articles daily or each week, including those outside your sphere of practice, enhances your ability to assess

quality. Being this well read also offers a more objective view of your own work. After many long hours of research and focusing on your own sphere of interest, it can become easy to be overly invested and believe that your work is exceptional, but it is important to stay grounded and to recognise that this may not always be true. Do not fall foul of the maxim 'cannot see the wood for the trees'.

Principle 2. The more objective you are, the better your work will be

Maintaining objectivity about your own work can be challenging but, if a level of detachment cannot be achieved, you may not be able to reach your full potential as an author. In the context of publishing, objectivity is crucial for evaluating the quality and impact of submitted work. Editors and reviewers are required to assess manuscripts based on their scientific rigour, originality and relevance, rather than on personal biases or preferences. This impartial evaluation aims to ensure that only high-quality, credible research is published, which maintains the integrity and reputation of the journal.

For authors, objectivity means critically assessing their own work with a clear, unbiased perspective. This involves recognising the strengths and limitations of their work, addressing potential flaws and being open to and inviting constructive feedback. By approaching their work with objectivity, authors can improve the quality of their submissions, enhance their chances of successful publication and contribute valuable, well-vetted research to the field.

This level of self-awareness and critical thinking can lead to a more rigorous and impactful submission. Developing this skill early on not only improves the quality of one's work but also helps in navigating the peer-review process more effectively.

Principle 3. Editors and reviewers are required to evaluate objectively

The calibre of a journal's editorial board can give you an idea of the quality of the peer-review process – its rigour. By examining the masthead (containing the list of editorial board members), you can gauge the expertise and reputation of the journal's reviewers. Esteemed editors and editorial board members will typically attract high-quality reviews, which can significantly enhance the feedback that you receive.

Before submitting your manuscript, you should invest time in thoroughly refining it. A well-prepared manuscript is more likely to receive constructive feedback that can help to improve its quality. Conversely, if your article contains fundamental errors, then reviewers might not provide helpful suggestions for improvement; this can potentially diminish the overall quality of your submission. Therefore, ensuring that your work is meticulously polished prior to submission maximises the chances of receiving valuable, actionable reviews and increases your likelihood of successful publication.

Principle 4. Improve your English writing skills

Improving your English writing skills goes beyond just correcting grammatical errors; it is essential to ensure that complex ideas are being communicated clearly. The most impactful scientific articles are those that make intricate concepts accessible to readers who may not be experts in the field. Notably, renowned authors are often celebrated for their ability to deliver clear, logical and compelling presentations and this skill translates into their written work also.

Clear writing is important not only for successful publication in English-language journals but also for effective communication in any professional context. Articles that lack clarity or are poorly written, regardless of the quality of the work discussed, are often rejected or face delays because they require significant revisions and editing. Therefore, investing time in refining your writing skills will enhance your ability to communicate your message effectively and increase your chances of timely and successful publication.

Principle 5. Embrace rejection as a learning opportunity

Losing objectivity about your work can make rejection more difficult to handle, but

rejection is a common and expected part of the publishing process, even for established authors. In the world of publishing, facing rejection is normal and maintaining objectivity helps you respond constructively. Accepting feedback without taking it personally is crucial for improving your work and increasing your chances of future success. The reviewers' comments reflect their evaluation of your manuscript and accepting their feedback is key to making necessary improvements.

If reviewers are consistently offering you critical feedback on your work, this is usually a strong indicator that their assessments of your submission are accurate. When major revisions are recommended, it is essential to meticulously address each point that has been raised by the reviewers in both your revised manuscript and your response to the Editor. This thorough approach not only demonstrates that you are committed to improving your work but it also helps to clarify how you have responded to the reviewers' concerns.

Although undergoing multiple rounds of revisions can be demanding and may extend the timeline for publication, this iterative process is important for enhancing the quality and clarity of your work. Each round of feedback offers valuable insights that can significantly strengthen your manuscript.

By approaching the publishing process with resilience and a positive attitude, you can effectively refine your manuscript, address any shortcomings and significantly improve the chances of your work being accepted for publication. This commitment to continuous improvement and adaptability not only enhances the quality but also fosters your own growth as an author. Embracing feedback and revision with an open mind ultimately strengthens the impact of your work and advances your contributions to the field.

Principle 6. Good research and effective reporting share essential qualities

The essential components of high-quality publishing are clear: the originality of the topic, a thorough review of relevant literature, reliable data, rigorous analysis with strong statistical support and a compelling discussion. Similarly, effective publishing requires clear organisation, appropriate use of tables and figures, a suitable length for the journal and writing that suits the intended audience.

When reviewing your manuscript,

remain objective and do not rely solely on feedback from mentors or those who are directly involved in the work. Instead, seek candid opinions from colleagues who are not intimately familiar with the project, including those outside the specific field. This broader perspective can help to ensure that your manuscript is both rigorous and accessible, enhancing its chances of successful publication. It is imperative that you know the target audience of the journal to which you are submitting your manuscript.

Principle 7. Begin drafting the manuscript as soon as you define the key questions or themes

This approach ensures that you capture your initial ideas and develop a structured narrative early on, streamlining the process of preparing your work for publication. Being focused at this stage can help clarify the scope of your work. Try not to attempt to cover every detail in a single article, effective articles should be concise and communicate the most information in the fewest words.

It is essential to follow the journal's submission guidelines meticulously (as an example, see <https://www.magonlinelibrary.com/page/authors>), as the Editor and reviewers will expect you to strictly adhere to them. Additionally, keeping a well-organised bibliographic database and regularly reviewing its contents ensures that your work remains informed and relevant.

Principle 8. Start reviewing articles early in your career

Reviewing other authors' manuscripts can help you to write better articles (see Peate and Gardner, 2024). To begin reviewing articles, start by collaborating with others. Ask them to give you manuscripts they are reviewing so you can draft initial reviews. Afterwards, compare your initial review with the final one submitted by the reviewer and, when possible, analyse other submitted reviews to gain insights into the process. This experience will help you understand what constitutes a high-quality review, provide perspective on your own work and aid in evaluating where to submit your own manuscripts.

Principle 9. Decide early on where you wish to publish your article

Deciding early on where to submit your manuscript is important because it will significantly shape how you approach writing

and structuring your article. Each journal will have a different focus, scope and requirements, so understanding the target journal's preferences will guide how you frame your submission, emphasise specific aspects and adjust the level of detail.

For instance, a journal with a broad readership may require a more general overview and accessible language, while a specialised journal might demand more technical details and in-depth analysis. Early selection of your target journal helps tailor your manuscript to meet these expectations and enhances its relevance and appeal to the journal's audience. This strategic decision not only increases the chances of acceptance but also ensures that your work is positioned effectively within the field, highlighting its novelty and significance in alignment with the journal's focus.

Principle 10. Excellence is paramount

Quality is everything, the excellence of your work is paramount and should be the primary

focus. In the context of publishing, this means that every aspect of your manuscript, such as the research, writing, data analysis and presentation must be of the highest standard. High quality in your work ensures it is credible, impactful and likely to be accepted and valued by reviewers, editors and readers. It emphasises that prioritising quality over other factors is crucial for achieving success in publishing and making a meaningful contribution to your field.

Publishing a single article in a prestigious, high-quality journal is often more valuable than publishing multiple articles in less reputable journals. It has become increasingly easy to track and evaluate the impact of publications. Unlike in the past, when the reputation of a journal alone was a significant measure, current metrics provide a clearer picture of your work's influence. Ultimately, the quality and impact of your publications contribute significantly to your legacy in your field, and adhering to these principles can help ensure that your contributions are valued by future generations of authors.

Conclusion

I hope these 10 straightforward principles provide valuable guidance and support, whether you are a new author in health care, just starting out or an experienced writer aiming to refine your approach. By applying these principles, you can enhance the quality and impact of your work, navigate the publishing process more effectively and achieve greater success in your academic and professional writing endeavours.

Ultimately, publishing can lead to improved patient care and better care outcomes, as your insight contributes to the advancement of the profession, healthcare practices and policies. **BJN**

Peate I, Gardner S. Essential principles for writing reviews. *Br J Nurs*. 2024;33(17):848-850. <https://doi.org/10.12968/bjon.2024.0325>
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WRITE FOR US

British Journal of Nursing (BJN) welcomes unsolicited articles on a range of clinical topics. We are currently focusing on dermatology, continence, nutrition and respiratory care.

The journal publishes clinical reviews, articles on service improvement initiatives and case studies, with all articles subject to double-blind peer review. We also welcome comment pieces on topical issues in nursing.

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- Reflect on current practice and fulfil your CPD activity
- Gain recognition for your work in a prestigious academic journal
- Enhance your CV and boost your career prospects
- Make your contribution to the evidence base – and future nursing care

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@ bjn@markallengroup.com 020 7738 5454 @BJNursing