

TIPS ON WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

Sarah Stewart RM DPSM BSc(Hons) MA(Applied)

Midwifery Lecturer, School of Midwifery

Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin

Contact for correspondence:

sarahs@tekotago.ac.nz

Introduction

Midwives can be daunted at the thought of writing an article for publication. This article identifies some of the issues to consider when preparing and submitting an article.

Why a midwife will write for publication

There are various reasons why a midwife might write for publication. These include to:

- disseminate research findings, as part of the research process;
- generate new knowledge;
- encourage debate and discussion;
- achieve promotion or pay rise;
- meet employer/institutional requirements for research outputs (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002);
- meet professional portfolio requirements for research/scholarly activity as part of Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

Getting started

As with any skill, writing becomes easier the more one does it.

- It is best to write about something one is familiar with, and excited about.
- Start with a short item, such as a letter to the editor or book review.
- Collaborate with a more experienced writer.
- Read articles that have been published to assess the format and style of articles.
- Decide what form the material should take - research report, literature review, discussion, commentary or letter to the editor.
- Know what has been written on the topic by carrying out a literature search.

Choosing a journal

The choice of journal is determined by what the author wants to achieve.

- The journal requirements can be found in the guidelines for contributors, which helps the

writer match the content of the article to the purpose and focus of the journal (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). An article that is a personal clinical commentary is likely to be published in a clinical-focused journal, but it might not be accepted in a research journal.

- Journals generally publish their guidelines for contributors at least annually. The best place to access guidelines is via the publisher's web site.
- If the aim is to reach an international audience, choose a journal that is indexed in electronic databases such as CINAHL, where citations can be accessed from anywhere in the world.
- Think about whether the journal is professionally or academically credible. Midwives who are required to publish as part of their employment and institutional requirements, will choose to publish in academically credible journals. Journals that have a peer review process for potential articles are considered to be more academically credible than those without a review process.
- Journals that have an impact factor are considered by academic institutions to be more academically credible. The impact factor is a measure of the number of times an average article from a journal has been cited in a year (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). *Midwifery*, *Journal of Advanced Nursing (JAN)* and *Nurse Education Today* have designated impact factors, which can be found on the journal web site. *The NZCOM Journal*, *British Journal of Midwifery*, *The Practising Midwife* and *Midwifery Today* do not have impact factors. This may explain why many midwives submit their articles to the *JAN*, rather than midwifery journals.
- Tailor the style of writing to match the journal. The style of writing in an academic research journal such as *Midwifery* is more formal than a clinical practice journal such as *The Practising Midwife* or *Midwifery Today*.
- Consider - "Who is the readership?" Focus the article so that the content is of interest to the target audience (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002).
- If there are questions about article content and submission, then contact the designated

receiving editor for advice. The editor's details are usually found in the contributors' guidelines.

Format of an article

Every journal has its requirements for format of an article submitted.

It is best to write about something one is familiar with, and excited about.

- Check the journal's guidelines for contributors for details about format and presentation of an article. Most journals have specific requirements for abstract, subtitles, headings, word count, referencing style and key words.
- Be aware of the journal's copyright requirements, especially when using diagrams, quotations, pictures and photographs.
- Aligning with an institution may increase the possibility of having work published (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). However, be aware of institutional policies such as requiring an in-house review of the article before submission for publication. This is to prevent inferior work being published and reflecting on the institution.

Developing writing style

There are plenty of resources available that will advise writers about writing style such as *The art of writing for publication* (Davidson & Lunt, 2000).

- Pay especial attention to grammar, punctuation and spelling. Editors are much more likely to reject a manuscript if it is poorly written, whatever the content (Newell, 2000).
- Be professional in style and tone. Avoid exaggeration and contrived emphasis with exclamation marks and underlining. If writing a research report, acknowledge limitations of one's own research (Daft, 1995).
- Ensure there is a clear progression and integration of ideas from paragraph to paragraph (Wink, 2002).
- Clarify definitions. Do not assume that the reader has the same interpretation as the author.
- If writing a research report, explain design decisions, ethical approval process and provide theory or explanations for the research findings (Daft, 1995).
- Ensure the conclusion is congruent with the body of the article (Daft, 1995).

- Take care that all ideas and words belonging to another writer are properly referenced according to academic convention and particular journal guidelines (Erlen, 2002). Using material that is not one's own without adequate acknowledgement is plagiarism, and is considered to be theft. Where this is identified by a journal, publication may be precluded.
- If co-writing an article, decide who is responsible for particular sections of the article and the order in which authors' names are presented. This is important for midwives working in academic institutions because first authorship is considered desirable for research outputs.
- Ask a critical friend to read drafts for content, structure and relevance of material.
- Ask a colleague or critical friend to proof read the article before submission.
- Check that all citations are in the reference list and that the reference list uses the style required by the journal. Information about the reference styles is usually given in the contributor's guidelines or can be found on the Internet. Commonly used styles are American Psychological Association (APA) (www.apa.org) or Harvard (<http://lisweb.curtin.edu.au/referencing/harvard.html>).

Writing and publishing is time-consuming and challenging, nevertheless it is extremely rewarding to know that a published article has added to the body of publicly available midwifery knowledge.

Submission process

Once the article is written, submit it to the journal utilising the appropriate submission process. The following points provide background on this process.

- Many journals will only accept electronic submissions, therefore become conversant with the Internet and computer.
- Journals generally require that an article is original work and request that it is not submitted to other journals whilst the review process is undertaken. This is to avoid reviewers completing unnecessary work (Erlen, 2002).
- The time from submission to publication can take up to one year or more, and varies from journal to journal.
- After an article has been reviewed, the author is informed of the outcome which is generally: acceptance without amendment; re-submission with amendments; or declined for publication.

- If the reviewing/managing editor asks for the article to be re-submitted, make the effort to carry out the amendments as directed. Use the feedback so that the amended article fits the style of the journal (Newell, 2000). Learn from the feedback.
- If required to make amendments it can be difficult to regard the work in an objective manner, so pause before revising the article. This can facilitate a clearer perspective of the work.
- When resubmitting an article, write a covering letter to the editor that lists amendments made and clarify why any changes requested by the editor are not appropriate. This increases the probability of the paper being accepted (Newell, 2000).
- Do not be deterred from writing if the article is rejected. Submit the article to another journal, or accept it as a learning experience and move on to the next project. Remember that even the most experienced and eminent writers have had their work rejected at some stage.

When an article is published

Authors feel a great sense of pride and achievement when an article is published.

- Be prepared to feel to feel nervous once the article is published because the work is now public and open to both challenge and congratulations.
- Consider reflecting on the process of writing and publishing work, and include this in a professional portfolio.
- Enter details in your curriculum vitae (CV). Details of articles that have been submitted for review, or have been accepted and waiting for publication may also be included in the CV.

Conclusion

Writing and publishing is time-consuming and challenging, nevertheless it is extremely rewarding to know that a published article has added to the body of publicly available midwifery knowledge.



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